

Reading Faces Albert Adato	3
The BMCC Teaching Academy: Building a Teaching College One Cohort at a Time Christa Baiada, John Beaumont, Nancy Derbyshire, Jeffrey Gonzalez	6
Formative Assessment and Active Learning in College Teaching and Learning Bakurie Gjoci	16
Helping BMCC Graduates Find a Job or Internship in Child Welfare, Criminal Justice, Disabilities, and Gerontology (Rose) Rosalie J. Russo Gleicher	24
And the Question Is... Stephanie Carberry	33
Making a Connection: A Tutor's Perspective David Dones	36
How The Walking Dead Helped Me Teach Students Why School Matters Geoff Klock	42
Embracing Critical Thinking in the College Classroom Van Havercome	46
Taking it to the Streets: Integrating Empirical Research and Learning into Undergraduate Education Yadira Perez Hazel, Yolanda C. Martín, Jill Strauss	48
Out of Darkness: The Gruesome Face of War Narratives of a Civil War Child Survivor Nkechi Madonna Agwu	60
Are you ready to change? Precious Sellars-Mulhern	65
The Day Beyoncé Turned Black Stephen Tumino	68
Thoughts and Provocations from the English Department Faculty Forum	
Introduction to the Faculty Forum Robert Lapides	71
Disillusionment and Despair: The Future of Affordable Quality Public Education Jaime Weida	72
Reevaluating Progressive Symbols in Contemporary Fiction Jeff Gonzalez	74
How Literature Shapes our Political Expectations James D. Hoff	76
Trump's Poetics Leigh Claire La Berge	78
Against the Classroom as a Work of Neoliberal Fiction Andrew Levy	81
Southern Evangelicals: The Base of the Republican Party Michael Odum	83
return of radical black art in the time of #blacklivesmatter Syreeta McFadden	86
On the Spring 2016 Joe Doctor Colloquium Lauren Wickstrom, Quinn Minor	89
Both the Advocate and the Devil's Advocate: Moving beyond Debate in Addressing Intellectual Conflict in the Classroom Neil Kernis	91

INQUIRY

Volume Twenty-Three

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Introduction

2015/2016 marks another high point year at BMCC. Our classrooms are bursting with 27,000 students; there are more academic advisors, plans to expand ASAP triple-fold, along with new faculty-generated initiatives, programs, and majors: a sociology major, a psychology major, a history major, the Teaching Academy in its second year, a Women's Studies program is in the process of being approved, the Balancing the Curriculum seminar in the spring—with discussions of recent works including Ta-Nehesi Coates's memoir *Between the World and Me*, Moustafa Bayoumi's *This Muslim American Life*, and Claudia Rankine's Pulitzer Prize poetry collection *Citizen*. There were readings to the college community by significant writers including Pulitzer Prize winner Gregory Pardlo. Colleagues led another bi-annual national conference about teaching literature in the community college, faculty-student plans to green the curriculum and the college resulted in another lively environmental fair, have moved forward toward green roofing tied to the science curriculum, and the Faculty Senate has approved an environmental literature course (taught previously as a topics in literature class.) Faculty across the college, spearheaded by our library colleagues, have joined the Open Education Resources initiative (OER); the Criminal Justice program has committed itself to OER textbooks and other resources. We have an interdisciplinary team of faculty leading an NEH grant to develop Asian American studies across CUNY. A grant from the Foundation for Child Development won by the Early Childhood Education faculty will study the recruitment of male teachers for Pre-K programs.

Added to this, there have been faculty and administration discussions of the Coates survey about support for our research—and, on another spectrum, a lively debate and a vote in favor of allowing our PSC-CUNY union leadership to authorize a strike if need be... As we write this there is a contract to be voted upon. Note to faculty: whatever we may have left out, which perhaps you've noted, is a sign that we need to hear from you about your classroom thoughts, projects, grants, and accomplishments. So please send us articles for issue No. 24.

This is the 23rd year of the *Inquirer* at BMCC. It has passed through the hands of various editors. We think it is important to remind our readers that this is a faculty-focused, faculty-controlled journal, that helps us share, think about, and discuss our teaching, our role as community college and intellectual scholars, as educators and researchers, in a complicated US.

We have taken *Inquirer 23* articles from a variety of spaces and zones—with these above-mentioned frameworks in mind and more. This issue is a year's work in progress, so that, indeed, some of the writings may seem dated, some specific to a particular moment, but we ask our colleagues to consider the immediacy of the arguments about teaching, connections with our students, and with the then-current issues of the day that continue to resonate as we work with our bright, underserved, eager, over-burdened, energetic students (there are many more adjectives we might add, about students we respect so adamantly, and of whom we rightfully require so much).

The articles you will read are both micro and macro. Some speak, like

Nkechi Agwu’s lyrical article, on the complex childhoods and backgrounds we bring to teaching. The spaces our authors write from range from the Teaching Academy to the Writing Center, (Baida, Beaumont, Derbyshire, Gonzalez, Dones) to the classroom, (Adato, Carberry, Havercome, Kernis, Tumino); the counselor’s office (Sellars-Mulhern) to the Joe Doctor forum (Wickstrom and Minor). Two collaborative articles reflect the genuine sharing and interdisciplinary concerns of our faculty (Hazel, Martin, Strauss; Baida et al). Other articles speak of a larger perspective on what it means to work with BMCC students (Klock; Gjoci) and still others address a broader framework of politics, economics and culture in our approaches to teaching literature in community colleges (those presentations from an English Department Faculty Forum)

We close with two relevant pieces—one a brief summary of this past spring’s Joe Doctor Colloquium (Wickstrom and Minor), and a commentary about teaching that may or may not involve the presidential debates (Kernis). Good luck! Not surprisingly, we see a sweeping reach in perspective from many of our contributors, who close their essays not only with astute conclusions about the benefits of these projects and practices, but also with urgent calls for more support for our students, and for faculty and staff endeavors, in the face of numerous changes Christa Biaida for example notes which have had “important ramifications for teaching.”

This issue is rich in initiatives and conversations. We continue to be impressed with, and proud of this diverse group of collegial and engaged writers, both faculty and staff, and look forward to continuing the conversation with you next year. The call for papers is available at the end of this issue. Feel free to write the co-editors with your ideas, thoughts, and comments.

Page Delano
English

Elizabeth Wissinger
Sociology

Reading Faces

Albert Adato

Social Sciences, Human Services and Criminal Justice

Every once in a while I remember to check them out, their faces, to see if I can tell what's going on in their minds. But most of the time I see them, their faces, without taking notice. I gloss over them as I talk, absorbed in some idea I'm trying to convey to the sociology class I teach.

It used to be, when I would deliberately look to see if they understood me, it *seemed* they were. I say it *seemed*, in italics, because my doubts as to what's going on in their minds have only grown. They seem (without italics) to be attentive—at least most of my thirty or so students—and it may well be that I had been confusing attentiveness, at least its appearance, with understanding. It's easy to do that.

I know better now, that is, not to confuse one with the other. I'm reminded of times in conversations when I'd maintain eye contact but without my complete attention to and understanding of what the other was saying. So there's this experience, and other reasons, for my growing suspicion that my students' apparent attention and listening may not entail all that is implied thereof. In fact I'd say that, despite such appearances, what's going on in their minds is anyone's guess.

Even when I'm not deliberately 'checking' their faces, I can't help but read them as my gaze goes from one to the other. (I try to distribute my gaze evenly, without prejudice, though I must admit it tends to go to certain students more than others, much too selectively despite my better intentions.) In the mere second or less it binds to Roxanna's face before moving on—sometimes I must intentionally detach myself from a particular face so that my gaze doesn't hang on it for 'too long'—I would sometimes see her looking at me in such an expressly open and interested way that I'm convinced, at least *in the moment*, that she is not only understanding what I'm saying but is even enthralled. But, alas, from such a countenance I expected a lot better than what I got from her on exams...and she never speaks. And, likewise, I expected better of others who were usually 'listening', even if not so expressively.

But this mystery is even more confounding. The majority of my students are from the lower and less educated strata of the society. They come to this college, this institute of higher learning, without the advantages of those from higher strata, not just the wealth thereof but also the intellectual culture of middle and higher strata (as sociology would define such strata rather than, in particular, in the all too loose way 'middle class' is often mentioned in the mass media). Many studies have found such differences, especially in language. And, so, the very language of higher learning is thus less familiar to many of my students than it is to others and it's almost as though that, for them, they're struggling to learn a foreign language.

There is, for example, a certain precision to the language they must learn that they are unaccustomed to. Basic concepts like 'class,' 'group,' 'culture' and 'status,' which, as words in *their* language they already know, must now be *learned*

anew as if they'd never heard them before. And in a sense they haven't. But it's not only that these words are now rendered in a more precise meaning than how they've always understood them; it's rather that these words, in sociology, are no longer the ones familiar to them and used as they've been. They've now been transformed into 'concepts,' into a new order of linguistic objects, and it's an order that requires of my students deliberate thought in their proper use. And, as such an order, they're of a system of thought and discourse that behooves internal consistency. Among these concepts there are many distinctions and relationships that are very challenging for the student in whose culture that sort of transformation is unfamiliar.

And then there's the well-known finding that there's a huge gap in vocabulary between the classes, with lower strata folk on the short end of it, very much so. According to the research, that is mainly due to the enormous difference in exposure to words, especially during childhood, in particular, to abstract words like 'ominous,' 'travesty,' 'fortitude,' or 'tranquil.' Even after years of teaching I'm still surprised when a student asks me what 'derive' means.

So I'm left with the question of how much of their apparent attentiveness is due to this struggle on their part, that of understanding language with which they're relatively inexperienced. And I'm well aware of this problem such that I adjust my language accordingly. I'll repeat certain points more than I would if my students were better educated in the language of higher learning, of the humanities and sciences, in the hope that repetition will help. I'll avoid words they wouldn't know and if I must use such a word, if no other will do, I'll explain what it means. I'll keep my sentences as short as possible. In providing examples of a concept or an idea, I'll try to do so from within the realm of *their* world, of what I can expect them to know.

How much of their world is mine as well; how much do they overlap? There's no telling how much, but it's a nagging question. We seem to understand each other in our verbal exchanges, whether in class discussions or in private. But there are many things which they'd assume 'everyone knows,' like the names of celebrities in their sub-world of entertainment or stock abbreviations in texting and email, that I don't. And, in turn, I've learned that I can't assume they know 'Watergate,' 'Jimmy Carter' or much about the current issues in the news, at least those on the front page of the *New York Times*...stuff I used to think most 'anyone' would know. For most of my students it's stuff they may have *heard of*, at best.

I doubt, however, that this cultural divide between them and me has much to do with my lack of understanding 'where they're at.' That they don't know anything of 'Watergate', and I hardly at all of 'Beyonce' or 'hash tag,' is somewhat a problem, but not one that's hard to deal with. The more important divide is not at the level of such 'content' but rather one in terms of basic skills, especially in the kind of language in which the concepts and ideas they must learn are formed. The better students—whom I often perceive are of a somewhat higher stratum—rather than groping to make sense of them, are more likely to raise questions and comment on a more critical level of thought.

Ah, but maybe the better students are simply smarter? Maybe it's not so much a matter of basic skills, especially their familiarity with the language of higher

learning, but rather their higher intelligence? A fair question, but one that's so hard to answer given the very delicate and daunting complexities of measuring intelligence—for example, the very problems of 'intelligence' as a discrete phenomenon and what it is that IQ *actually* measures. At least language is a more empirical phenomenon as to the matter of higher learning (and other kinds) which is, so obviously, constituted in and of language itself. And don't get me started on the intricate relationship between language and thought.

And another thing. Many of the students don't appear to be taking notes, as they should, however much I try to impress upon them the importance of doing so. In a few cases that may be because they take notes on their smart phones, held on their laps with fingers working while looking straight ahead. But I'm not seeing the others with pen in hand writing things down, at least not nearly to the extent they should. Sometimes, after making a clearly noteworthy point (pun intended), I'll tell them "You should be writing this down." Then I'll see a flurry of note taking, and not otherwise. So what's going on there? Well, my best guess—that's all I've got for now—is that in their struggle to understand what I'm saying they can't spare *any* attention to that for writing it down and/or their understanding is too dim to know, selectively, what they should write down. (I can recall as a student straining to follow the lecture while taking notes; but, nonetheless, it seems that my fellow students and I did much more note taking then than mine do today.) Insofar as note taking is contingent on understanding, then here too class matters.

Do they study enough? From what I've gathered so far, the answer is no. (One student confessed as much when I asked her how come she did so well on the final exam when on the previous ones she had done so poorly: "I studied for the final, but didn't at all for the others.") And there'd be good reason for that. These students face problems in their daily lives that those of higher strata don't, at least not to the same extent. Some need to work, even fulltime, to make a go of it. Some have a child, or two, to deal with, as well. I hear of troubles—like death and illness in their families or, in one case, eviction from her apartment—which I scarcely heard of when I taught at colleges with students of somewhat higher strata. Ample research shows such class differences and we can well imagine their consequences as to educational outcomes. I can well imagine that my students, beset by such problems as they are all too often, have less time to study and/or are too upset and distracted by them to devote the needed time for study. And so again, it seems class matters.

Wherever the fault lies as to their difficulty in understanding 'the material,' I can surmise that my students take it upon themselves. They don't seem to blame me, at least not according to their formal evaluations of me, in particular the question "The instructor's explanation of the course material was clear" and their comments thereof. And when my peers formally observe me, clarity appears to be one of my virtues in their reports. And toward the end of the term when the topic is social class, and how that matters, I doubt that they learn the lesson well enough to apply it to themselves. I think that, nevertheless, they continue to take the fall.

The BMCC Teaching Academy: Building a Teaching College One Cohort at a Time

Christa Baiada, John Beaumont, Nancy Derbyshire, Jeffrey Gonzalez
Academic Literacy and Linguistics, English

Introduction

John Beaumont, Associate Professor, ALL

Contrary to common lore, teachers are made, not born; and while effective teaching behaviors are intuitive to some, teaching ability can be developed and strengthened in everyone through faculty development programs. Teaching is a complex craft that develops slowly and with practice and focused reflection. It stands to reason then that some faculty members might need or want support when they first enter the community college classroom.

From 2009-2014, BMCC hired 247 new, untenured faculty members,¹ many of whom are highly qualified in their knowledge of subject matter, from organic chemistry, graphic arts, and modern languages, to forensic accounting and linguistics. However, many of these new faculty members have limited teaching experience, let alone experience in a two-year community college in a diverse, urban setting. They struggle in their first few years to find the right teaching/learning balance with a class of students that differs widely in background and language, in literacy and academic preparation, from faculty expectations or previous experience.

Faculty development is not only crucial for individual faculty members' tenure and promotion and classroom experiences, it is critical in their interactions with students. Most of our students have busy lives and the classroom is one place where they have sustained interactions. The connections they make and the learning that happens there can make a difference in their educational trajectories. Good teaching and engaged students are the starting point in the college achieving its learning outcomes and retention goals. A 2014 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* describes what some educators are calling a "crisis of mediocre teaching" in higher education. While we do not want to paint faculty at BMCC with that broad brush, it does speak to a need to prepare faculty to focus on teaching and developing a mastery of pedagogy in their discipline. Faculty at BMCC teach college students who face many academic and social challenges, which for many includes the challenge of being first generation college students entering with little preparation for what to expect, and how to manage the demands of being a college student.

For community college students, the problem is not just one of academic preparation but also a social and psychological disconnect they feel with their instructors and their teaching methods. In *The College Fear Factor*, education professor Rebecca Cox documents the way that community college students experience anxiety and fear around their ability to succeed. She noted that even

where professors seem “friendly,” many students feel too intimidated to seek them out for help. The problem is not just academic but also one of affect, with faculty needing to understand the experiences and apprehensions of first generation college students who would benefit from instructors sensitive to their educational needs.

Although programs at BMCC, such as Writing across the Curriculum (WAC), Reading across the Curriculum (RAC), teaching-related Faculty Interest Groups (FIGS), and workshops organized by BMCC’s Center for Excellence in Teaching Learning and Scholarship (CETLS), have provided faculty with opportunities for professional development, a group of faculty determined that BMCC needed a formalized, integrated and sustained program for instructors to focus on their practice and the needs of their students. The BMCC Teaching Academy attempts to fill this need.

Specifically, the Teaching Academy is a four-semester professional development program for faculty members new to BMCC and/or new to teaching. Participating faculty collaborate in teaching communities of up to four instructors under the guidance of a master teacher. Teaching community members observe one another and meet five times per semester to discuss observed classes, theory, practices, and topics related to teaching at BMCC. In the final semester, participants conduct classroom-based research in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

In this paper, we present three narratives, one from a master teacher and two from teaching fellows. Originally presented as a colloquium at the Two Year College English Association Northeast conference (Baiada, Beaumont, Derbyshire & Gonzalez, 2015), these professors reflect on their experience in the BMCC Teaching Academy from three unique perspectives, sharing insights they have gained about their teaching, their students, and themselves.

Christa Baiada, Associate Professor, English, Master Teacher

I am an associate professor of English and one of four “Master Teachers” in the 2015 cohort of the BMCC Teaching Academy. As master teacher (a title with which some master teachers are uncomfortable, as we feel like we also have room for growth and improvement in our teaching), I worked with one cohort of four teaching fellows from different departments at the college. On a practical level, I organized meetings and observation schedules, assigned and led discussions on readings, observed teaching, and maintained communications within the group. But more importantly, my role is to encourage and facilitate my fellows’ reflections of and experimentations in their teaching. I listened and observed and tried to reflect back to the fellows about what happens in the classroom, why, and what they might try to do differently, to see what happens. I invited the fellows to observe my teaching and comment on what they saw there that might help me enhance my own teaching. I offered perspective based on my experience at our college and with our student body to help assuage anxieties. I offered suggestions but more often simply posed questions. This involved quite a bit of time and work, but I felt the cause important and worthwhile.

I have been at BMCC for eight years. Like my junior colleagues, I entered

eager and energetic. I was dedicated to my teaching, worked assiduously with my students and on my lessons and assignments. I'm still dedicated to my teaching and students, but without being fully cognizant, I had fallen into a rut. Though I redesign my courses, especially the writing ones, every semester, I more or less depend upon the same approaches and strategies. I had developed habits of teaching and habits of mind. I had figured out what worked, and it did, more or less, so I stuck with it as my energy and attention were drawn in other directions, like committee work, research, and mothering. However, the Teaching Academy invited me in a structured, recognized way to revisit with my fellows so many of the concepts, practices, and ideas I had explored before and could now reconsider through the lens of experience more than expectation (which so often proved misleading). I became more attentive to what I do and don't do, to what I could do and might do. I reflected more purposefully, assessing what I do thoughtfully and what I just do; how I react to students and their words and work; how they react to me and my words and materials. I became playful again in terms of approaches to teaching and students. I was once again playing with different strategies and ideas about teaching and learning the way I used to when I first started. This was a direct result of the time and space the Teaching Academy opened up for such reflection—ostensibly for the fellows but inevitably also for the master teachers—and by my fellows who engaged me in conversations about problems and limitations we face in our profession as well as possibilities discovered with students.

The timing of the Teaching Academy for me was especially helpful because I began working with my group at the same time I was teaching my first on-line course and needed to seriously reinvent an approach that works in that medium. While I didn't discuss this particular challenge directly with my group, my interactions with them, observations of their struggles acclimating to our college, and their inspiring enthusiasm and dedication informed my online teaching as I decided what translates from my face-to-face class and what doesn't, how to rethink and reshape what doesn't, what to abandon and what to stick to even if students don't like it. I forced myself to have a rationale. The Teaching Academy helped me maintain a reflective lens on, and flexible approach to, the process of designing and teaching online.

My participation in the Teaching Academy has also been significant to me for its symbolic message. Having worked with faculty in various roles—coordinator of composition, Writing-Across-the-Curriculum co-coordinator, mentor, observer, and simply, colleague—I have repeatedly been confronted with others' experiences of feeling anxious, lost, and overwhelmed, reinforcing my own. Especially among newer colleagues, there is a sensation of drowning. While many of our junior faculty in English were hired with teaching experience—often as graduate students—this experience had not necessarily prepared them for a 12-/15-hour course load, large class size, and the wide-ranging backgrounds, needs, abilities, and attitudes of BMCC students. Among the more seasoned, we tend to feel (and look) burned out. Our time, enthusiasm and energy gets drained. Teaching at a two-year college can be all consuming—thwarting attempts at life/work balance—and is mentally and physically exhausting, particularly if one finds herself confronting the challenges of the classroom in an environment that sometimes

feels lacking in institutional support, respect, and appreciation for one's work.

So it was not simply time and the erosion of my energy store attributing to my growing sense of depletion. In my mind I am at a community college to teach above all else. And, repeatedly, this is also the message from the department and administration. However, in the less than a decade I've been at BMCC, much has changed with important ramifications for teaching: enrollments have skyrocketed, the English department has doubled in size, our campus has expanded, and a university-wide common core has been instituted. What has this meant for teaching? Upwardly creeping class caps, running around TriBeCa to get to classes on time, and often being away from my office all day without resources like computers, printers, and appropriate space to meet with students, a push for distance learning, and a marked decrease in interactions among colleagues in the department so that sharing of ideas, providing support, and simply maintaining a feeling of community have become more challenging. With Pathways, learning objectives for our core courses have multiplied, requiring revisions of courses and, inevitably, more assessment. Pair this with increasing pressures for and measures of publication, and the absence of a raise for the six years we've been working without a contract while living in and, for some of us, attempting to support our families in one of the most expensive cities in the world. I share all this to give some context for my growing despondence and frustration, which no doubt impacted my teaching. The only rewards came from the students—and were much appreciated! But we all know that the greatest frustrations also come from the students in the incredibly diverse student populations we teach. I sometimes felt like I was working without support most of time and in midst of doubletalk in terms of priority of and respect for our teaching. For if teaching and learning is truly our first priority, why wasn't it sufficiently supported and funded by the university, city, and state? If the students we teach need the most support and are the largest growing demographic in the university, why are those who teach them given fewer resources and significantly higher workloads than those at our partner four year colleges?

This may all sound really negative, so let me also say that there is much I have enjoyed about BMCC and there are various ways I have indeed felt supported and appreciated. These have mostly been interactions with individual students or classes and with colleagues that I have connected with for whatever reasons. Partly chance, partly luck, partly making the time to be involved in additional projects or programs (that draw time and energy from teaching and scholarship) but are among the few ways to develop a community of peers. And I must say that BMCC offers several programs to support enhancements in teaching—WAC of course, in which I've been involved to my benefit for most of my tenure here, others for MAC, RAC, globalization, Freshman Learning Academy, Digital Storytelling Initiative, and ELearning. However, all of these are limited in scope—both in time (usually lasting one semester) and purpose. All expose participants to new pedagogical approaches and encourage reflexivity, but none have been about developing one's own teaching style. The Teaching Academy is, and that is partly what is so exciting about it. This program offers junior faculty many significant benefits in terms of support and guidance in cultivating their teaching. I wish such a program had been available when I began. And I hope that the college will sustain (dare I say, increase?) support for the Teaching Academy so that it

may continue and expand its reach to include not simply more faculty but also to engage lecturers and instructors (which I was happy to hear will happen with the 2016 cohort) and long-term adjuncts who teach the majority of our introductory classes. Administrative support is also essential to facilitate the work of the coordinators and involvement of master teachers in the program.

When I heard about this program I felt somehow that the administration was recognizing in a concrete manner that the craft of teaching is difficult: it is a process; it is individual and personal, and it is special. And while the Teaching Academy's target is junior faculty, its message to the rest of us who have been around and have started to lose steam is encouraging. It says: we know what you do is important and challenging and, though you may not have had the support you needed, we have learned from the past and are dedicated to fostering a support system to benefit our faculty and in turn our students who need and deserve confident, reflective, flexible and valued teaching.

Nancy Derbyshire, Assistant Professor, English, Teaching Fellow

The BMCC Teaching Academy has influenced my teaching by sparking an ongoing process of exploration and research, dialogue with colleagues, critical reflection, and experimental change. It provides a non-evaluative and nurturing framework for these vital activities, much like the Japanese tradition of lesson study. Though I am only half-way through the two-year commitment, I intend to continue this process of pedagogical development once I finish, by practicing the Teaching Academy principle of experimenting with small change in the classroom and seeking input from colleagues who observe my teaching. These collegial relationships have proven to be the most valuable tool in my effort to develop a mindful and informed pedagogy.

I applied to the Teaching Academy because I felt it would address a long-standing question of conscience: *What am I doing to learn about pedagogy and to reflect critically about my own teaching?* My work with a teacher preparation program at William Paterson University, called Paterson Teachers for Tomorrow, first planted this question in my mind. At the time, the subjects of pedagogy, psychology, and anything related to social science seemed daunting. I perceived myself primarily as a lover of novels, poetry, and philosophy. Yet I was attracted to jobs where I could help others, particularly in underserved urban communities. Earning a PhD at CUNY helped me get into the classroom right away. I did have an initial practicum in which I read a bit of composition and rhetoric theory, but I was mostly on my own when it came to figuring out what works in the classroom and how to negotiate my authority, something which did not come naturally to me. Observations were a good opportunity to talk about my teaching and receive practical feedback, and though I was nervous like anyone else, I valued the opportunity to confer with senior colleagues about instructional methods. But again, I secretly suspected that my own teaching could be more critically informed; I just didn't find the time or focus for it while I was in graduate school.

The Teaching Academy has sparked a reflective process for me and my colleagues. First, we read about pedagogy—The National Research Council's *How People Learn* (2000) and articles about teaching passed around informally—and

we discuss the readings in our small teaching communities on a regular basis throughout the semester. The communities' interdisciplinarity de-emphasizes subject-specific strategizing, which is beneficial because it keeps the focus on the larger concepts and offers ideas and suggestions from colleagues with different ways of seeing.

Secondly, the Teaching Academy orientation and various meetings (online and at the start and end of each semester) disseminate useful research and discourse about education and psychology for busy faculty. In one orientation, the Teaching Academy director cited information about how collaborative reflection (e.g., group therapy) stimulates the ventral vagal nerve, which is a driver of behavior. Also, our academy studied current educational research about the use of video to improve faculty self-awareness and instruction. It will be interesting to see the individual research projects that my fellows undertake in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, as we move forward to the second half of our four-semester commitment.

Thirdly, the Teaching Academy has prompted ongoing classroom observation and reflection about teaching methods and their impact on student learning, which leads to experimental changes. More so than providing lasting instructional answers, membership in the Teaching Academy has helped me to cultivate a habit of reflective tinkering and a desire for timely peer feedback on my teaching. One way that I experimented with introducing a small change was to implement a living or open syllabus in composition and intensive writing classes, a practice already in place in several colleagues' classrooms. The change was prompted by reading about the perils of a curriculum that is a "mile wide and an inch deep" and witnessing students' need to engage deeply in learning experiences in order to build confidence, motivation, and interest in an academic discipline. According to *How People Learn*, "Research on expertise suggests that a superficial coverage of many topics in the domain may be a poor way to help students develop the competencies that will prepare them for future learning and work" (National Research Council 42). This switch—which occurs both before and during a semester—has allowed me to focus on two basic teaching principles: diagnostic teaching/assessing prior knowledge and progressive formalization/emphasizing learning for understanding and transfer. In the intensive writing class, for instance, the open syllabus has given the space and time to identify the needs of the learners, build trust, and introduce custom activities and assignments. In the composition classes, the open syllabus allowed me to hold unplanned individual conferences with students during weeks 5-6 so we could discuss early formative assessments of a scaffolded essay assignment in greater detail. Students also shared their thoughts, concerns, and experiences with the classwork so far, which helped me to better understand their thinking about the content. Other changes include spending much more time with students on an individual basis during class to ferret out and address confusion, insecurity, or apathy; trying out different methods for reporting back from group work; and providing opportunities for students to discuss their study habits and to take make-up quizzes on complex content.

The Teaching Academy has shown me the usefulness of problem solving within group contexts in order for understanding to take root. But if change brings

insight, so too does collaborative reflection stimulate further action or change. Like my own students, I learn better if I can balance experience with critical reflection within a group context. Facts and knowledge cannot be applied meaningfully, or in a way that promotes understanding and transfer, if I am not working with others to solve mutual problems. I believe that a faculty interest group in BMCC's CETLS could provide this vital framework for fellows and master teachers after they phase out of a Teaching Academy cohort.

There are difficulties in participating in the Teaching Academy. One challenge is choosing, implementing, and monitoring small changes our teaching. It is hard to know what to switch out/in, so the chance to be observed and confer with peers is precious. Some changes are inspired by practical suggestions and student needs, others by the theoretical principles in the reading. Going forward, as I prepare to teach a Writing-Intensive class next semester, I wonder how backwards syllabus design can be combined with the open syllabus approach. Another challenge is the frequent inclination to speak in disciplinary terms. I want to strategize with other English teachers about instructional methods, but I also sense how salubrious interdisciplinarity can be. Also, the time commitment involved with participating has posed difficulties, as I take on more service and work on my personal research and publications. Though the Teaching Academy provides a framework and tools to help fellows focus on critical pedagogy, it does not provide reassigned time for the labor involved (e.g., meetings, reading, blogging, observing peers, taping and editing video, writing, and research).

If there is an analogy for the experience of being a teaching fellow in the BMCC Teaching Academy, it would be getting fitted for a fresh pair of eyeglasses, when the optician adjusts the lenses so you can see more clearly. Or perhaps this process is like learning a foreign language by immersion—a slow and steady immersion—except that you have dreamt about those strange words before and wondered about them. The thing about the eyeglasses or the new language is that once you attain them, you wonder how you ever lived without them. Luckily, the process of tinkering and calibration is never-ending and we can utilize our collegial relationships to bring vision and effectiveness to our teaching.

Jeffrey Gonzalez, Assistant Professor, English, Teaching Fellow

I began teaching at a high school in central New Jersey as a 22-year-old. I did so without any formal pedagogical training, via what is called the Alternate Route program. I was working almost entirely off of my instincts and recalling what had worked for me when I was a student. Though I was guided through the curriculum by my very helpful mentor and handed assignments by colleagues, what I did in the classroom was invented on the fly, without scaffolding, without a real trajectory, without student-centered design. The night classes I attended as part of the Alternate Route focused on classroom management and, despite the best efforts of the instructor, consisted mostly of complaints about students and supervisors.

After my first observation (which went well: the only negative comment, somewhat prophetically, was that I paced like a college professor), my department chair told me that she had always suspected great teachers were born, not made. The comment felt both true and daunting to me: it confirmed an impression I had long held, which was that you were just supposed to *know* how to teach,

and if you didn't, you weren't cut out for it. While my supervisor was likely trying to make me feel comfortable, knowing that I hadn't had any training, she actually compounded an anxiety that teaching was best-suited for those who naturally belonged, and I wasn't sure I fit into that category.

The way I reacted to this anxiety was to hang on to what had gotten me that good observation and what reliably led to good evaluations from students, which again was an approach based in what would have worked for me when I was on the other side of the desk. Once in a while, I would go to a professional development session, and I would implement something I was excited about; if it didn't work, or if it felt uncomfortable, I abandoned it. The classroom didn't feel like a place one could experiment because experimenting could mean failure, and failure would prove that I didn't know what I was doing. And when I would talk to a colleague about an assignment or about how he/she dealt with students, I got strategies or handouts without knowing that I should (or could) ask for how he/she approached assignments or what he/she considered most important about organizing a classroom.

These concerns and the defensive pedagogy I had developed based on those concerns stayed alive when I began teaching college, but when I was at four-year schools with well-prepared students, I could get away with continuing to create assignments and discussions assuming that students would respond well to the approach I had developed. The anxieties I had about teaching stayed alive, but good evaluations, observations and discussions enabled me to hold off on implementing change.

I couldn't continue to work in this way when I started at BMCC. Our urban population simply had needs that my approach didn't meet. Many students were not well-versed in the slice of American culture with which I grew up. They comprised a large ESL/ELL population, which was primarily educated in a New York City public schools system beset by issues and challenges. It felt to me that relying on the same-old, same-old pedagogy would lead to compelling experiences for the best students but wouldn't work for the majority of them. Yet I didn't really know how to adapt to this new environment or how to think about the changes I knew I needed to make.

My application to the BMCC Teaching Academy was a day late, and I'm not sure it was that strong; I'm also not sure what drove my chair to recommend that I consider applying—was my anxiety evident in ways I didn't realize? This concern was compounded by the fact that the Teaching Academy was intended for teachers in their first and second years, and I was in my third. Nonetheless, I was accepted, and now I have the opportunity for the kind of growth, experimentation, and support for pedagogical exploration I'd lacked for a dozen years in the classroom.

On the very first day of the Teaching Academy, we watched a five minute-video of a participating Master Teacher in front of her classroom. John Beaumont, who runs the program with CETLS Director Megan Elias, asked us to watch and simply state what we observed—just talk about what we saw the teacher doing, not to evaluate the teacher against some predetermined set of criteria. Some people really struggled with that: some people thought they were supposed to say “gotcha,” to say that the instructor we watched wasn't eliciting participa-

tion in the right way, and so on. But John repeatedly encouraged us to say what we saw, rather than what we wanted to see. I remember thinking about specific pedagogical behaviors: how the BMCC professor in the video phrased questions, re-phrased questions, how she reacted to students' answers, sometimes by paraphrasing and sometimes by simply nodding, how she moved around the room. I was able to think of these behaviors without comparing them to a prescribed standard, wondering what impact they would have on students, trying to determine what these practices would yield and what they might cost. In none of this thinking was I worried about the standards I felt others had, even those who were playing gotcha. It felt like a real chance to think about how to do the job in a very open, fair, and caring environment.

Observations of my teaching had always put me in a cold sweat. I worried I was going to be found out by someone who truly belonged, for that person to come in and realize that what I was doing was disastrous. This feeling was confirmed by my experience of observations—well-intentioned, certainly, but based on criteria that were hidden from me and that could lead to a negative evaluation. The idea of a camaraderie-driven observation, built on the template of our conversation about the video that day, helped me buy in to what the Teaching Academy could offer.

In the two semesters that followed, the peer observations that my small teaching community carried out were in the same style. We would observe each other without evaluating, not saying what we thought a person should be doing or saying. The only criteria we would use were provided by the teacher being observed. The observed teacher articulated goals, and observers looked for what the teacher was doing in relation to those goals. That meant I knew I would get feedback on what I wanted to accomplish, and that meant it was I who was doing the standard setting. Instead of thinking that there was some secret knowledge that I should natively have, I could decide what my lesson's goals should be and see if what I planned and executed could bring them about.

The small groups served the additional purpose of giving me a place to check in on the progress I was hoping to make. Prior to participating in the Teaching Academy, I would often begin the semester promising to implement changes, but as the months went on, I would find reasons not to carry out those plans. Having to meet with colleagues who knew my hopes, who were around to recall what I'd said I'd wanted, provided a real spur to experiment, even when I felt the old anxiety emerge. I never got the sense that I would be drummed out for not rearranging the desks in the classroom or doing more prewriting, just that now I had a community that could hold me to the standards I had joined the program to achieve. On top of that, discussions with my group led to thinking about teaching and evaluating as less isolated and, thus, less scary.

The last element of the Teaching Academy on which I'd like to comment is our reading. We have been reading bits and pieces out of the National Research Council's *How People Learn* (2001), and I have to admit that it was the first straight pedagogical research I had ever read. The reading gave me a vocabulary for those aims and techniques I wanted to establish, experiment with, and learn more about. In the run-up to one of our small group discussions, we read about

the difference between content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, or the gap between understanding content and knowing how to teach that content. I had never thought about that difference—I didn't know that difference really existed, or perhaps better put, I didn't know that that difference was recognized and studied and therefore common. Learning about that difference gave me one potential hypothesis for why my classes tend to have great discussions but weak papers.

The methods of the Teaching Academy that I've discussed—the observation and feedback style, with teacher-created criteria; regular observations by my group; checking in with them; reading about and discussing pedagogy with them—has made being reflective about my pedagogy central to what I do. It is not something I think about at observation time; it is something that goes into preparing every day. And the thinking I do isn't a crucible, stating whether I belong in the classroom or not, but instead part of a process, one aimed at getting better at the job I love.

Conclusion

In their own way each of these three professors shared how much they valued this rare opportunity to focus on their teaching in a way that is sustained, meaningful, and low-stakes. This is accomplished in the Teaching Academy through peer observation and non-judgmental feedback, describing what teachers and students are actually doing in the classroom, experimenting with small changes, and in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning through reading, reflecting, action research and sharing insights. Currently there are thirty-seven instructors from twelve departments participating, with a new cohort launching each spring semester. With the enthusiastic support of the College's administration, the BMCC Teaching Academy hopes to elevate teaching to a scholarly practice so that teaching is not simply something we do in addition to our scholarly practices; it is central to it.

The panel presentation upon which this article is based led to the BMCC Teaching Academy's being awarded the 2016 Diana Hacker Award for Outstanding Programs (in the category of Fostering Student Success) by the Two-Year College Association (TYCA).

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Formative Assessment and Active Learning in College Teaching and Learning: An Analysis of Literature

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Introduction

“One must learn by doing the thing. For though you think you know it—you have no certainty, until you try.”
—Sophocles

In this paper I want to give an examination and analysis of the literature on the effectiveness of the use of formative assessment combined with active learning strategies in college classrooms in general and especially in teaching and learning of mathematics. After giving a description of what formative assessment and active learning represent, I want to examine the evidence for effectiveness of their use in providing opportunities for feedback and revision, which leads the students to a higher level of thinking and better understanding. I also will provide an overview of the literature on how formative assessment and active learning can help teachers in choosing the methodology of teaching that works for their students. How different types of formative assessment and active learning can be conducted in different classroom communities aligned with other perspectives of learning environments, learner-centered, knowledge-centered and assessment-centered, in order to reach the educational goals, improving students understanding and logical thinking skills, and promoting lifelong learning skills will be explored as well. I also want to present some barriers that may exist in regard to wider practices of formative assessment and active learning strategies.

The Learning Environment

The educational goals for the twenty-first century are different from the goals of earlier times. Today's goals include the preparation of students to be able to manage the fast paced changes that are taking place nowadays. As David Kearns, former CEO of Xerox Corporation, said: “We need the flexible intellectual tools to be problem solvers, to be able to continue learning over time” (Humphreys, 2006, P. 1). We as educators should strive to guide the students to find their way to the solution, by providing more questions and fewer direct answers. In order to reach this goal, we need to alter the teaching pedagogy from the traditional one. We need to go from teaching procedures and mechanics, to teaching for understanding (Darling-Hammond et al, 2008, Prince, 2004).

Today, students need to understand the current state of their knowledge and to build on it, improve it, and make decisions in the face of uncertainty. They

should be able to identify and solve problems and make contributions to society throughout their lifetime by displaying the qualities of “adaptive expertise” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999).

To achieve this goal, the environment in which teaching and learning take place has a very important role, which should be designed in such a way that accommodates the developments of the science of learning. Figure 1 illustrates four perspectives on learning environments that take into consideration the principles of learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999), which have an important implication on what is taught and how, and how student learning is assessed.

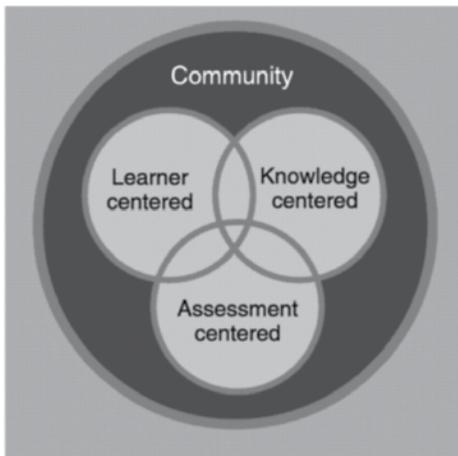


Figure 1, Perspectives on learning environments. (Bransford et al., 1999, p. 134).

The learner-centered environment fosters the principle of learning that the students come to the classroom with preconceptions of how the world works. If students’ initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999). A knowledge-centered environment provides attention to what is taught, why it is taught, and what competence or mastery looks like. This fulfills the second principle of learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999); students must: (a) have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, (b) understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and (c) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application. The community-centered approach requires the development of norms for the classroom and school, as well as connections to the outside world that support core learning values. Bransford, Brown and Cocking (1999) state that the assessment-centered perspective on the design of effective learning environments has two major uses:

- a) Formative assessment, which involves the use of assessment as sources of feedback to improve teaching and learning.
- b) Summative assessment, which measures what students have learned at the end of some set of learning activity.

The four principles of the learning environment—learner – knowledge – community and assessment-centered—need to be aligned in ways that mutually support one another, and also support active learning (explained in the next section). Rec-

ognizing when the students understand and when they need more information (studied under the concept of metacognition), helps them take control of their own learning.

Active Learning

I hear, I forget;

I see, I remember;

I do, I understand.

-Old proverb

In the context of the college classroom, active learning can be defined as anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing. Strategies promoting active learning in the classroom include (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 2):

- a) Students are involved in more than listening.
- b) Less emphasis on transmitting information and more on developing students' skills.
- c) Students are involved in higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis and evaluation, Bloom's Taxonomy, (Krathwohl, 2002)).
- d) Students are engaged in activities (reading, discussing, and writing).
- e) Greater emphasis is placed on students' exploration of their own attitudes and values than on lecturing.

Bowell and Eison (1991) conclude that the use of active learning leads to better student attitudes toward learning and toward becoming better thinkers and writers.

Rosenthal (1995), from the University of Toronto, Ontario, argues that using active learning in advanced mathematics classes instead of using a purely lecture format led to a better understanding and better retention of knowledge by the students. The types of active learning strategies he and his colleagues implemented were: (a) small-group exercises, students learning from each other, (b) writing to learn, a way to get students to think about what they are learning, (c) peer review of writing assignment, (combining writing assignment with cooperative learning techniques).

Prince (2004) examined the evidence for the effectiveness of active learning used by engineering faculty, and concluded that there is broad support for the engineering education literature on the benefits of student active-engagement. He suggests that engineering faculty should be aware of different instructional methods and the literature on "what works." Prince's review of research supports the view that introducing activities into the traditional lecture and promoting student engagement increases student attention span during lectures and promotes better recall of information. He describes different instructional methods that could be implemented into a traditional lecture, *collaborative learning*, (with emphasis on student interactions rather than on learning as a solitary activity), *cooperative learning* (with focus on cooperative incentives rather than competition to promote learning), and *problem-based learning* (PBL), (which typically involves significant

amounts of self-directed learning on the part of the students). From my experience, introducing the above instructional methods into a traditional lecture in mathematics courses improves the student understanding.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) address the question: “How to improve the undergraduate education?” All their *seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education* (based on research on good teaching and learning in colleges and universities) promote active learning:

- 1) Encourages contacts between students and faculty.
- 2) Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.
- 3) Uses active learning techniques.
- 4) Gives prompt feedback.
- 5) Emphasizes time on task.
- 6) Communicates high expectations.
- 7) Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

They emphasize the importance of both active learning and formative assessment, by stating that (Chickering and Gamson (1987, p. 3):

[L]earning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

Knowing what you know and don't know focuses learning. At various points during college, and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves.

Formative Assessment

Teaching practices congruent with a metacognitive approach to learning include those that focus on sense-making, self-assessment, and reflection on what worked and what needs improving (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999, p. 12).

The reflection on what worked and what needed improving can be done by using different types of formative assessment—ongoing assignments designed to make students' thinking visible to both teachers and students, which permit the teacher to grasp the students' preconceptions, understand where the students are in the developmental corridor and design instructions accordingly (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999, p. 24). Providing good feedback to students helps them identify their deficiencies and leads them to better understanding and faster improvement.

The heart of teaching is what students are asked to do—the tasks in which students engage as they explore concepts, learn procedures, and try to make sense of the content. Formative assessment can be a powerful tool for enabling students to learn if it provides opportunities for the students to communicate their understanding. Providing feedback—feedback that goes beyond right or wrong—

can help students succeed (Burrill, 2007). Burrill (2007) concludes that formative assessment is about teachers being flexible, moving consistently towards shaping their teaching that bridges students' thinking and obstacles with students' understanding. *Such teaching fosters learning.*

William (1999a) explains the importance of good questions used in formative assessment. Knowing that the vast majority of misconceptions are quite commonly shared among the students: "...As long as the teacher has a small battery of good questions it will be possible to elicit the most significant of these misconceptions..."

The first element of formative assessment is questioning, and then the feedback continues the process. Feedback to learners should focus on what they need to do to improve, rather than on how well they have done—feedback should contain recipe for future action. Otherwise it is not formative. Finally, feedback should be designed so as to lead all students to believe that ability—even in mathematics—is incremental, i.e., the more we *train* at mathematics, the cleverer we get (William, 1999b). The last elements of the formative assessment, as William (2000) describes them, which have to do with a learner's role, are: (a) sharing criteria with learners through discussion about what they like or dislike about the topic, *reflective assessment*, and (b) student self assessment.

William (2000) concludes that there is a huge range of studies in various countries that have looked at students of different ages and that have found a similar pattern. *Involving students in assessing their own learning improves that learning.*

Formative Assessment & Active Learning

The part of learner's role of formative assessment shows the connection of it with the active learning strategy. While assessing their own work the students are thinking and monitoring their own understanding, which shows the alignment with one of the key findings of a broad research on learners and learning and on teachers and teaching (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999, p. 18):

A "metacognitive" approach to instruction which can help students learn to take control of their own learning, by defining learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving them.

The greatest attribute of formative assessment by generating active learning is that it promotes the goals of lifelong learning, including higher levels of student achievement, greater equity of student outcomes, and improved learning to learn skills. Teachers using formative assessment approaches guide the students toward development of their own learning to learn skills—skills that are increasingly necessary as knowledge is quickly outdated in the information society (OECD/CERI, 2008, p. 1-2).

Evidence of improvement in student achievement on exams, retention in courses, and logical thinking skills was documented in the introductory Earth Science courses at the University of Akron (McConnell, Steer & Owens, 2003), after a traditional lecture course was converted into an active learning environment through the incorporation of formative assessment methods matched to different levels of cognitive development.

Incorporation of active learning through formative assessment is an ongoing

recursive process students and teachers engage in when they (a) focus on learning goals, (b) take stock of where current work is in relation to the goal, and (c) take action to move closer to the goal (McKenna, 2011). The recursive process that the use of the Formative Assessment puts teachers and students through is shown in figure 2:

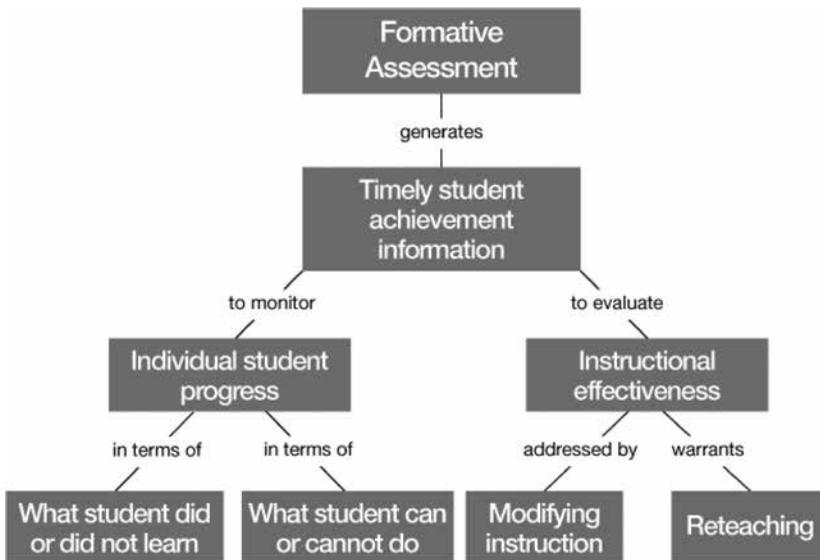


Figure 2, Formative Assessment, (McKenna, 2011, p. 3)

First, the concept of what good work *looks like* belongs to the teacher, and then, the student's self-assessment process marks the transition to independent learning.

Using formative assessment to identify the learning needs in different classroom communities helps the teachers adapt the required pedagogy to achieve their goals. Different types of active learning tasks can be used to accommodate different learning styles.

I have experienced considerable improvement on my students' summative test results, but I think the most gain was in improving the classroom-learning environment, having students enjoying their time while learning long term learning skills. My teaching philosophy promotes active learning:

Getting to know my students as individuals and as a class allows me to establish high expectations without creating an abrasive atmosphere. Showing appreciation for their questions and comforting the students with the idea that being wrong is part of learning stimulates active learning. Mastering the information through a question-and-answer process helps me lead the students in the direction they should go in order to reach correct conclusions and answers, without always providing the answers to them. Challenging them by presenting materials and constructing assignments in a way that enables students to apply the learned information in new learning situations allows them to share the excitement of discovery. These avenues make it possible to reach the course objectives as well as increase the students desire to explore the subject I teach beyond the boundaries of the course.

Summary

It is clear that there is a broad support in the undergraduate education literature of the effectiveness of the use of formative assessment and active learning strategies on improving students' understanding and logical thinking skills, and there is also evidence of promoting lifelong learning skills, all necessary to reach the education goal: *An undergraduate education should prepare students to understand and deal intelligently with modern life.* (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). Formative assessment generates active learning, which guides the students toward development of their own *learning to learn* skills and become problem-solvers, which is needed to succeed in today's modern, fast paced, ever changing society. The literature also points out the barriers of wider practice of formative assessment and active learning. Schools' accountability for summative tests results by local and federal government makes teaching to the test a short-term financial gain. The lack of assistance to the teachers on discovering and implementing formative assessment and the fact that it is time consuming make it hard to sustain.

I have tried my best as a teacher to use formative assessment and active learning as a guide to lead the students to *learn how to learn*, but I am also faced with the barriers of implementing formative assessment and active learning because I am required to cover the curriculum and apply summative assessment.

Will a day come so that summative assessment becomes obsolete?

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Helping BMCC Graduates Find a Job or Internship in Child Welfare, Criminal Justice, Disabilities, and Gerontology

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Human Services

This paper aims to inform students about careers in child welfare, criminal justice, disabilities, and gerontology, how to further their education in these fields, and how to secure possible employment in New York City. Contemporary literature indicates that faculty take a more active role in discipline-specific career counseling, and not rely the college career office. Note the high rates of unemployment among college graduates (Goodman, 2015; Ortiz, 2015, Okker, 2014).

Child Welfare:

The need for child welfare caseworkers is growing. *The US News and World Report* (undated), reporting statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, expects 15.1 percent employment growth for child and family social workers between 2012 and 2022, resulting in some 43,100 new jobs. Child welfare workers help families with children who are abused, neglected, or at risk, through providing prevention, protective, education, foster care, adoption, and/or juvenile justice services.

Whenever possible, families receive prevention services to keep them at home, but some children are in foster care, and some children are in the process of adoption. Knowledge about developmental milestones, health conditions, mental health conditions, government benefits/ entitlements, and substance abuse is useful because some of the parents and/or children have unmet needs. Child welfare workers Kelly MacWilliams (2011) and DeCosta (undated) describe their experiences in helpful video clips.

Youths transitioning out of foster care is a particular child welfare population that is at risk. For example, Greeson and Kinnevy (2014) report that according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services more than 23,000 older youths were emancipated from foster care in 2012 without a legally permanent adult connection, and represented 10% of all foster care exits, and suggest “natural mentoring” is important.

Caseworkers have to balance the needs of the child, the natural parents, and the foster parents/adoptive parents, schools, and the courts. VanPelt (2013) writes about the need for multidisciplinary teams in child welfare. Staff training and supervision are a key to providing caseworkers with support (Blustein, 2014). A growing area of training focuses on the importance of caseworkers with training in understanding how outbursts, withdrawal, and/or depression are triggered by past trauma, and the importance of parent-training to prevent children being removed from homes. Also, training in breathing therapy for youths experiencing trauma is

valuable (Rodriguez, 2015). For many positions, it is an advantage to have bilingual skills in languages such as Spanish, Bengali, or Hindi to work with families.

Students are encouraged to continue their education at a new bachelor of social work (BSW) program at the Silberman School of Social Work of Hunter College (CUNY) that offers a concentration in child welfare.

Criminal Justice:

This diverse area of practice includes working on either side of the table with both crime victims and defendants, as well as their children. A variety of positions involve working as forensic social workers, domestic violence counselors, probation officers, parole officers, and victim advocates who work in varied areas such as corrections, courts, crisis-centers, hospitals, law enforcement, jails, prisons, alternatives to incarceration programs, and community-based advocacy organizations (Pace, 2012, Patterson, 2012). Rewards include helping individuals with criminal justice system involvement to access services and resources (ex. job training, college, GED), or advocating for legislative reform (Patterson, 2013; Wilson, 2010).

When working with domestic violence victims, domestic violence counselors and victim advocates work with victims in private practices, hospitals, governmental organizations, primary care settings, crisis hotlines, shelters for battered women and their children, domestic violence advocacy organizations, drop-in crisis counseling centers, counseling centers; some also perform home visits, to conduct interviews, to assess and counsel abuse victims, help a victim and his/her family move into alternative housing or shelter, provide advocacy and referrals for social services, and act as a liaison with law enforcement agencies (Careers in Psychology, undated; Miller, undated; Thompson, undated). Social workers can help lawyers, judges, and juries to understand that a person who commits a crime because of mental health issues may need to be treated differently than an offender who committed the crime with awareness (Greenwood, undated). Contemporary issues in the area of criminal justice are discussed by Human Rights Watch (2015).

Students are encouraged to continue their education through the CUNY Justice Academy at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The first 60 credits are taken at BMCC, and the final 60 credits at the senior college.

Disabilities:

Approximately 890,000 individuals with disabilities live in NYC, approximately 11% of the population (Center for Independence of the Disabled, 2011) (CIDNY). The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (2009, para 4) defines a disability as a "...physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of a person's major life activities (walking, speaking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, working, self-care); or a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having an impairment..." This diverse group includes people with mobility, visual, hearing loss, intellectual, developmental, cognitive, and/or health-related disabilities, who share a similar history and fight for civil rights.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 aimed to ensure that 43 million Americans with a physical and/or mental disability have legal protections to obtain full rights to society in education, employment, housing, public accommo-

dations, education, transportation, communication, recreation, health services, voting, and access to public services (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2009). 25 years later, one in five Americans, or 57 million people, have a disability and the number is growing (US Bureau of Census, 2012); however, many of these individuals continue to face a combination of challenges in the same areas (CIDNY, 2111; Fessler, 2015; Myers & Laux, 2010; O'Leary, 2015).

Social workers help people with disabilities to address personal and societal challenges to become independent, productive, and included in society, which is a very rewarding career. The rewards of helping people who have intellectual disabilities and their families is discussed by Russo-Gleicher (2007). Social workers need to be good listeners, be patient, and give choices. People with disabilities face similar issues as the general population, such as relationships, depression, substance abuse, and career/education goals. Group work skills are needed to develop socialization skills, and to lead parenting groups and/or disability-related support groups. An example of using groups with people who have intellectual disabilities is found in Russo-Gleicher (2013). Social workers help clients to develop self advocacy skills, connect with role models, support groups, technology, community resources, and connect with disability culture, like the NYC Disability Pride Parade, and Independent Living Centers.

Social workers need good collaboration skills to work in team settings with a variety of professionals on behalf of the client and/or his/her family, to coordinate services and develop a service plan based on the concept of person centered planning, which uses the strengths, interests, preferences, capacities, needs, values, and goals of the individual and/or family. Early intervention services, school age settings, and day treatment programs are particular areas that use a team approach. Russo (1999) has written about the use of a strengths approach with people who have developmental disabilities. Person-centered-thinking is a newer approach which involves asking the person about his/her dream and being creative about new ways to fulfill it (Jones, 2009).

Social workers in the disability field advocate on behalf of clients to connect them with services, and encourage client self-advocacy, whenever possible. Good writing and speaking skills are necessary to write letters, make phone calls, appeal decisions, and participate at fair hearings, for example, at Medicaid or Social Security. Political advocacy includes attending meetings with government and other community organizations, participating in political demonstrations and at sit-ins, and getting involved in coalitions such as borough-wide Developmental Disabilities Councils, for <http://www.manhattanddcouncil.org/committees/dd-council>. See also the Disabilities Network of NYC: <http://dnnyc.net/>

There are job openings working with people who have disabilities in a wide variety of settings such as residential services, vocational services, in-home services, schools, and early intervention. A driver's license, certification in CPR and first aid, knowledge of sign language, and being bilingual are assets to securing a job. An in-depth look at career paths in developmental disabilities is discussed by Russo and Bennett (2011). Students are encouraged to pursue their education in the area of disability studies or social work. A list of all social work program are listed at: <http://www.cswe.org/>. There is an online BA program in Disability Studies at the CUNY School of Professional Studies.

Elderly/Gerontology:

Advances in medication, nutrition, and research have led to an increase in life expectancy (Martin and Gillen, 2014). The number of Americans age 65 and older is expected to double to 80 million in the next three decades (Brody, 2012). People 85 and older are the fastest-growing age group, and by 2020, there will be approximately 6.6 million people age 85 and older (Brody, 2012). The number of Americans living beyond 100 is also growing (Marcus, 2016). By 2030, one out of five Americans will be over the age of 65, and approximately 70,000 gerontological social workers will be needed by 2020 to help older adults and their families to access health and social services (Baby boomers, 2011; Geriatric Social Work Initiative, undated; Worthington, 2008).

Elders are an ethnically and culturally diverse group who need help with daily living skills, but part of the challenge is that many do not have family living nearby (Brody, 2012), and stress among family caregivers to coordinate services is also a problem. Seniors face higher rates of poverty, chronic health problems, lack of resources, social isolation, financial problems, and mental health issues (Brody, 2012; Geriatric Social Work Initiative, undated; Martin and Gillen, 2014).

Wilding (2012) writes that geriatric social workers address challenges faced by older people in many arenas; the main goal is to maintain and enhance elders' quality of life, so these social workers need to understand physical aspects of aging, mental health, and cultural barriers. The Spectrum Model of Aging aims to increase well-being of seniors by creating individualized plans for managing health, comfort, and care, which includes medications, social support, health promotion, contentment, gratitude, forgiveness, stress management, cognitive stimulation, and the pursuit of meaningful activities (Martin and Gillen, 2014).

Some skills helpful to working with elders are: compassion, patience, understanding, cultural competency, listening skills, ethics (confidentiality and self-determination), trust, rapport, risk assessment skills (for suicide, elder abuse/neglect, substance abuse, depression), a sense of humor, and positive memories of grandparents and/or other elders (Graziano, 2010; Warta, undated; Worthington, 2008). Compassion and patience are needed because many older individuals may resent getting help from younger people, or might have dementia, Alzheimer's, mental illness, be victims of abuse/neglect, and may be fearful or confused (Graziano, 2010; Warta, undated).

Settings where there are positions for gerontological social workers include: home care, senior centers, faith based organizations, hospice, palliative care, housing entities, naturally occurring retirement communities (NORC's), caregiver programs, hospitals, rehabilitation agencies, mental health agencies, social and medical adult day programs, or geriatric care management agencies (Graziano, 2010). Warta (undated) discusses the need for social workers in adult protective services, especially due to abuse and neglect in nursing homes. Caregivers to the elderly, especially in certain cultural groups, for example, Asians, are often overburdened and stressed (Lun, 2015).

The three main areas of practice in gerontology, according to Wilding (2012) are clinical, service, and advocacy. Clinical interventions include conducting therapy with those who are lonely, depressed, anxious, or in bereavement; group outings; and dealing with end of life issues by recording "life stories", writing

“goodbye” letters, making videos, and making phone calls. Service interventions include referring clients for resources, coordinating medical services, assisting with paperwork, and recommending useful technologies. Advocacy involves assisting an individual to develop an end-of-life care plan (living wills, advance directives, DNR orders) and reporting elder abuse.

A geriatric case manager plans and coordinates the care of the elderly to improve their quality of life and to maintain their independence, and acts as an advocate when family is not available; the educational requirement is a degree in nursing, gerontology, social work, or psychology, with training in elder care (Cirillo, undated). Working as a geriatric care manager, doing tasks like psychosocial assessments and developing a resource directory, is good way to begin a career in working with the elderly (Graziano, 2010). Whenever possible, all services need to involve the family and be culturally sensitive. A good resource is New York City Department For the Aging: www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/html/about/about.shtml

This free online magazine, *Today's Geriatric Medicine*, is dedicated to issues facing older adults: <http://www.todaygeriatricmedicine.com/>

Students completing the A.S. degree in Gerontology at BMCC are encouraged to further their education in Gerontology by transferring directly into the bachelor degree program at York College/CUNY (BMCC, undated). More information can be found at: www.york.cuny.edu/produce-and-print/contents/bulletin/school-of-health-and-behavioral-sciences/health-and-physical-education/gerontological-studies-services-bs

Types of organizations

Students will find employment at non-profit, government, and for-profit organizations. There is no one master list of all social service organizations in NYC because they are supervised by a variety of government agencies, and receive a variety of funding such as government contracts, fee-for-service, and/or private or public insurance (ex. Medicaid, Medicare). The following websites send emails about job leads:

Idealist: www.idealists.org

Social Service: www.socialservice.com

Indeed: www.indeed.com

Getting hired at certain government jobs is a process that is determined by education, experience, military service, and usually a test. Your application package is given a rank or score on a list. Then there is a waiting period to be called for an interview that could be months or years. The following is a list of websites for government jobs.

New York City Government: www.nyc.gov/html/dcas/html/work/exam_monthly.shtml

New York State Civil Service jobs: www.cs.ny.gov/jobseeker/gettingajob/empnys.cfm

New York State jobs: www.statejobsny.com/

Federal government jobs: www.usajobs.gov/

Job titles across practice areas for BMCC graduates in the social sciences:

	Possible job titles
Associate's degree	Correction officer, direct care/residence counselor, child care worker, family or youth advocate, firefighter, group leader, job coach, paraprofessional, police officer, outreach liaison, program aide, and security officer.
With additional education and experience	Case manager, caseworker, coordinator, parole officer, probation officer, program director, quality assurance supervisor, residence manager, social work assistant, and vocational counselor.
With advanced degree and experience	Lawyer, psychologist, rehabilitation counselor, and social worker.

Conclusion:

This article addressed the need to provide discipline-specific career information to assist BMCC graduates to increase student success with obtaining a job after graduation. An overview of the fields of child welfare, criminal justice, disabilities, and gerontology was provided, as well as how students can further their education in each field. For a list of websites for organizations in NYC in each practice area that can be used for job searching, please email: rgleicher@bmcc.cuny.edu

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And the Question Is...

Stephanie Carberry
English

This paper was written for an adjunct pedagogy seminar titled “The Art of Questioning” which took place online. Participants read about the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) and then in posts we discussed our ideas and experiences trying to implement the QFT into our classes. This workshop culminated in the composing of a paper which discussed our process, experiences and results.

“Can you please repeat that.”

“Wait, what?”

“So, just write down questions?”

“Do we have to answer the questions too?”

“So, just questions? No answers?”

“Cool!”

“What’s the point?”

A cacophony of confusion and exclamations for clarification was how my introduction of The Question Formulation Technique (QFT) began. The QFT, developed by the Right Question Institute, immediately had my students asking questions. Instead of worrying, I hoped this was a good sign of things to come. They were already asking, probing, seeking information. Right?

In teaching English Composition for six years I’ve realized one of my biggest challenges, and perhaps this is true for most instructors, has always been to have students be fully engaged and interested in their own learning. It’s always been important to me that my students not only learn how to become better writers, but also become more engaged and critical thinkers. I often say, and write on the board, “Challenge, challenge, challenge!” Challenge what you read, what people tell you, what you’ve always thought to be true. I emphasize this so much that by the time I reach the middle of a semester and I ask my students how they should approach a new reading or topic, they respond by yelling out “Challenge!”.

Silence. Voice. These two words circle my mind repeatedly when I think of teaching, of learning. How do I transform the empty stares and stifled tongues of my students on the first day of class? How do I make students, who often feel ignored, irrelevant, and unintelligent, believe in their voices, ideas and perspectives? This is one of my greatest challenges, and yet I pursue it so persistently because, when it is achieved, it is also the most rewarding accomplishment of teaching.

Silence. I too sat awkwardly in classrooms—back row, corner seat, head down, hoping the teacher would leave me alone and no one else would notice me. I believed I didn’t “belong” in college. I didn’t fit in. I didn’t know the things

the students around me knew. My formal education was limited and therefore I hadn't read most of what they read or experienced much of what they experienced. I equated intelligence strictly with academic success and awareness. So, I stayed silent because I believed my personal experience, history, and point of view was wrong or irrelevant to the classroom.

Voice. In writing I found a voice. It took years, and struggles, and doubts, but I found a way to validate my perspective. I wrote and it gave me, maybe for the first time in my life, a sense of power. Professors who never heard me speak in class validated my ideas, my interpretations and challenged me to go beyond what I perceived was the right answer, which I thought resided only within my classmates, and allowed my interpretation to be heard and challenged and become a part of the class discourse. So, when I did walk into the classroom as an instructor at BMCC for the first time, which was also my first teaching experience, I had a sense that I would be encountering the same challenge I once posed to my own professors.

After reading Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana's article "Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Questions," published in the September/October 2011 issue of the *Harvard Education Letter*, and being assigned the task of implementing the QFT in one of my own classes, I tried to come up with a lesson plan that I could effectively implement and which I thought my students could handle. I wrote out several possibilities and even discussed the method and how to put it into action with a colleague. Eventually, I decided to use a somewhat amended version of the QFT. Starting small and slow is what I am comfortable with. I was teaching two sections of English Composition, so I decided to use it in both.

Luckily, I was at the point in the semester where both classes were set to begin a new reading, "Allegory of the Cave," which seemed like a fitting place to start the QFT. What other writer/thinker would appreciate and advocate questioning more than Plato/Socrates? Rather than having my students write a response to the text, which I usually do, I decided to have them question it. I did not provide strict parameters for the questions as the method suggests. I asked them to challenge themselves and ask real questions they wanted answered, questions which, perhaps, could have various interpretations. I did this in an attempt to lessen the amount of factual based questions such as, "Who is Socrates/Plato?" or "What is an allegory?" We also spent some time discussing these things in detail beforehand. This assignment was given as homework over a weekend, so all students had a minimum of three days to complete the reading and compose their list of questions. I also told them to allow their minds to ask whatever they needed answered. Don't correct, overthink, try too hard.

The next class I had some success. The majority of the students had completed the assignment, and most had more than four to five questions (of course a few only had one or two questions and/or still managed to ask who is so and so). After some time discussing their thoughts on the text (some loved it, some hated it, some were indifferent), I had each student go through his/her list of questions and choose the top three to explore and spend time discussing. I then placed

students into groups to share and discuss these questions. They, as a group, had to choose one question from each group member and write it out for me to collect with an explanation as to why they chose each question. I found this an interesting step in the QFT process. There were a variety of explanations. Students gave reasons like, "We're choosing it because it's interesting, we really liked this part and would like to discuss it more, and we think it's a challenging question and want help with it." In addition, for homework each group member took home the three-four questions their group had chosen to attempt to answer. They didn't have to know the answer, or look it up, or come up with something definitive. I merely asked them to say what came to mind.

The following class they reconvened in groups to exchange their ideas/notes on the questions. (I collected this assignment as well.) I sat with each group for a few minutes engaging in conversation. This was when we discussed open-ended questions vs. closed questions. We discussed the differences, the benefits and drawbacks of both. I then asked the groups to perform one more step, to choose the one question they had the most trouble answering and present it to the class for discussion.

Therefore, each group led discussions for the rest of that class and the following one. I facilitated these discussions, and the students definitely seemed to be much more invested and engaged in the process. I could see students working out ideas as they went along. Thinking as they spoke, searching their minds for possibilities. It was fun and rewarding.

I also found the group work helpful especially for my ESL students and those who don't participate regularly. They are very uncomfortable speaking to the whole class, but I could see them engaging and laughing and discussing within the smaller group, which felt like an achievement in and of itself. They also were more comfortable leading the class discussion because they weren't doing it alone. They had two to three other students who were presenting these questions with them. This also helped to prepare the entire class for the more high stakes group facilitation they have at the end of the semester.

The QFT was certainly an adventure in my classroom instruction and my students' usual way of learning, but it is one I will undertake again. In the future, I'd have them compose the question in class so they are forced to allow their questions to formulate in the moment rather than the over thinking and editing that inevitably takes place when they have more time. Regardless, as long as it ends up with engaging discussion, I'll take on the barrage of confusion at the onset.

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Making a Connection: A Tutor's Perspective

David Dones
Basic Skills Lab

Although college enrollment numbers continue to increase, underrepresented students are falling short of graduating from four-year institutions. Students who are required to take remediation courses can take up to six years to graduate or more. Sadly, too many students give up on their dreams whether for lack of confidence, skills, tenacity, or direction. Remediation courses are not only a drain on financial aid, but create anxiety, and lower a student's self-esteem as a result of falling behind their peers. However, remediation is an unavoidable necessity for community college students, and therefore, the significance of our tutoring programs has increased exponentially. Now more than ever, professors and tutors need to create a standard of practice that is based on recognition, communication, and unification. My intention is to illustrate how professors and tutors are kindred spirits. Some professors have been tutors themselves. We share an altruistic desire to make a difference in the lives of students. In the process of facilitating knowledge, we wear matching hats. For the most part, what occurs in tutoring sessions has been buried in the end credits. Allow me to unveil the curtain on a typical day of tutoring. This is by no means meant to be a representation of the Basic Skills Lab. This is my story, and I'm sticking with it.

10:05 am. The Basic Skills Lab

Sectioned off at the farthest end of S-510, tutors and students cultivate concepts for success. Standing by a ceiling to floor view of the Hudson River, I am reminded of the *Miracle on the Hudson* that occurred in 2009, when Captain Chesley Sullenberger piloted a successful water landing in the Hudson River. Captain Sully was able to turn a possible tragedy into a second chance.

I observe from a short distance as my students are writing their responses to a practice CUNY Assessment Test in Writing. The CATW is intended to test a student's ability to read, comprehend, and respond in writing to a passage. Passing the official CATW exam is paramount so that students may be permitted to register for their accredited English courses. My tutees have been with me from the start of the semester. We have covered strategies that supplement the classroom experience. I have modeled the thinking processes involved in the pre-writing and writing stages. Trust has been established between tutor and student. And now I am told that a new student will join the group. For most students, tutoring at the Basic Skills Lab occurs once a week. There are exceptions made based on student need. Every session is its own precious jewel of learning opportunity. Now, imagine a student joining a classroom in the middle of the school semester, and being asked to sit down and follow along. Our new student needs to be brought up to speed at a different table so as to not disturb the other students with our conversation.

"What has your professor said about how to pass the CATW exam?" After introductions are made, this is my first question. I listen to the student's summation;

it is a struggle for him to articulate what he has learned. I ask the student if he has attended class regularly. The student admits that he has, but doesn't pay as much attention to his writing as he should. I request to look at his class notes with the hope that I can find his professor's feedback, but he informs me that his English assignments are not in his back pack, because he doesn't attend English class today. The professor's notes would have been helpful, but I can gauge where the student needs the most focus when he has produced a writing as part of our session. He is aware that the test date is approaching, and is feeling stressed. I explain that there are many professors in the English department who have their own methods on how to pass the exam. The methods are meant to be a guide. For the most part, the approaches are similar. "In class, do what your professor requests of you," I advise him. Some professors like designated paragraphs in a certain order, and some have their own ideas of how an essay can be structured. The tutoring session is free reign to expand the imagination and learn through trial and error. I add that I will provide supplemental strategies based on my own success with tutees which encompasses eight years of training and experience as a tutor. In the end, it's all relative. The student's shoulders relax just a bit. Minutes later, the new student, I'll call him Matthew, has revealed what he believes to be the weaknesses in his writing. I confirm that we'll be working on those areas during our sessions, and that once I have some of his writing to evaluate, I can determine as to whether these weaknesses are facts or negative personal assessments on his writing.

During these introductions, I have found that students' preconceived notions about what they struggle with can be greatly exaggerated. "I'm a bad writer," a student may confess. He or she arrives with a long list of writing flaws that are typical of most students at the developmental writing level. The common needs are: how to write an introduction, avoiding going off topic, elaborating with examples, including personal experiences, spelling, and grammar. I explain how each of those areas can be corrected with minor adjustments. The biggest challenge is gaining enough confidence to wash away the red marks of past papers that are branded into their memories.

10:25 am

The new student has been introduced into the group. The table rules are reviewed. No cell phone use at the table is permitted and mutual respect of each other's opinions is required. The two students seated at the main table have finished their body paragraphs. One of the two students was chronically late to our sessions at the start of the semester. After repeated warnings, I threatened to remove his name from my schedule if he didn't arrive five minutes early for his third session. The improvements in his essay writing and not wanting to repeat the remediation courses next year proved to be enough motivation to prompt him to arrive on time for his subsequent sessions. It is reassuring to see that prior to their group reading, the two students continued the habit of proofreading aloud so that they may better find their errors and self-correct. The new student, Matthew, observes and gets a preview of what is expected of him during next week's session. When ready, each student reads their body paragraphs to the rest of the group. I ask questions geared to getting positive confirmation from their peers about something effectively con-

veyed in their writings. This is followed by a few open-ended questions aimed at reaffirming the uses of learned strategies. Next, I provide my own feedback. I point out where the student has improved, and suggest where she/he could have written more or made a clearer transition. I remind each student that perfection is not the goal. We are a construction site, building and progressing.

10:50 am

The session ends with affirmations that something new was learned. I collect their papers. I write my comments in the students' folders after I walk away from the table. The next group has arrived early and sits in their customary seats.

11:15 am

This session with Remedial English O88 students began like clock-work. Sit, read, and write. English O88 is a lower-level course which primarily requires a student to provide personal narratives. The exercise prompt is one paragraph consisting of three or four questions, and is situational based. The tutee usually responds in writing about a time when he or she faced a particular challenge. My goal is to encourage them to provide a clear and fluent beginning, middle, and end.

One of the three students at the table appears to be lost in thought. Maria's native language is not English. At times, she gets stuck attempting to translate from Spanish to English. We have discussed why this method may not necessarily work for her, as it seems to create more obstacles than it helps, but for Maria, it is a hard habit to break. I have pointed out how her conversational English is enough to get her point across if she can get out of her head, and stop second-guessing. The pen is no longer on the paper. I have observed inconspicuously from a few feet away. My training has taught me to remove myself from the table when students are writing in order to avoid their tendency to ask questions that distract others from their writing. I walk over to her. "What's happening here?" I point at my head for reference. "I'm just thinking," She responds. I probe a little further by revealing that sometimes when we think we're thinking, we are really worrying about what to write. To break out of that cycle, it's okay to write anything that comes to mind about the subject, even if at first it doesn't make sense; chances are the action of writing will spark something that the student really wants to say. Satisfied that my point has been made, I walk away from the table. A few minutes later, I notice she has put her pen down again. I return to the table and ask her to read aloud what she has written down so far. I point to a sentence and say, "Tell me more about this." She pauses a moment and then begins to tell me a short story with dialogue and details that bring life to the paragraph. A couple of integrated questions from me steer her along. "Okay, now you see how much detail you gave me, now write it all down, and when you're done, we'll look at it together." I cheer her on.

When her paragraph is completed, it has a concise beginning, middle, and end. The character's conflict is understood. I ask her how she feels about what she has written; did she write everything she wanted to write? Does the paragraph make more sense now with the additional information she has provided? I continue. Can you write like this in another paragraph about one of the other parts of the prompt? She responds to all of my questions affirmatively. I notice that one of the other students at the table has been writing undistracted throughout. I leave

her alone for now.

A few minutes later, the only male in the group, Alex, has stopped writing. The pause is brief so I don't approach him. He continues writing his response. I believe it is imperative to give students the opportunity to work out their own thoughts in order to process. However, it is equally important as a tutor to observe a student's body language and ask questions from time to time to ensure that students are still engaged, and are not simply daydreaming. A possible result of my lack of interaction could negatively impact the progress the student has made, and the trust that I have worked to establish with them. Alex gets back to his writing. I have given him a second hour of tutoring at his request. Alex has struggled. We have worked together on his writing deficiencies on a one-on-one basis in individualized sessions dedicated to one particular issue at a time in order to avoid overwhelming him. Each semester, I am alarmed at the increase of students who lack even the most fundamental writing skills. I ponder these questions from time to time, "Is the Common Core Curriculum actually working? How many college students have I come in contact with who are at a ninth-grade reading level or less? What is actually being taught in high school English classrooms? Can Alex be an example of social promotion? These questions for now remain unanswered.

Approximately fifteen minutes later, pens drop on the table in a synchronized fashion. That is my cue to walk towards the table. Each of them acknowledges that they have proofread their responses. It is essential to remind students that writing is a two-step process. Write and proofread, but do only one at a time. I ask the young man to begin reading. The movement from generalizations to specifics helps the listener to follow along. I tell him that. The essay needs some fine tuning which will be addressed, but there is definite improvement.

The other female student at the table, Victoria, anticipates my request and asks, "Do I have to read mine out loud?" I make eye contact with her. "Reading aloud helps us to get used to hearing our own voice and makes it easier to notice if there is anything missing on the page. Our eyes can deceive us," I reply. "On the other hand, if you've written something very personal that you'd rather not share as a group, we can discuss it privately." She considers this for a moment, and then courageously decides to read her response aloud. She has written about her relationship with her father. In her essay, there are feelings of hurt, abandonment, and loss. As she reads, there is a snuffle and a wipe of a tear. It crosses my mind to tell her that she doesn't have to continue, but she reads with such calmness and urgency that it is apparent that she wants to get it over with now. When she is done reading, I am moved by her words. Thoughts in the back of my mind recollect a comparison to my own splintered relationship with my father. "Thank you for sharing that with us, and for your honesty," I say after clearing my throat. The content of the essay is strong. I comment on specific points that resonate with me, and take this opportunity to point out that when we can make an emotional connection to something we write, it becomes much more powerful. Writing can be a safe and beneficial outlet for the private expressions of our feelings. I thank her again for writing so openly about herself.

12:05 pm

When I ask students to predict how well they will do on the next test, students often answer, "It depends on which topic I get," and "I hope it's an easy test this time." I remind students that they are smarter and more powerful than any topic they are given on test day. If they don't believe that then they are giving away their strength and confidence. "It's all in the planning." I assure them. How do I keep students from sinking low in their seats? Two words: Positive and Negative. This brainstorming technique will make it easier for students to make a decision as to whether they will agree or disagree with the author. Every decision comes down to a flip of a coin. Students have opinions and comments about everything under the sun. Yet, they somehow don't think this is useful to them. I ask each of my tutees why they chose to become a student at BMCC. Typically, students will answer convenience of location, good reputation, choice of majors, affordable, and recommendation from a friend. Beautiful! After the first student attempts to answer, the rest chime in at an even faster pace. I proclaim that each of those answers could become a body paragraph. That's it. Our session on pre-writing has begun.

The second half of our session covers the personal experience aka The Safety Net. If you are a freshman student, you probably haven't taken many courses. You may not be an avid reader yet, but you have had an experience every moment of your life. You can recall and visualize it, especially the most recent experiences. You know what you saw, what you thought, and what you felt about it. This is what I remind students when choosing how to approach the personal narrative paragraph. I encourage students to be the director and star of their story, to put the reader there in the moment. You know how the story ends. Don't jump from A to C, because that's where the money is, B helps us to understand how it happened. B contains some vital information; whether it is revealing dialogue, inspiration, motivation, conflict or all of the above. This is one of the most common areas of focus during tutoring sessions. Students have a tendency to leave things out. Furthermore, their anxieties can lead them to exaggerate. I support certain creative license in a narrative, as long as it describes a real-life situation. I encourage students to always consider writing about their own experiences first, if they can't relate to the topic on an individual level, then they should consider thinking about their family or friends as a possible source. If these options seem inaccessible, I ask, "How would strangers be affected by this, and what are the positive or negative consequences of their decisions?" I love it when a student breaks out of the bubble, and becomes more self-aware, engaging the world around them in their writing through their personal experiences, and considering diverse points of views.

12:47 pm

One of my students from a different day on my schedule has come by to inform me that he has passed his CATW exam, and is grateful for my assistance. The exuberance of his announcement makes me smile. "I couldn't have done it without you!" he exclaims. I am humbled with a touch of pride. "Great job!" I respond smiling as we shake hands. I inform John Short, our Director, about the happy news, and he gives me his thumbs up seal of approval.

Reflections of the Day

Each respective tutor's experience speaks for itself. The role of the tutor encompasses many supplemental aspects to the classroom. Higher education students need all the help that we can provide them so that they may progress more quickly through the remediation process while acquiring the relevant skills required to excel in their subsequent courses. Every professor and tutor have their own stories about students who have presented challenges outside of the actual work required, a relatively small percentage of personalities that have made our jobs unnecessarily difficult. Characters such as: the socializer, contrarian, tired tutee, cell-phone monitor, and late-comer. We have all dealt with them at one time or another. I have found that my interaction with these personalities is effectively pacified by establishing a structure of expected behavior and continuing to enforce it, providing honest positive feedback, and presenting an initial demonstration of exactly how I can assist students in meeting their academic goals. Needless to say, some days run more smoothly than others.

Without question, each day of tutoring has been a rewarding experience. As a matter of fact, the Basic Skills Lab works with the office of accessibility to address the needs of students with learning disabilities, Asperger's syndrome, hearing and sight impairments, and attention-deficit-disorders. Despite the obvious challenges for these students, we have witnessed their successes. Furthermore, in cooperation with the ESL lab, directed by Joshua Belknap, the B.S.L assists the ELLs (English Language Learners) with essay writing for the CATW exam. Across the board, our tutors agree that our success rate with these hard-working students is especially gratifying. I would argue that ELLs have been some of our best tutees as a result of their dedication, perseverance, and desire to improve. Each semester, a number of ELLs have shown major improvements in their writing over their native English-speaking counterparts.

Their accomplishments are nothing short of inspirational.

I call for more tutors to be hired to better meet the growing demand of students. Furthermore, the Office of Accessibility needs to have specifically trained personnel who can accommodate students with ADD, ADHD, and dyslexia among other needs. College advisors would be a valuable resource in conjunction with the Office of Accessibility in providing emotional support. Each year, tutors in every department are reminded of the positive impact we make in the lives of thousands of students that participate in our respective tutoring programs. In spite of this, each semester tutors are required to take on extra responsibilities. Tutors assist students with disabilities without having any training or relevant experience. Limitations are placed upon tutors which decrease overall morale, and while the standard of living increases, our salaries remain stagnant unless we acquire additional college degrees. Tutors need a significant increase in salary to keep up with the standard of living. It is time to give tutors their due. I have no doubt that we can collectively raise graduation rates for all students. It is my sincerest hope that I have encouraged professors to put a face to our names, and keep an open mind to the advantages that tutoring can offer.

How The Walking Dead Helped Me Teach Students Why School Matters

Geoff Klock
English

Professor Klock gives this speech to students, like, every term, and once a student told him he should say it at graduation, and another chimed in that you can't say stuff like this at graduation, and a third said "you should grab the mic like Kanye."

Students hate my English Literature 1 class when they walk in the door the first week. This is not entirely their fault. They have taken the English Department's required Composition 1 course, and followed it up with Intro to Lit, also known as Composition 2. Many of them feel they have had enough of courses of this type, but discover a 300 level English Literature class is required for graduation, say, in the course of pursuing a Liberal Arts degree. English Literature 1 is a 300 level literature course and students often take it because the title makes it seem as if this is the next one they should take. What's the next English Literature Course? English Literature 1, surely.

It is not their fault that the title of the course is misleading. Students arrive to discover that the word "English" in "English Literature 1" does not mean the same thing it means in the phrase "English Department." In front of the word "department" "English" means "English Language." In front of the title of my course it means "British." The "1" is also misleading. After the word "composition" it indicates an order—first you take Composition 1, then once you have completed this prerequisite you take Composition 2. But the "1" in my course does not indicate a prerequisite, it indicates a time period: 700AD to 1750AD. "English Literature 2" covers more modern literature from England and you can absolutely take it first, and indeed on its own, to fulfill course requirements. You could also take any number of courses that seem at first glance to be more fun: Science Fiction, The Detective Story, The Short Story, Film—these would all knock out your requirement for a 300 level English class.

Unless, that is, you are a Criminal Justice major. Most students find CUNY's graduation requirements to be a little baffling. Do would-be Nursing students really need A's in Intro to Lit to get into nursing? But one quirk that I find delightful is that Criminal Justice requires students to take World Lit 1, World Lit 2, English Lit 1 or English Lit 2. I am heartened that our criminal Justice majors are likely to exit with some familiarity with Plato, Tolstoy, Hamlet, or Keats. It is a vision of a better world, and a recipe for some kind of dapper thoughtful detective in the mold of Inspector Lewis's sidekick.¹

But the end result is a sea of horrified faces in English Literature 1, who have just realized that, while the Shakespeare they got hit with in Intro to Lit was hard

¹ Inspector Robert "Robbie" Lewis is a fictional character in the Inspector Morse crime novels by Colin Dexter.

to read because it was old, Chaucer was old, even to Shakespeare: “Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote / the droghte of Marche has perced to the roote...” They first need to learn that spelling correctly is a modern invention—hilariously in Shakespeare’s day there was no single correct spelling of his name. Once they hear someone read it while they read along they can put it together: “When April, with its sweet showers brings to the March drought water that goes all the way to the roots...” But still, it is natural for students to ask: maybe it can be done, but why should it be done? Why do we have to take this class to graduate? And while we are on the subject, why do they have to take any of the classes we make them take to graduate?

The answer can be found in *The Walking Dead*, the zombie apocalypse television show airing on AMC for the last 5 years. It tells the story of a world overrun by zombie hords, and a handful of characters trying to stay alive by killing them, and other survivors, while seeking food and shelter. It is brutal and violent and grim and humorless; it is sometimes thrilling and frequently boring and repetitive. And our students love it.

Characters on the show do extreme things to survive. They kill obviously terrible people. Some throw companions to the zombie hords to get away themselves. They turn to cannibalism. And throughout the series they debate with each other: “Hey let’s do this terrible thing to survive.” “But if we do that terrible thing, we will become monsters, and then what is the point of survival?” So maybe sometimes they don’t leave an injured comrade behind because he is slowing them down. Or maybe they stop and look for a girl who might be dead, or assault a compound to get one of their own who was taken. Or maybe one character goes off on his own, searching for the wife he was separated from, even though traveling alone is dangerous. Or maybe they don’t kill someone, because that would change them, make them into murderers. Sometimes the nice things they do backfire, and they die for their kindness, like how Tom Hanks dies in *Saving Private Ryan*, killed by the soldier he took pity on and let go.

The show contrasts those who would do anything to survive with those who make impractical decisions out of principle or emotion. Many of our students admire the bad guys, the worst of the worst, because they admire tenacity and survival and cunning and ruthlessness. Because they think they need that to get by in their lives. But many of our students, including those I just mentioned, admire the characters who refuse to let loved ones get away from them, because those characters are sympathetic, more nuanced, and more interesting in the long run. And many of our students have loved ones they want to protect.

Many community college students are focused on an education to get a better job and make more money and feel it is a waste of time to have to fulfill liberal arts requirements that ask them to analyze poetry, or go to a museum. But their sympathy for the characters on *The Walking Dead* who do more than just survive, and the way the show demonstrates the brutal costs of choosing only mere survival, turning its main characters, initially sympathetic, into horrible people—this is the beginning of understanding the value of the liberal arts.

The etymology of the phrase “liberal arts” is useful. “Arts” here does not mean just paintings and sculpture, as many students assume, but “skills.” The Martial Arts are the skills of Mars, god of war. “Liberal” here does not refer to

left-leaning politics, but “free,” and is related to “liberty.” The Liberal Arts are the skills of the free people. As opposed to what? As opposed to the slaves, who masters think need only one skill to do one job, and who are actively prevented from learning how to read and write.

Because so many of our students are going to college to make more money anything not closely tied to money, to job skills, feels like a waste of time. I tell my students that Composition 1 is about how to write a thesis driven essay. We could, if we wanted, practice writing cover letters. Cover letters are thesis driven and students marshal different kinds of support for their claims and consider objections, just as they would in a thesis driven response to an Emerson passage. “You should hire me for this job. My last job prepared me well for this one and while my GPA may be lower than you expect, notice that that is because of low grades in classes not relevant to the kind of work you are looking for me to do.” But I don’t do that. I make my students write in response to Freud.

I once gave a talk in which I showed a group of teachers how I walked students through a particularly difficult passage of philosophy that included the sentence “The mistakes, the appearances, the play of the mind’s dioptric give depth and animation to the world’s miserable mass.” A teacher felt that while vocabulary building was important, students were unlikely to see the word “dioptric” again, and she felt she would be doing her students a disservice by not giving them more “useful” skills, the ones they would need to succeed in the marketplace. I am sympathetic to this view. If I am being honest, outside of that passage, by Paul Valery (194), I have never seen the word “dioptric” again myself. For students getting frustrated with this kind of thing, an army recruitment center is set up outside of every community college in America, ready to offer an alternative.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger said that we must have one thought and we must think it through to the end (50). I don’t like what happens when you think this thought to the end. If the community college is a place to learn job skills, then it is a vocational school, then the community college classroom is not really a place for the word “dioptric,” poetry, or some of the less common foreign languages, philosophy, anthropology, some of the more esoteric math and science stuff. Liberal arts professors talk a good game about well-rounded job applicants and bosses who want critical thinking skills, but I am skeptical. In any case once we start justifying the liberal arts with reference to money we have already lost, because we have accepted the worldview of our opponents. As David Mamet writes, “who controls the terms of the battle controls the terms of the peace.”

Our students are often the first in their family to go to college, often recent immigrants, and in the words of the television show *True Detective*, have been drafted into the wrong side of a class war. They want what they learn to be useful in the marketplace but if we give them nothing but that, we are participating in a world where linguistics, theater, and history are reserved for rich white kids at NYU. NYU has placed fully degree-granting campuses, on the McDonalds or James Bond-villain model, in places like Dubai and Singapore, so that if America burns tomorrow, classes are open Monday in Brazil. And these rich white students would probably love it if our students, majoring in our most popular major, respiratory therapy, could keep their grandmothers breathing and not think too much

about Occupy Wall Street or James Baldwin, or Hamlet. Eventually, perhaps, our students can, in the words of the Simpsons, get jobs polishing and maintaining the robots that America will use to attack whatever brown people they don't like this week. The thing I like best about working at a community college is the chance to do damage to this vision of the future.

The word "monster" is related to the word "demonstrate"—to teach something. And *The Walking Dead* teach us why mere survival, why a laser focus on pragmatics like money or food or shelter, is something less than fully human. And our students who have ever rooted for Maggie to break off from the pack and find her husband, even though that exposes her to the zombie hoards, have an instinct that life is about more than survival. And the liberal arts are a key part of that "more." And so are we. Interestingly while the title "The Walking Dead" should refer to the zombies, the only time it is said on the show is when Rick, the leader of our protagonists, calls the survivors, his group, "the walking dead"—the emotional strategy they need to live is to pretend they are dead inside, think of themselves as dead to make it. Some of our students may agree, but Daryl, the heartthrob hick with the heart of gold and the crossbow, maybe the coolest character on the show, says "We ain't them. We ain't them." I like that moment a lot because he makes it seem badass to want something more from existence.

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Embracing Critical Thinking in the College Classroom

Van Havercome
English

Imagine you're behind the podium in front of a class of students. One might think they're the only ones ready to learn, but it's also the other way around. Students have become proactive learners, and this shift encourages us to become more effective educators. I have found fewer and fewer students walk into the college classroom underprepared or unaware of their potential.

What becomes truly captivating is when we consider the curriculum for many of our classes. Our objective is to challenge students with the critical thinking process. Many discussions about writing have been rooted in this method. We have to help students to understand that thematic topics can create an ideal laboratory for learning. In most instances, students may think that learning is an individual task, when in fact it's not, it is a shared process. Pulling together all the ideas developed during a lecture really makes the learning experience more valuable.

To demystify learning in the college classroom, we need to accept that many students embrace critical thinking as a reaction to the learning experience. Critical thinking is an extraordinarily creative process. It offers an objective assessment of ideas for the students. This becomes a part of college culture which students are expected to embrace. To think critically allows students to make intelligent decisions and formulate more complex ideas. Critical thinking is a philosophical behavior. In other words, I believe students can improve their thinking abilities by carefully examining systematic ideas and taking part in challenging class activities.

According to the *National Center for Education Statistics*, in Fall 2014, some 21.0 million students were expected to attend American colleges and universities. This statistic suggests that numbers are increasing. With this growth in students, there is a greater demand for professors to facilitate the critical thinking experience.

We are faced with the problem, however, that students are overly dependent on the notion that textbooks can offer critical thinking. This notion is not fair to the learning process. Some regard the usage of the textbook in the classroom as the most comfortable way to learn, yet we have a diverse population of learners to consider. The conventional way of learning has been the norm, which has made the learning process harder, and critical thinking less popular, in the college classroom.

Departing from traditional note-taking off the board, learning on the college level has evolved. With countless co-operative learning activities, merged with critical thinking, I've found that peer interaction is a fundamental way that students learn. As students develop sophisticated thinking abilities, even while using a text-book, the experience of learning becomes clear when coupled with experience.

We accept that the furnishing of education has often become the professor's responsibility. Particularly, instructors are expected to use critical thinking questions as a method to secure the intellectual growth of students. In a variety of hu-

manities course, the integration of critical literacy and sophisticated ideas engage students. However, this practice includes, but isn't limited to English departments. Students develop as thinkers when they adapt and modify their interpretation of information in any subject. It's this critical process of learning that molds the proactive learner.

Taking it to the Streets: Integrating Empirical Research and Learning into Undergraduate Education

Yadira Perez Hazel
Ethnic Studies

Yolanda C. Martín
Social Science

Jill Strauss
Speech, Communications, Theater Arts

Introduction

In 1998 the Boyer Report established research-based learning as an effective tool in undergraduate teaching. Since then, the US federal government has increased efforts to encourage educational institutions to incorporate research as part of learning standards from freshmen to senior year (Boyer Report, 2-3). Research in undergraduate education continues to establish the success of high-impact educational practices such as undergraduate research in addition to community-involvement, collaborative assignments and diversity/global learning (Kuh 2008, 5).

Yet there are few research components being introduced in lower-level social science and humanities courses (100 to 200 level courses). The Center for Studies in Higher Education studied undergraduate research engagement at fifteen research institutions and found that 83 percent of upper division students (juniors and seniors) took one or more courses with a significant research requirement like a research paper or project. However, the study found that undergraduate research engagement outside of the traditional classroom is a relatively uncommon experience. This is unfortunate because the undergraduates who participated in research (outside of the classroom) “self-reported learning gains across many areas, but especially in the areas of field knowledge, how to present and communicate knowledge, research skills, higher levels of satisfaction, better use of time, and higher levels of non-quantitative skills (Douglas and Zhao 2013, 4).” This report supports the effectiveness of student research in the classroom in enhancing student learning.

Student led research projects in the classroom also create the space for students to build on their own experiences and knowledge. Scholars, educators and policymakers concerned with increasing graduation rates for minority students, especially Puerto Ricans and Black Americans who have some of the highest dropout rates in high-school and college, have pushed for educators to adopt learning situations that draw out information from students and provide them with the opportunity to make their own connections and act on their own ideas (Claxton 1990, Aragon Steven ed. 2000).

This article presents case studies that utilize a qualitative research approach to teaching in lower-level social science and humanities courses in an urban ju-

nior college with students with multiple diversities. This article argues for research to be integrated across disciplines as part of increasing effective teaching and creating learning environments that are student centered and affirming.

Case Study 1: Oral History Research as Writing and learning

Who I am and why I teach Research-Situated Pedagogy

I am an assistant professor of Cultural Anthropology at the Center for Ethnic Studies at BMCC where the question of ethnicity takes primary focus in our courses and research. As a professor in the only center in CUNY that focuses widely on ethnicity, I chose to implement a student-conducted oral history research project in a majority of my courses to support the Center's curriculum focus of enhancing learning and CUNY's vision of creating spaces that provide research opportunities for both students and teachers.

An a trained anthropologist, I have conducted several research projects in the Dominican Republic and New York City that have incorporated story collection methodologies such as oral history interviews. As a Mellon Mays Fellow at Cornell University, I had the unique opportunity to conduct research as an undergraduate. In my last two years at Cornell, I worked with a faculty member who supervised me in an independent research project. This experience was immensely impactful in my success at Cornell and in my decision to pursue a graduate degree. I learned how to formulate research questions and how to choose appropriate research methodologies. I gained the confidence and skills to be a critical thinker and independent learner. From personal experience, I believe that teaching research methodologies to undergraduates is not only an effective teaching tool but also a tool for transforming academia.

The Research my students conduct: Oral History, Ethnic Studies and Learning

In two courses I teach, *The Puerto Rican Experience in Urban USA* and *The History of the Dominican*, my students conduct oral history interviews of community members in the courses' respective ethnic group. Oral History is a method of collecting qualitative data through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with an aim of better understanding the lived experience, in this case among Puerto Rican and Dominican communities in New York City. In *Doing Oral History*, Donald Ritchie (1995) explains that oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews and it involves a well-prepared and trained interviewee actively listening and recording the narrator's story.

The Puerto Rican and Dominican communities are both significant ethnic communities for New York City and the City University of New York. BMCC has over 30 percent of our students identifying as Hispanic, and a majority with Puerto Rican and Dominican ancestry. Both of these communities are experiencing multiple regional, national and international changes (political, financial, socio cultural, legal, etc.) that impact their daily lives and the ways they understand who they are. Scholarship has shown how oral history projects in the classroom enhance and provide opportunities for higher levels of student learning such as analysis and critique. This oral history research project also targets students'

knowledge, comprehension, application and synthesis learning.

Throughout the semester, my students are trained how to design oral history interview questions, how to select a narrator, how to conduct the interview, and how to analyze the data. Students are required to write a final oral history paper where they contextualize the themes that emerged from their interviews within historical events, theoretical constructs, and social science concepts discussed in class and assigned readings. This oral history paper is used as their final course assessment.

Students' capacity to conduct an oral history interview and analyze the data is developed in five mini-sessions (of 10 to 20 minutes) that provide space for discussion of concepts, in-class exercises and role-playing. They occur after the main lecture topics of the day.

Topics in these sessions include limitations and opportunities in conducting qualitative research, creating interview questions for the semi-structured interview (the difference in open and closed-ended questions), interview best practices, engagement with community members, taking notes/recording, analyzing data and contextualizing data within historical events and anthropological/sociological concepts for the oral history paper. Throughout the course, students are assigned readings that provide a historical background to the Puerto Rican and Dominican presence in the US as well as readings that outline some socio-economic challenges within these communities.

Students are asked to interview a community member who self-identifies as Puerto Rican or Dominican, depending on the course they are enrolled in. In addition, the narrator (the interviewee) must be 18 years or older and be available for a face-to-face interview. The interview is conducted between the 7th and 9th week of class. Once the interview is complete, students complete two data analysis activities and are asked to submit a two-page draft a week before the final deadline. The final oral history paper asks students to situate the narrator's life within relevant socio-economic and political time and place, and though some students' have expressed the challenge in connecting their narrator's life with larger structural factors, they are invested and push themselves to complete the paper. Once the paper is turned in, students sit in a circle to share a story from their interviews. In this story-circle, many students use classroom discussions, theories and historical events to provide context and import to the narrator's story, demonstrating high levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

I find that most, if not all of my students who conduct the interview also complete the final paper with great effort. And the analytical essays they create share stories of discovery—learning that a grandparent took a yola (makeshift floating device) to Puerto Rico to enter the US; inspiration—family members who died fighting to end a dictatorship; empathy—learning that Puerto Rican migrants and Dominican immigrants share socio-economic experience with Black Americans; renewed drive/focus—understanding why it is important for them to finish college in the face of current statistics and families' financial struggle, and an increased appreciation for other people's lives in the community. To illustrate, a young Puerto Rican man took two of my courses and came to understand how structural inequality creates spaces that increase physical violence against women—an understanding that he applied to his single mother's life.

Results (Impact)

In the fall of 2014, 55 students responded to a post-interview survey. Over 90 percent reported that this was their first oral history project. I asked three open-ended questions in the survey: 1. What did you like best about this project? 2. What do you recommend to make this project a more effective learning experience? 3. What else can you share about participating in this oral history project? My analysis led to the following themes, Provided Depth of Knowledge, Connection to Community, and Identity-building & Affirmation that illuminated their learning experience.

Case Study 2: Integrating Ethnographic Student Research in the Documentation and Analysis of Crime and Drug Trends in New York City

Who I am and why I teach Research-Situated Pedagogy

An Assistant Professor of Criminology and Program Director of the Criminal Justice Program at BMCC/CUNY, I have a doctoral degree in Sociology. My scholarly research interests draw from the interdisciplinary fields of Latino studies, critical criminology, and public health work. My undergraduate education at a selective liberal arts college brought me my first bite into the research process. I became the research assistant of Professor Luke Harris, the Chair of the Political Science Department at Vassar College, and co-founder of the African American Political Forum. From the beginning, I found myself immersed not only in primary research with Prof. Harris, but witnessing how some of AAPF's work had the power to inform both public policy and public opinion. That was a turning point for me as a student, a moment when my current teaching practices were greatly shaped. Like the students throughout CUNY, I was a first generation college student in need of guidance and mentorship. I benefitted from looking at the world through the critical lens usually developed by those that find themselves in the role of agents in the production of knowledge, rather than mere consumers of it. I want my students to be intellectually emboldened by that same critical lens, and I aim to make this happen at the group, rather than individual, level.

Ethnographic Research Study in Urban Criminal Justice Classrooms

This section describes an ethnographic research project criminal justice students develop every semester (two sections per semester), as part of the regular coursework, and I now train and mentor students on the collection of first-hand data on crime and drug trends in the area neighborhoods. This paper also highlights the ways in which this research project produces a variety of beneficial outcomes for the students, the faculty, and the college, such as enhancing student comprehension of abstract theoretical frameworks through their hands-on experience, and building a tradition of research that begins to distinguish BMCC from other community colleges.

The community-based research strategy described here embraces qualitative and quantitative methods to guide students in the study of issues of direct relevance to the public health and safety of their neighborhoods, namely, problems related to drugs and crime. This pedagogical approach, I argue, follows the radical view of education as instrument of student liberation (Freire, 1984; 72), in which

students build knowledge upon their own individual experience, underscoring both a recognition of previous awareness and a non-hierarchical classroom dynamics in which student and faculty learn from each other. bell hooks, a feminist social activist and scholar, (and former student of Paolo Freire herself), similarly challenges traditional classroom dynamics. According to hooks, faculty ought to acknowledge students' histories as an organic element in the building of learning communities, transgressing hierarchical dynamics, and turning these histories into collaborative practices (1984). Embracing feminist methodologies, on the other side, reminds us that "the personal is political." Teaching social problems that affect criminalized youth, for example, in largely underserved communities to students of color, many of whom have been racially profiled and stopped and frisked, and whose friends and relatives may have been subject to deportation, to violation of due process clauses, or to arrest for minor drug dealing, all of it political at its core. Students learn, by their own research exploration and interpretations, the intertwining of "private troubles and public issues" (Mills 1959; 8). Students' individual experiences are not random or completely individual; they are part of socio-economic and political patterns that need to be framed within spatial and temporal contexts. Ultimately, students are empowered upon the realization that their lives are shaped to a great extent by broader structural arrangements that move beyond personal responsibility explanations of their lives.

The evolution of an approach to student-based research

In the spring and fall semesters of 2014, this ethnographic study was implemented in the course CRJ 204, "Crime and Justice in the Urban Environment." CRJ 204 is an upper-level criminal justice class at BMCC that has been re-designed as a capstone course for criminal justice majors. The course description reads:

This course takes a critical approach to the study of crime and justice in urban settings. Course materials examine contemporary crime-related issues that affect urban communities within a historical and sociological context. The course highlights the intersections of deviant behavior and the criminal justice system within the structures of class, race, gender, and power inequalities. Topics explored may include racial profiling, juvenile delinquency, media representations of crime, policing, the war on drugs, and prisoner re-entry.

The social problems covered by this course description mirror many of those experienced, directly or indirectly, by the vast majority of our students. Most of the CRJ students in my classes self-identified as either working or lower middle class students of color residing in underserved communities that are often subject to more police scrutiny than more affluent neighborhoods in New York City. I incorporated this project into two Criminology sections in the fall of 2013 for the first time. One of these Criminology sections was designated Writing Intensive (WRIC); the other section was non-WRIC (the earlier required an extended version of the final paper, with additional interviews and longer neighborhood ethnographic description). Although a few students questioned at the beginning of the semester the value of writing about their own community, by the end of the

semester the vast majority of the students reported greater appreciation of theoretical frameworks that help them make sense out of their environments. This was reflected in the quality of their papers and oral presentations.

To supplement their research experience, and as part of this experiential learning continuum, I mentor interested students into presenting their original research outcomes at an academic conference (Left Forum, 2014 and 2015, Eastern Sociological Society, 2015). In the panel presentations students reflected on their overall learning experience conducting criminological research, as well as on their individual research findings, discussing core issues in criminological research, such as obstacles in “gaining access” to hidden populations, or “establishing rapport” with study participants.

Outcomes

The research project includes three main tasks that students are required to complete: a 35-question survey students administer to 10 people in their neighborhood; an annotated bibliography of secondary source material they have assembled about their neighborhoods; and finally, three in-depth interviews and students’ own observations of neighborhood conditions. Altogether, these components of the scaffolded paper result in a rich dataset about the perception of crime and drugs in the New York City area over time. To make the management of this rapidly growing database easier, beginning in 2014 students began entering all of the various types of data that they collect as separate entries in an online electronic database. Each survey, in-depth interview, ethnographic observation, and secondary source was now entered by students separately so that manipulating and searching the data became far easier and more efficient than searching through the texts of the final papers submitted at the end of each semester. By engaging in the data-entry step, on top of producing a final research paper, students get to experience the full process of what “becoming a social researcher” entails.

It was clear from the beginning of this project that the quality of the work that many of the students produced for the class—especially the narratives that they wrote that described their neighborhoods and/or recounted in-depth interviews—exceeded the quality of the work that they routinely performed for other classes; they were simply more emotionally invested in this work as compared with studying for the multiple choice exams and/or writing the literature reviews that they were asked to complete in other Criminal Justice classes.

Case Study 3: Ethnographic Life History Interviews as an Interdisciplinary Methodology for Conflict Analysis

Who I am and why I teach Research-Situated Pedagogy

I have been teaching at CUNY since 2009, first as an adjunct at a four-year college and now as an Assistant Professor in the Speech, Communications, and Theater Arts Department at BMCC where I teach Conflict Resolution. I have a Master of Education in International Education Development with a Concentration in Peace Education and Conflict Resolution. I completed my PhD in 2010 at the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland where I designed an ethnographic fieldwork proj-

ect that brought together an intergenerational group of Protestants and Catholics to remember and reflect upon the most recent period of violence known as the 'Troubles.' The young people who volunteered to be part of the project were undergraduate visual art students at my university and this was my first experience teaching conflict resolution skills to college students who then used these skills as part of oral history workshops with peers and older people from their own and the other religious identity group. The stories told and heard were not part of the dominant narratives of the region. From this project I observed first-hand both the pedagogical potential of oral history (Ritchie, 2003) and the power of storytelling for validation, perspective taking, and empathy.

This paper describes the audiovisual life history interview that students in my conflict resolution course produce as part of their final project. Students today are technologically savvy. They have easy access to technology, while at the same time faculty are encouraged to use more technology in our teaching. In my case, I teach in a department that includes media courses that make these short documentaries enjoyable.

The experiences that stay with us are often of unresolved conflict between friends, family expectations, identity issues, power differences, silences, or when we feel we have been wronged and/or not been heard. For their final project, I have my students plan and record a life history documentary in which they interview someone about a conflict s/he has had. However, they are preparing for the final from the first written assignment in which they reflect on and analyze one of their own unresolved conflicts or one that they wish they had handled differently (Hocker, 2014). Then I teach conflict resolution skills such as empathy, paraphrasing, multiple perspective taking, and active listening. However, practicing active listening and paraphrasing in particular, can be difficult outside of the classroom when you aren't accustomed at the same time as they are to note important abilities in conflict de-escalation. Interestingly, because the oral history interview requires these same skills, I teach this formalized dialogic approach which lends itself well to practicing these skills. The life history interview process also involves learning how to create open ended questions and edit a narrative into a concise story, both of which will serve students in all their studies.

After learning and practicing the conflict resolution skills of multiple perspective taking, active listening, empathy, and paraphrasing skills, as well as life history interview questioning techniques in class, students arrange to interview someone about a present-day conflict or one from the past (Norkunas, 2011). Students, now the experts, then show their documentary interviews in class and present an analysis of the conflict(s) highlighted in the interview by making connections to the larger conflict themes discussed in class and in relevant assigned readings. As student researchers practice good conflict resolution techniques and interview skills, their interviewees describe, sometimes for the first time, experiences of injustice and betrayal, intergenerational and cultural conflict, issues of identity, fractured relationships, and sometimes reconciliation and forgiveness.

Results (Impact)

Some of the more compelling conflicts that concern the undergrads in this course have centered on gender identity and respect. For example, a Hispanic lesbian

struggles between her sexual identity and her family's expectations of and for their daughter. She feels that she cannot tell her parents that she is gay. At the same time, she wants to cut her hair short like many lesbians do but her family's cultural tradition say that girls have long hair. For this student and others like her, the more tolerant college environment is where she is accepted for who she is by her peers and professors. Conversely, home—the place that is supposed to feel safe and where we expect unconditional love, is where she must hide who she is. A conflict over one's sexual identity and independence vs. family expectations and acceptance manifested itself here in the metaphor of hair length. The importance of metaphor does not go unrecognized by our visually sophisticated student body. For another documentary interview on a similar theme of the dilemma of 'coming out' to one's parents, the student researcher wanted to create a sense of isolation and claustrophobia for the viewer to underscore the interviewee's narrative, so she recorded her interview in a photo booth. Because of the small space, this aesthetic decision also actuated a feeling of vulnerability as well as immediacy.

On occasion, this assignment has also been an opportunity for honesty, healing, and even forgiveness. For her final assignment, another student took the opportunity to have her mother tell her side of a conflict from several years earlier. Until this interview, mother and daughter had not discussed the events that led to the daughter's leaving home and refusing to speak to her mother for more than a year. When the daughter finally returned home, the argument and the underlying problems were not brought up again until this assignment. For this family, this project became much more than a task to record and analyze a family conflict. It became an invitation to address a silence that might have otherwise remained latent only to surface later as part of an even more complex problem. I have found that in some cases the camera shuts people down but more often, as in this example, the camera invites people to tell their side of the story. Perhaps it is like talking to a third party or perhaps it is just the opposite in that they are looking at a camera lens rather than a person and so there is no fear of judgement.

Not surprisingly, family conflicts have been a recurring theme in these documentaries made by young people in their late teens and early twenties. But other topics have come up as well. For example, one white male student, who planned on going into the police academy after graduation, interviewed his friend who is black about being stopped by the police who questioned and searched him when waiting on a subway platform on his way home from school. My student had been with his friend at the time and was not questioned by the police presumably because he is white. My student knew about Stop and Frisk practices (NYCLU) in New York City but had not witnessed it first hand before. In fact, this was a conflict for both the interviewee and the interviewer. In the documentary, the interviewee told of the humiliation, fear, powerlessness, and injustice he had experienced. In his research paper, my student wrote about racism, power, and social injustice but also about his feelings of helplessness when he couldn't come to his friend's defense for fear of being interrogated himself. This assignment gave both young men an opportunity to reflect on what happened with the language to analyze and interpret that experience in a meaningful way. While the event was traumatic and disempowering, being able to talk about it and record it, which is a form of publication, removed some of the shame and stigma and was empowering (STAR, 2002).

Documentary making allows for creativity and autonomy in that each student chooses who s/he will interview and they decide together the conflict narrative to be recorded. Then, the student determines the conflict themes to be researched for the final paper. From my experience, students work hard on this project because they care about the topics they are presenting and they know they will screen their work in class. Therefore, they are now reading and doing research for a purpose and applying the theory to real life. It also involves developing problem solving skills as challenges arise. Finally, making the documentary and the accompanying research paper serve as tools to assess students' understanding of the material covered in the course.

Students have told me that they practiced their paraphrasing skills as learned in class, and often bring in more than the required five-minute interview because the story is so important to them. I have found that this assignment is when the more reticent students shine. Speaking for themselves, documenting injustice and uncertainty, and engaging in the present enables these students to learn what activist research is and what it means to be an agent for change.

Our Challenges

Not surprisingly, we found similar challenges when implementing student-led research in the classroom. The disparity in college readiness levels even within the same class means that while these experiential projects excite and inspire some students, they intimidate and overwhelm others, those who have never written a research paper before or who have become comfortable taking multiple-choice tests. In addition, we have found students' time constraints to be challenging as well as a reality, as they juggle a full course load, jobs, family, and other unforeseen issues. Therefore, the three of us break down and scaffold the learning so that students find it more manageable.

Yolanda also incorporates a peer review exercise. Serving as peer-reviewers of each other's work creates not only a heightened sense of cooperation among students, but it also enhances self-awareness of the key components that the student-reviewer might have left out of his/her own paper. As an added plus, she has found that after engaging in the peer review session, classwork-related conversations are more likely to occur outside the classroom. Jill has assigned the audio visual recording as a mid-term project so that students have only the final research paper at the end. This has its pros and cons in that it gives students a chance to redo the interview if necessary and makes the end of semester workload lighter at the same time as the class may not be as prepared to do the project mid semester as they are closer to the end of the course. Finally, Yadira began implementing her oral history research curriculum with the support of her chair, but felt hesitant at first to share with colleagues and administration that she teaches research skills for fear that it would be viewed as contradicting the college's teaching focus. However within a year's time the college hired a new research director and announced a grant to support research in the classroom. This provided the institutional support necessary for the continued development and collegial sharing of curricula that teaches qualitative research in social sciences and humanities.

Conclusion

The open-door accessibility of community colleges like BMCC plays a critical role in the process of upward mobility in our society. Thus, it is imperative to foster success in these educational environments for students of diverse backgrounds and socio-economic status.

The three case studies in this paper outline discipline-specific student-led research projects conducted in community college classrooms—an oral history project in ethnic studies (sociology/history), audiovisual life history project in communications, and ethnographic research study in criminal justice. For many undergraduate students in these classes, the opportunity to conduct research that directly relates to their everyday lives, their families and their neighborhoods motivates them to devote extraordinary amounts of time and energy to collecting data and interpreting that data. The undergraduate student-led research projects provided the space for students to broaden the curricula and include experiences, issues and communities that matter to them. Teaching research methods in the classroom also provide professors the space to build students' capacity by drawing on skills, knowledge and experiences they already hold. This transforms the educational space from "professor filling student's brains with knowledge" to professors developing community researchers/leaders.

Each of the educators in this case-study were trained researchers and experienced managing research projects before entering the classrooms. In addition, all of them participated in internal and external faculty development programs and events that supported the development and refinement of their research projects. The motivation to create these undergraduate research opportunities came from personal experience with benefits received from conducting research as students, knowledge of high-impact teaching strategies and an awareness of their students various learning abilities and levels of exclusion in the classroom. The educators report increased student engagement, assignment completion, and meta-cognition.

There is a process to integrate these research projects in the classroom effectively and educators need support before, during and after implementing a high impact methodology like research in the classroom. Faculty development programs are essential to supporting educators in learning about teaching and learning pedagogies and creating non judgmental spaces to give and receive feedback from experts and fellow colleagues. Other sources of professional development are also important, such as mentoring, and access to support services such as research software, and technological support for students and professors. There need to be resources (mentoring, faculty development, etc.). Also important is administrative support for faculty innovation, experimentation, and adoption in the classroom. Faculty freedom to create new assessments and shift course content is important to creating methodologies that matches their passions, students' needs and the college's mission and intended outcomes. Financial support in the form of easily accessible teaching funds, curricula developments grants, release time and classroom assistants (teacher assistants, graders, transcribers, etc.) can enable educators to take on the extra-time and resources needed to integrate research projects effectively and to create programs, events and, even, institutional research centers where data collected by students of local communities is archived and shared publically. The creation of a research center for faculty and students

to showcase their work, while also providing training for faculty to teach research and students to do research (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods), can create an equitable, high impact learning space for various perspectives, identities and ideas to share, create and innovate.

With such resources and practices in place, this article supports teaching research in the classroom as part of a teaching/research continuum and outlines three different undergraduate student-led qualitative research projects because it led to effective teaching—the types of intentional pedagogical practices that leads to significant and deep student learning—and creation of spaces where students affirmed their identity and belonging.

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Out of Darkness: The Gruesome Face of War Narratives of a Civil War Child Survivor

Nma (Beautiful) Jacob aka Dr. Nkechi Madonna Agwu
Mathematics

Introduction

This article comprises a combination of poetry, biography, and mathematics curricular activities that are linked narratives of a civil war child survivor. The curricular activities are currently being used at the Borough of Manhattan Community College for teaching concepts in graph theory in Mat 200 – Introduction to Discrete Mathematics Writing Intensive Class and also in the mathematics workshops of the Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP). It provides an illustration of the traumatic experiences of victims of war and what can be done to empower them to reclaim their lives and bear fruits of creativity and innovation.

This article is one of the invited presentations on “Solutions for Peaceful Advancement for Women Across Cultures” for the 60th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women from March 14-24, 2016, in the parallel sessions organized by African Views, Our Collective and Women’s Health International. It can be used for teaching and learning in literary areas that require creative writing, poetic expression, and analytical interpretations of issues related to war.

Hell on Earth

They live in fear of their own shadows
They are orphaned and invisible children
They are dispossessed of a place to call home
Their assets are prison walls and refugee camps
They know not whom to trust
They cannot walk around freely
They hide in forests and abandoned villages
Victims of rape, human trafficking and other forms of dehumanization
Beggars, thieves, child warriors based on circumstance
Kwashiorkor ridden, virus stricken
Living off ants, lizards, plants, and anything edible they can find
The power of the warring sides has consumed them
Death lurks patiently waiting to claim its children
Whose names are written boldly on the honor roll of “Hell on Earth”
Will they ever know what it means to roam freely
Will they ever know what it means to experience the joys of living
Will they ever know what it means to smile again!

From the *Collection of Poems on Africa* by Nma (Beautiful) Jacob aka Dr. Nkechi Madonna Agwu

Trauma. Mayhem and Displacement Caused by War

War is never pretty. It always brings with it a heavy toll in the shedding of innocent blood, forcible human displacement, and destruction of property and valuable records. Leaders of nations, ethnic groups, and clans should always try to avoid making policies and taking actions that could lead their people down this road. They should attempt all peaceable means of resolving differences, including negotiating healthy compromises and agreements.

I was a Biafran child. I was barely five and half years old when the events that led up to this war started. This tragic war caused the death of over two million innocent civilians in Biafra. Many of them were children, women, aged, and disabled persons. It rendered my immediate family as displaced persons or refugees for almost four extremely long and painful years of hardship. All our valuables were looted or destroyed during the war or immediately afterwards. In the twinkle of an eyelid, we lost practically all our cherished possessions, birth and citizenship records. Overnight, I became an “invisible” child. I was “dispossessed” of practically everything that told joyous stories of my birth and my happy life before the war. It was now replaced with tragic and traumatic war stories and memories.

We (all the members of my immediate family) were fortunate, *Imela Chukwu* (Thank you God) to survive the horror and mayhem of this war without any debilitating physical injury or illness. However, our government-assigned home in the Government Reservation Area (GRA) in Enugu where we lived before this war started was completely destroyed. Our personal home in Ibeku, Umuahia was damaged by bomb fractals while we were living there after forcible relocation from Enugu when this city was captured by Nigerian soldiers. I remember clearly the day our home in Umuahia suffered severe destruction from a bombing raid. I had to grab my younger brother (Ifeanyi) to run for cover outside our home under the fruit trees we had in our compound. My father (Jacob) loved to eat fruits. He had planted many fruit trees as part of the landscape of our home. It was where we took cover during the bombing raids in Umuahia by Nigerian fighter planes, which were almost an everyday experience.

Both of my parents (Jacob and Europa) were critical war emergency workers for Biafra. Consequently, they were hardly home with us during the day, sometimes even at night and sometimes for several days on end. Not wanting to come home one day and find their children dead or critically wounded or lost to them because of a bomb raid or some other calamity of war, they chose a viable option of relocating their children to Sierra-Leone with our maternal grandmother, Mrs. Hannah Adeline Wilson (nee Brown). My maternal grandmother (Hannah) was a Sierra-Leonean, a Creole (Krio) woman from Freetown. She was visiting us when the war broke out and she ended up stranded in Biafra.

The *Red Cross* was evacuating foreigners stranded in Biafra. My mother (Europa) was a Red Cross volunteer helping to care for and transport out Biafran kwashiorkor-stricken children orphaned during the war and stranded foreigners on Red Cross planes to Garbon and Fernando Po (now Equatorial Guinea). She would travel to villages to pick up abandoned Biafran children sleeping in the forests and bring them to Red Cross refugee camps. She claims that we left on the last Red Cross plane out of Biafra to a refugee camp in Fernando Po. My mother (Europa) is one of the many unrecognized heroes—silent “women soldiers” of Biafra, who

worked hard behind the scenes caring for the orphaned, sick, wounded, aged, and disabled. The stories of these super women are yet to be fully told so they can get the proper recognition they deserve. Most of the published stories of this civil war are narratives by the male leadership on the Nigerian and Biafran sides.

We were in Fernando Po for a few months until the British consular office acting on behalf of the Sierra-Leonean government approved our refugee visa entry into Sierra-Leone. My parents (Jacob and Europa) had planned that my mother (Europa) would just see us off to Fernando Po and return to Biafra, since this was part of her regular Red Cross volunteer responsibilities. However, my mother (Europa) was unable to return to Biafra because no more Red Cross planes were flying into Biafra. Also, the British consular office refused to grant us refugee visas to enter Sierra-Leone without our mother (Europa) going with us. They felt that my maternal grandmother (Hannah) was too old to take care of us. Therefore, we would become a liability to the Sierra-Leonean government.

Not wanting to leave us without an adult guardian in the refugee camp in Fernando Po to risk returning to Biafra by land, my mother (Europa) made a quick turn-around decision of accompanying us to Sierra-Leone with the hope that she would be able to return later by land to join her husband (Jacob) in Biafra, after we were settled. Tragedy met us in Sierra-Leone that really required my mother's presence to take care of us. This prevented her return to Biafra until several months after the war had ended when she went back to locate her husband (Jacob). Thanks to the grace and mercy of Chukwu, she found him in our home at Ibeku, Umuahia, alive and well. He was struggling to survive and take care of his mother, Mrs. Omamma Virginia Agwu (nee Egu Agu) and other members of our family clan of Umuapu, Agbakoli, Akoliufu, Alayi. This hardship caused us to stay much longer in Sierra-Leone after the war had ended to allow my father (Jacob) sufficient time to get back on his feet financially.

Living in the refugee camp in Fernando Po taught me several valuable lessons at an early age about survival and self-preservation. Sadly, I also learned what it meant to be a street child. We left Fernando Po by ship to another refugee camp in Monrovia, Liberia. We were bundled in the ship like sardines in the worst quarters with the worst possible meals with restricted access primarily to our quarters because we did not pay to be transported. This is how I developed seasickness and a fear of water that I eventually overcame much later in my adult years. Through this experience, I can envision some of the sea experiences of slaves of ancient times that were transported like cargo to Europe and the Americas during the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Finally, we left Liberia via plane chartered by the Sierra-Leone government to another refugee camp in Freetown, Sierra-Leone, until we were re-settled. We arrived in Sierra-Leone on October 4, 1968, just a few days before my sixth birthday. This was the only year growing up as a child that my birthday was not celebrated with a party due to our circumstances of homelessness. However, I thanked Chukwu and praised Him. On this particular birthday, I celebrated life and good health—escaping from the mayhem, turmoil, and trauma of war. I was one of the fortunate child survivors of this war. War is gruesome. It is “Hell on Earth.”

Adapted from *God's Own: The Genesis of Mathematical Story-Telling*
by Nma (Beautiful) Jacob aka Dr. Nkechi Madonna Agwu

Mathematical Story-Telling: The Dark Gruesome Face Changes to a Shining Star
 Chukwu (God) spared my life, giving me an assignment and a gift. I am to narrate my war story in a creative and innovative way using the tools of mathematical story-telling so that the experiences of those Biafran children who died as a consequence of this war will never be forgotten.

My war narratives shall demonstrate the importance of providing social, health, and educational programs in our communities for victims of war to share their experiences, to recover from the terror of war, and to empower themselves and others victims of war. Out of the darkness shall come light for the child survivors of war, according to His word in Isaiah 9:2. For me it is mathematical story-telling and poetic expression. This is my gift. It is advocating for educational enrichment programs where child survivors of war can showcase their talents, creativity and genius which their war experiences buried and suppressed. This is my assignment.

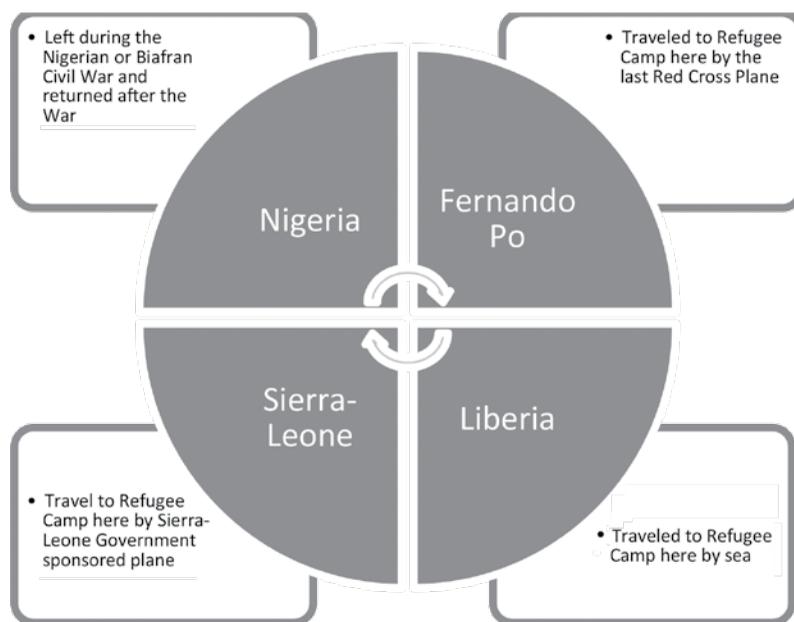


Figure: Vertex-Edge Graph of the Countries of my Relocation due to the Biafran Civil War

Mathematics Curricular Activity: Graph Theory

- 1) What type of vertex-edge graph is this?
- 2) Color this vertex-edge graph with the minimum number of colors so that neighboring vertices have a different color.
- 3) What is the Chromatic Number for this vertex-edge graph?
- 4) How many vertices does this vertex-edge graph have?
- 5) How many edges does this vertex-edge graph have?
- 6) What is the degree of each vertex for this vertex-edge graph?

- 7) Construct one vertex-edge graph that reflects the experiences of the children survivors of war portrayed in the poem "Hell on Earth."
- 8) Color your vertex-edge graph in #7 with the minimum number of colors so that neighboring vertices have a different color.
- 9) State the Chromatic Number of your vertex-edge graph(s) in #7.
- 10) State the number of vertices of your vertex-edge graph in #7.
- 11) State the number of edges of your vertex-edge graph in #7.
- 12) State the degree of each vertex for your vertex-edge graph in #7.

Conclusion

My creativity and innovation related to mathematical story telling and Ndebele Doll sculpturing is an illustration of the type of talent and creative seeds that are suppressed in child survivors of war. They need to be planted on fertile soil, watered, and receive adequate sunlight to bloom. I was able to survive and climb Jacob's ladder to success because of the mentoring connection. My mentors took a vested interest in me. They encouraged me to avail myself of a variety of programs and projects that nurtured and groomed me as an academic scholar and grassroots community leader. Today, I am a pioneer in developing the tool of mathematical story-telling, thanks to the mentoring connection and Chukwu (God). I have different types of mentors for different issues, personal and professional. Some of my mentors are even my students, such as Ms. O. (as I will call her to maintain her anonymity), a published poet who encouraged me to publish my poetic expressions and engage in creative writing. Ms. O. – Imela, Thank you.

Are you ready to change?

Precious Sellars-Mulhern
Counseling

What follows are some brief thoughts collected in my capacity as a “Precious Possibilities” Coach. They are thoughts and ideas I often offer my students. I hope you can make use of them in your own life and that of your students as well.

Notice the question, are YOU ready to change?—not: do you want things to be different? We all want things to be different, and we often think that our lives would be great if the people and circumstances in our lives were different.

We instinctively know that if we continue to think a certain way, we will continue to feel a certain way; if we continue to feel a certain way, we will continue to act a certain way. We want to change, but we’re stuck. How do we free ourselves from the bondage of our habitual thinking/feeling states? Trying to figure that out keeps us stuck. The more we ponder the problem, the bigger it gets. We have mastered analysis and contrast. And what has that gotten us?—greater understanding, but not greater joy.

In most cases, it is only when the pain of our current situation becomes unbearable that we will we consider new options. In recent years, I have become aware of a powerful option for change. It is an idea that is simple to understand, yet not easy to implement because it requires a paradigm shift in our thinking/feeling states.

Source Energy (God, Allah, Jah. . .) ALWAYS says YES to our signals [thoughts and feelings]. That concept is difficult to accept sometimes because we look at our circumstances and say, “I would not do this to myself. . .I want GOOD things for myself and others.” We do not realize that our powerful “internal manager” is lovingly and obediently manifesting the focus of our attention. When we focus on what we want, we get it; when we focus on what we “don’t want,” we get it.

To determine what signals you are transmitting, look around you. The answers lie in your life experiences. Notice that when you feel good, good things flow easily to you. And you are more resilient when faced with bad news. Similarly, when you are angry or sad, more things to be angry or sad about occur to you. Our emotional set point determines our tendency toward joy or worry. Therefore, it is in our best interest to keep our spirits uplifted.

There are many ways to lift our spirits and set the tone for a positive, productive day. We can begin the day with a positive reading (Daily Word), poem or mantra, for example,

Reiki Principles (adapted)*

Just for today:

I let go of anger.

I let go of worry.

I give thanks for my many blessings.

I work honestly, creatively and joyfully.
I am kind to myself, my loved ones, and to all creation.

*adapted from Jeanne Shanin, Reiki Master Teacher

A poem that I love to recite, *Autobiography in 5 Chapters* (The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, 1993), reflects the following Stages of Change as outlined in Motivational Interviewing (the poem can be found at www.jonathanfader.com):

- 0) Pre-contemplation – Who me?! It's not my fault!
- 1) Contemplation – It's not really my fault.
- 2) Preparation – Old habits die hard.
- 3) Action – I can make adjustments.
- 4) Maintenance – I'll try something new.

Chapter 1 - Pre-contemplation

I walked down the street.
There's a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I'm lost.
I'm helpless.
It's not my fault.
It takes a long time to find a way out.

Chapter 2 - Contemplation

I walk down the same street.
There's a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in, Again!
I can't believe I'm in the same place.
But it's not my fault!
It still takes a long time to find a way out.

Chapter 3 - Preparation

I walk down the same street.
There's a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it.
I fall in.
It's a bad habit.
But I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

Chapter 4 - Action

I walk down the same street.
There's a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter 5 - Maintenance (new experience)

I walk down a different street.

If you keep doing what you've been doing, you'll keep getting what you've been getting. If you want different results, if you want better results, you've got to take different action. You've got to take better action. It's time to walk down a different street. And I wish you God speed.

When you are truly ready for change, make peace with where you are right now, and allow yourself to dream about what you prefer. Notice how great you feel during those moments of "precious possibilities."

The Day Beyoncé Turned Black

Stephen Tumino
English

Many of us who teach introductory English composition courses will more than likely recognize my title or something close to it from our own inboxes attached to chains of email discussions that followed Beyoncé's Super Bowl half time performance. It refers of course to the skit aired on Saturday Night Live, that has since gone viral, about "the day that [white people] lost their damn white minds" after the drop of her "Formation" video, the song she chose to cover on prime time television. Her performance of the song to the approximately 111 million live viewers that day, since viewed online by many more, has become, as they say, a "teachable moment." The question I would like to investigate here is why? My reason for doing so is to put forward the kind of "transformative" reading/writing/thinking that I practice with my students and which, I believe, can empower them to pursue "lifelong learning, and civic participation," as the BMCC mission statement puts it.

Many culturally obvious answers easily come to mind as to why Beyoncé has suddenly become very "teachable." Perhaps the most vocal response, at least in the mass corporate media outlets like FOX News or CNN, has been from conservative voices who perceive—or at least say that they do—her performance as a provocation to violence directed toward the police. They claim to find this call to terrorism embedded in the black power imagery Beyoncé alludes to in her performance (e.g., raised fist, black berets, etc.) and the video (e.g., the image of the police car sinking beneath flood waters). In these discourses, "black," it goes without saying, is never far from "violence."

It is important to encourage students to consider this reading of Beyoncé's performance, of which they are more than likely already familiar from social media, because of how it reads the imagery of the performance by taking it out of the context of entertainment, where it normally appears to be trivial and unworthy of our sustained attention, and places it within a political one, where things are taken to be serious issues. In this way the conservative reading, despite its insistence that entertainment be merely entertaining and not political and controversial, further demonstrates how reading the image has become necessary in our media-saturated world which is constantly resignifying the signs of culture to serve multiple and conflictual purposes, as Beyoncé's performance itself shows.

In more popular media such as YouTube and Facebook, Beyoncé's performance, it seems safe to say, has received a more favorable response and she is praised not only for embracing her blackness but also for adding her voice to the popular movements such as Black Lives Matter that are protesting against police brutality and mass incarceration, what Michelle Williams calls the "new Jim Crow." I would argue that to stop here and simply rehearse this familiar debate—to, in other words, follow the Graffian imperative and "teach the conflict"—does not really get at the underlying question of why there is a cultural conflict of opin-

ion over the song/video/performance to begin with, which, to my mind, should be the primary reason for educators to make the conflicted reception of Beyoncé's performance a teachable moment.

To be clear, I do not disagree that "teaching the conflicts" has its uses in the composition class, especially because it disrupts the beginning reader's/writer's habit of assuming that the meaning of a text is exhausted by "what it means to me." In other words, teaching reading/writing as an engagement with an ongoing cultural conversation or debate at a minimum requires the student to step outside her comfort zone and see things from the point of view of the other, which is of course a primary civic virtue for a democratic culture. The kinds of reading/writing/thinking required by the college composition class should always have as their aim to defamiliarize the student from the obviousness of her cultural assumptions if only to enable her to become more fully aware of not only what she actually believes but, more importantly, why, and thereby acquire a more articulate and powerful voice in the conversations that she will have in the workplace, the public space, and beyond. However, I will argue that although teaching the conflicts is necessary for the reasons given above it is not in itself sufficient to produce the kind of literacy that should be the task of the humanities today to advance: what I call transformative reading.

A transformative reading, I argue, is reading beyond the cultural obviousness produced by the dominant media environment in order to uncover the cultural unsaid, and thereby not only become a conscious position taker in the ongoing debates, but also someone who is able to intervene in them and open up space for change. A transformative reading is necessary for moving beyond the manufactured stalemate of "They say/I say," as another canonical composition textbook by Graff puts it, in order to show how differences of opinion are really signs of social conflicts that are irresolvable under existing arrangements. Transformative reading thereby enjoins the student to take a fresh look at the issues and to imagine and put forward the kinds of knowledges that might actually be required to move to solve them in practice. My students call this thinking outside the box. My response is always, which box? I'm not being facetious. What I am inviting them to do, hopefully, is investigate the ideological framing of the issues so they can change that.

As an example of what I mean by transformative reading let's return to the debate over Beyoncé's half-time performance that is staged by the media. What seems to be missed in the familiar framing of the debate over Beyoncé's "coming out as Black" is precisely how "blackness" disguises inequities of power and wealth as a matter of cultural identity. On the one side blackness is associated with cultural inferiority and violence by the culturally conservative, while on the other it is made a source of pride in one's heritage and speaking truth to power. However, both sides in the staged media debate are really on the same side when it comes to their shared complicity of silence regarding the underlying ideology of Formation and the way in which it conflates Black empowerment with market individualism, as when Beyoncé sings, "You just might be a black Bill Gates in the making" and "the best revenge is your paper." Is this not precisely the positive message of free market individualism the cultural conservatives are always saying needs to be instilled by civil institutions? They are of course right to recognize that

the black power movement generally, then and now, and the Black Panther Party specifically, opposed such libertarian discourse, but not because they were un-American as the conservatives claim, but because they were advancing a socially emancipatory discourse, because of their commitment to ending racial as well as class oppression.

On the other side, the “BeyHive” is right to point out that the song protests racial injustice, a call to end not a call to enact violence. It is just a video, after all, and Beyoncé’s use of the cultural signs of blackness not only fits squarely into the discourse of racial pride, and arguably, commodified sexiness, but also, as a cultural politics, it supports the tradition of non-violence as a means to redress injustice. However, the equation of blackness with empowerment within the existing social framework in which pride only comes through the pursuit and acquisition of power, seems to concede the conservative framing of the issues by silently implying that social movements can at best only ever be protest movements against cultural exclusion that seek inclusion within the ranks of the dominant, rather than radical movements for more fundamental and comprehensive social change seeking to put an end to inequality and injustice. Beyoncé demonstrates how the cultural appropriation of the signs of black radicalism can serve a culturally assimilationist ideology that, ironically, maintains blackness as a mark of otherness. Cultural inclusion within the social arrangements as they are today means the accentuation of cultural differences that elide the fundamental sameness of class inequality and ideology.

The shared unsaid assumption to the debate seems to be that if and when social movements become emancipatory movements by struggling to prepare the people to assume power and establish a society founded on advancing the social good of all rather than individual enrichment, they can only be considered violent because they violate the rule of liberal pluralism. But, to limit our conception of democracy to the terms of liberal pluralism is to sacrifice democracy to serving the interests of the powerful whose power is furthered by the failure to recognize how they regularly and systemically disempower the majority. It seems to me that to be critically empowered to thoughtfully engage such questions—by changing the framing of the cultural debates through transformative reading rather than assuming the pre-established media positions—should be the goal of the college composition class, especially now at a time when our civil institutions are in crisis as they must serve an increasingly polarized citizenry the majority of which are losing the means to access them.

Transformative reading is empowering and encourages lifelong learning and civic participation not only because it provides students with the analytical skills to read the culture, but because it demonstrates how the student is already placed within the ongoing debates by powerful cultural forces, and, as well, asks her to consider how this is because these forces are tasked with the purpose of keeping things as they are. Transformative reading defamiliarizes the popular culture landscape for students—from being merely entertaining to being intellectually and politically serious as well— and thereby transforms their image of themselves from being passive spectators to active participants who are able to change how the world will be.

English Department Faculty Forum Spring 2016

Introduction: Robert Lapidés

For more than forty years, usually four times a year, members of the English Department have shared their intellectual and creative work at our department's Faculty Forum. Because we've been troubled recently by the alarming turn right-wing American politics have taken toward bigotry and ignorance, the February 2016 Forum addressed ways that our work as writers and teachers is affected by politics. Here are the seven papers that were presented.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FACULTY FORUM SPRING 2016

Disillusionment and Despair: The Future of Affordable Quality Public Education

Jaime Weida

The title of my remarks derives from the fact that I *do* indeed feel disillusioned and despairing when I think about the future of public education in the U.S. According to current statistics, there are over 13 million students in public universities and colleges in the U.S. and that number is likely to continue increasing. (This is over two times more students than are enrolled at private universities). Currently, the average tuition at a 2-year public college is about \$3,400/year and at a 4-year public college, about \$9,000/year. To put those numbers in perspective, the average 4-year private college tuition is about \$31,000/year. According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau report, the average U.S. household annual income is about \$54,000; however, that number decreases when we break it down by race. For example, the average annual income for an African-American household is \$35,000.

Since I am a professor at BMCC-CUNY, I am focusing on the CUNY public university system and BMCC. However, I am also doing so because I believe CUNY represents the great potential of the public university. Our tuition at both the 2- and 4-year colleges is relatively affordable, amongst the cheapest in the New York City area. We boast a high quality of education and our transfer students and graduates are eagerly sought after by local private universities. We have award-winning faculty, including Michael Grossman (Economics), Jeffrey Halperin (Psychology), and Wayne Koestenbaum (English). We enroll 2/3 of all NYC undergraduate students and over 80% of all NYC African-American and Hispanic undergraduates. BMCC has over 25,000 students, over one-half of whom are first-generation college students.

So, what is the future of BMCC and CUNY and, by extension, that of public colleges in this country? Not good. Governor Mario Cuomo recently cut CUNY's budget by nearly half a billion dollars, justifying the cuts with the dubious claim that the money would be "made up" by the City. All CUNY faculty members have been without a union contract or a raise for over five years and Cuomo has steadfastly refused to negotiate with the PSC-CUNY union or respond to their concerns. He recently denied CUNY staff the \$15/hour minimum wage. Meanwhile, tuition for both the 2-year and 4-year CUNY schools has steadily increased, with more increases on the horizon. Faculty and staff have labored under "workload creep;" effective downsizing (employees who retire or leave are seldom replaced), ever-increasing class sizes; decreasing faculty and staff resources; and steadily increasing responsibilities to an exponentially-growing student body. The result is a decrease in our quality of education and student service. Salaries at CUNY rank below salaries at comparable institutions and our workload is much larger. The PSC has called for a strike authorization vote; president Barbara Bowen has

stated that patient and good-faith negotiation has failed to bring about any positive changes. CUNY is unique amongst public schools because it is NYC. CUNY students do not take their degrees back to their home communities in states hundreds or thousands of miles away; they are and will be the lifeblood of NYC. They are the NYC teachers, social workers, nurses and doctors, politicians, public officials, and businesspeople who shape the future of NYC. If the future of CUNY currently looks so bleak, what about the future of NYC?

And, by analogy, what about the future of our country? What we see here at CUNY is occurring everywhere in the U.S. Teachers' unions are under constant attack. Federal aid to students has been slashed while tuition prices continue to rise. Since the recession of 2008, the average U.S. family salary has declined slightly while the cost of living has increased. Recently, Chicago State University sent layoff notices to every faculty and staff member, trying to force the state's hand in the wake of funding cuts and the consequent financial emergency. There will always be a 1% who will continue to support and guarantee the future of pricy elite private schools like Harvard and Columbia University. However, the future of the public colleges that enroll and employ the rest of us is in serious danger. Who profits from the attacks on public higher education? I can easily and fearfully foresee not only a social but an educational oligarchy in which the 1% are not only the richest but also the best—or only—educated population in this country, thus leading to further marginalization of those lower on the socioeconomic ladder (including, of course, people of color).

Who profits from this depressing possibility? None of the current Republican candidates for president are terribly concerned with educational issues. At the time of this writing, Donald Trump, the Republican front-runner, has explicitly stated that he would cut funds for the Federal Department of Education “down—way down” if elected. A recent CNN poll reported that over a third of Trump's supporters' educational level is a high school diploma or less. I made the choice to work at CUNY because I wanted to feel I was making a difference and helping, in at least some small way, to change my city, country, and even my world for the better. Now the instrument of that change—quality affordable public education—is under serious attack and may not even exist by the time I am eligible to retire. It is indeed easy to feel “disillusionment and despair.”

Reevaluating Progressive Symbols in Contemporary Fiction

Jeff Gonzalez

Born in 1979, I came of age in a time when it seemed like most of the major political questions were settled, living in what Francis Fukuyama called the “end of history” and during a period when, as Frederic Jameson notes, the end of the world is easier to imagine than the end of capitalism. The utopian imaginary of the 1960s had been replaced by a dystopian one.

So as a writer and a person committed to a politically leftist position, I find myself most interested in exploring literary texts that play with the defeatist political template that organizes contemporary society. Neoliberal hegemony, like all ideologies, wants to make itself seem natural, the organic outgrowth of progress and history. Its name tells us that neoliberalism’s means of justifying itself borrows directly from earlier liberal attitudes about the importance of the individual and the damaging influence of mainstream society. Think of neoliberalism’s metaphors of individual empowerment—think of its concern for “the voter” and the “entrepreneur.”

The hallmarks of 1960s and 1970s postmodern literature—paranoia about power, concern with the normalizing impulses of collectives, and consistent themes of escape—are well-suited for challenging a society based on a Fordist model of capitalism, one dead-set on producing conformity and obedience. But when neoliberal society is also suspicious of power and normalization (at least in its rhetoric), contemporary writers aware of capital and of literary history need to adapt new strategies for representing and engaging with pressing political questions.

In my research, then, I look at contemporary writing that has an explicitly revisionist impulse, revising not the orthodoxies of mainstream society but the positions and techniques that emerged from the high postmodern period. This is why, I argue in my book project, David Foster Wallace looks a little conservative to some readers—his exploration of dogmatism in *Infinite Jest*, for example, looks for ones that can sustain a productive life, not ones that lead to subversion of the dominant order. Wallace’s characters begin in the space of isolation and absence of meaning that older works of literature tended to wind up within—in other words, instead of deconstructing orthodoxies, Wallace’s writing begins in that deconstruction’s aftermath. Wallace, writing in a time when innovation and change were the mantras of IBM and Apple instead of countercultural touchstones, worries about innovation for innovation’s sake and about the imperative to question all standing symbols of normativity and tradition.

The same is true of Marilynne Robinson, whose 1980 novel *Housekeeping* was hailed as a classic American postmodernist text. The ethereal spirituality of *Housekeeping* was read as a rejection of conventionality, a celebration of a femi-

nism not rooted in patriarchal narratives. But Robinson's later work pushes hard against the very themes readers found in *Housekeeping*, precisely because that counterhegemonic celebration of outsiderdom and escape had become mainstream in the thirty years between her books. The exploration of transience and wandering in *Housekeeping* becomes the firm-but-flexible Protestantism of *Gilead* (2007) and *Home* (2010), a shift that retains the earlier novel's meditative flavor while expressing a more developed system of ethics. In *Housekeeping*, young Ruth runs away from the domestic sphere with her wayward aunt Sylvie, refusing to join Ruth's younger sister and the conformity of her midcentury Idaho town. But in the later novels, a young man who'd run away *returns* to the community, seeking solace and forgiveness rather than forsaking the need for those comforts. Robinson's emphasis shifts from telling the outsider's story to the challenge of becoming equal to that outsider's needs, to receiving him or her in a way that is ethical, egalitarian and welcoming. That she draws the tenets of this ethical system from organized religion is no doubt problematic for many leftist or liberal readers, but like Wallace, Robinson is looking for dogmas that are useful if not necessarily true; this works against a system that hides its own dogmatic indoctrination behind celebrations of (illusory) individual freedom to choose.

Other recent works, rather than reincorporating old orthodoxies, question the use of formerly progressive symbols being used to justify the current form of society. I'm currently writing about four novels that use Walt Whitman in ambivalent if not negative ways. In each, the goal is to demonstrate how the use of Whitman by mainstream society reflects a growing neutralization of Whitman's messages of nonconformity. The political rhetoric of neoliberalism, which privileges the radical individualism that one can associate a thin reading of Whitman, and his emphasis on affective connection rather than rights-based discourse, has led to several novelists incorporating Whitman as a tool used by power or a purveyor of ineffective cliché—this is why, for instance, Bruce Robbins and Cyrus Patell have recently suggested that isolated Whitman quotes can sound like Reagan or George W. Bush. The attacks in the novels I'm covering are aimed at Whitman's symbolic flexibility, the ways his language could be appropriated cynically to support a banal consumerism ("I lean and loafe and invite my soul") rather than understanding his work's relationship to a particular time and space. This handling of Whitman suggests that even a revered symbol for the left and for the counterculture may have inadvertently become a useful pawn for patriarchy and power.

What unifies these texts is an impulse to consider what elements of the American literary tradition need to be rethought and reframed. One of the challenges, then, is to imagine what in our own discourse and in our own thinking is relevant to that reevaluation, to be pushed by great art to imagine our world in new ways.

How Literature Shapes our Political Expectations

James D. Hoff

When I teach writing, I often ask my students to summarize their arguments in just one phrase or sentence. If I were to characterize my own arguments today, I'd say they amount to a defense of the idea that "aesthetics matter," that there is something inherently revolutionary and transformative about literature and the arts that at once transcends and simultaneously underpins our political imaginations.

So today I want to speak briefly about the relationship between the aesthetic and the political, between what we teach in the literature classroom and the world that we live in outside that classroom, by beginning first with the inevitability of the political.

Human beings, after all, are political animals, and as such everything we do is, on one level or another, going to be infused with a political perspective and shaped by our political values and our material circumstances. To borrow a phrase from Derrida, there is no outside politics, and the idea that we can even talk about politics and literature or politics and teaching independently of one another is already problematic, for we know they are always intimately bound. But this is merely a postmodern truism, and this fact does not mean that as teachers we should feel somehow required to continually test our political principles or ideologies against our philosophical interests or literary tastes, or that our classrooms must be self-consciously political spaces.

It is fine and well to explicitly teach and to talk about politics in the classroom, and I do both quite frequently (it would be a disservice not to in times such as ours), but I think we should recognize and remember that explicit political discussions are not necessarily any more radical or revolutionary or politically productive than the everyday transformative experiences that literature and the arts make possible. Literature and the arts are a political good in themselves, and the question of whether or not, say, a revolutionary socialist can or should appreciate and teach Shakespeare, or the Brontes, or even seemingly more problematically, the poetry of Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore, has already been answered in the affirmative by no greater social revolutionary than Leon Trotsky, who in *Literature and Revolution*, argued for the value of even bourgeois literature, for:

What the worker will take from Shakespeare, Goethe, Pushkin, or Dostoyevsky will be a more complex idea of human personality, of its passions and feelings, a deeper and profounder understanding of its psychic forces and of the role of the subconscious, etc. In the final analysis, the worker will become richer.

And this gets to the heart of the point I want to make, for, as far as I'm concerned, the goal of any politics worth bothering about, the point of any revolutionary activ-

ity, is not to found a world of mere survival and efficient production or equality of limited opportunity, but a world of pleasure and leisure for all, a world in which the ordinary person has both the time and the ability to be their fullest self, to practice and appreciate art, poetry, literature, and philosophy, for these things are not mere handmaidens of politics, they are what we fight for when we fight for social revolution. They are what we work toward when we demand greater autonomy in our workplaces or when we demand shorter working hours for more pay or guaranteed education, housing, and food. Likewise, the teaching of literature, poetry, and the arts, the promotion of the values of aesthetic life is itself a kind of revolutionary activity because it changes our perceptions of the world. Art teaches us that other worlds are possible and provides us with the intellectual tools needed to imagine them. But most importantly, art and literature changes our political expectations. The contradictions between the beauty and ordered complexity we encounter in works of art and the anesthetic nature of so much of our day to day experiences under capitalism, has the profound effect of helping us realize what we are missing and encouraging us to expect more from ourselves and our societies.

But in case you think I'm being idealistic here or insufficiently dialectical, let me briefly explain what I mean by the aesthetic. Like the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, I believe that art is more than its object, and that aesthetic experience, is more than just the experience of art. Aesthetic experience as Dewey takes pains to show in *Art as Experience*, is meaning working toward consummation, and "works" of art, like paintings, poems, novels, or films, are merely exemplary of human experience when it is most attuned to its surroundings. For Dewey the work of art provided a model of sorts for how to navigate the tensions and resistances that guide our lives and our development as human beings and which are always present even in the best of circumstances. Most of our experience under capitalism, however, as Dewey argued, is anesthetic. It is either so disordered that it is unapproachable as anything but chaos, or so routinized, so regimented that it offers little to engage with but boredom and the desire for some kind of easy distraction.

The university, of course, sometimes reproduces this anesthetic condition. When we offer knowledge as a product or mere commodity, or when we treat the end goal of education as fitness for employment, we are reproducing a world of intellectual and emotional poverty. When we treat students as mere vessels for our ideas, we are reproducing the regimented structures that sap our lives of meaning. But when we approach education from a Deweyan perspective, when we see it not as "preparation for life," but as "life itself," when we provide spaces for the practice of the kind of aesthetic engagement that literature and the arts make possible, then we are surely contributing to the creation of a different kind of world. It is our job as educators to promote that form of life and to provide opportunities for student self-actualization that will make them expect more than merely the "right to live," but the right to flourish.

If art is life lived well then there is something inherently political about the teaching of art, poetry, and literature. As the great Big Bill Haywood declared, "nothing is too good for the working classes," and that is why I believe our students deserve and should expect the most passionate and meaningful engagements with the best works of art. It is their heritage, and as the collective work of their grandparents and parents, it is their birthright.

Trump's Poetics

Leigh Claire La Berge

In 1987 Trump published an autobiography: *The Art of the Deal*. He was one of many financiers including Ivan Boesky, T. Boone Pickens, Michael Milken, Lee Iacocca to take to the printed word. The 1980s constituted a revolution in finance, not only in its technologies and theorizations, but in the circulation of its images and narratives. *The New York Review of Books* took note of the flourishing of financial texts in 1988, and gave its economic critic, the esteemed American economist John Kenneth Galbraith, the task of reviewing Boesky's *Merger Mania*, Donald Trump's *The Art of the Deal*, T. Boone Pickens' *Boone*.¹ Galbraith's review unfortunately takes a pedestrian turn. He criticizes the split infinitives in Trump's text; he is amused that Boesky's book, supposedly written to bolster his reputation, was pulled off the shelves by its publisher after his criminal indictment for insider trading.

Today, in the midst of his political tumescence, Trump's *The Art of the Deal* has begun to circulate again. *The New York Times* has had two articles on the book in the past several months. And again the task was to point out the contradictions and banalities: for an advocate of the so-called free market and limited government, Trump's business only flourishes with city and state support, and so on. I wish instead, the *Times* had examined its own archive. In 1982, the paper reported on a new type of businessman, the corporate raider. "They have even developed their own language, laced with the images of aggression and sexual conquest: raids, battles, white knights, wooing, shark repellent, bear hugs." The financial autobiographies of Trump, Boesky, and Boone all adopted such terminology. Boesky speaks of takeover "battles" as "war" and designates various securities instruments as types of "weapons"; one subheading in his book is simply: "what can kill a deal." Trump includes a picture of himself as a military school teenager marching down New York City's 5th Ave. in full military regalia with the caption: "this was my first real glimpse of prime Fifth Avenue property."

The first text to offer a critique to the language, the poetics even, of this new era of finance was the novelist Bret Easton Ellis, in his book, *American Psycho* [where a Wall Street analyst is a serial killer and serial consumer of high end goods]. Ellis's text is a satire of the great financial novel of the 1980s, Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. Wolfe's plot of bond-trader's unintentional manslaughter through car accident is transformed through Ellis into the intentional violence of a serial killer. Most simply, the satirical presupposition of Wolfe's novel is: how

¹ In *The New York Review of Books*, May 12, 1988, accessed online June 17, 2006.

² These are, then, two very different constructions of satire. Steven Weisenburger has argued that satire in the twentieth century takes a "degenerative" turn, one that he uses to trace the emergence of post-modern fiction. Weisenburger's distinction between generative satire and degenerative satire is helpful in understanding these two texts' relationship to each other and to their respective literary modes of realism and postmodernism.

could we ever consider an ineffectual financier as a killer? The satirical presupposition of Ellis's novel is: how could we ever not consider an ineffectual financier as a killer?²

The plot and the satirical problem may be taken from Wolfe's fictional world, but the lack of plot in *American Psycho*, its associative patterns, chapter segmentation, even sentence structure replicate those of Trump, Boone, and Boesky's texts. In other words, some of what is recognizably "postmodern" about *American Psycho* is taken from these autobiographical best-selling guides to "personal finance." Postmodern American literature is already made in the image of finance. For example, one of the most distinct patterns in the financial, autobiographical narration is the combination of first-person statement, third-person declaration, and second-person advice.

From Boone's *Boone*:

A commodity futures play is one of the purest forms of entrepreneurship. The keys to success are an accurate analysis, the willingness to take risk, and the ability to act. Once you've made the decision, just stand by it because you're likely to get your answer quickly. Although I enjoy many types of investing, there's nothing like a commodities play for fast action. (B,264)

From Trump's: *The Art of the Deal*:

Location also has a lot to do with fashion. You can take a mediocre location and turn it into something considerably better just by attracting the right people. After I built Trump Tower I built Trump Plaza, on a site at Third Avenue and 61st Street that I was able to purchase very inexpensively. The truth is that Third Avenue simply didn't compare to Fifth Avenue as a location. (T, 55)

From Boesky's *Merger Mania*:

You are on the line and visible, especially to your Wall Street colleagues. Good Arbitrageurs seem to like it that way. They represent, I think, the best of America's entrepreneurial spirit. (B, 202).

In each of these passages, the movement between first, second and third person creates a mixture of factual assemblage, of radical economic objectivity, and from that objectivity a pronounced subjectivity. The effect of such diversity is that it quickly becomes impossible to discern which point of view is associated with which effect. Hardly banal, these texts are vertiginous. The financiers address the readers as though they were colleagues and as though they, too, might be about to engage in one of these deals. Thus, in each example, the ultimate point is not the accuracy of the description, but the transformation of description into a directive, into advice. All three texts offer to interpolate the reader into, in Boesky's words, a "wall street colleague."

Ellis's novel, too, offers such a structure. From *American Psycho*:

Then I always slather on a moisturizer (to my taste, Clinique) and let it soak in for a minute. You can rinse it off or keep it on and apply a shaving cream over it. It also helps prevent water from evaporating. Always wet the razor. One should use an alcohol-free antibacterial toner with a water-moisturized cotton ball to normalize the skin. (AP, 27)

The reader who would buy Trump's book would find his advice rather useless, as would the reader of Boone's or Boesky's. After all, few of us have access to millions of dollars of credit for our daily business doings, to the mayor of New York City, or to the national media. In *American Psycho* however, one can't mimic financial actions, only financial appearances and styles, here rhythm and pace. Indeed, the novel suggests that maybe finance is an appearance and thus is more plastic than other forms of value.

So why is this important to the question of teaching and politics? For one, it opens up a different archive for us to think through. Secondly, it shows how historical and always already contested so much political terminology and discourse is. And, finally, it allows us to take some critical pleasure in Donald Trump's writing, whether or not he authored it.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FACULTY FORUM SPRING 2016

Against the Classroom as a Work of Neoliberal Fiction

Andrew Levy

I wonder sometimes if I don't think of the classroom as a work of fiction. Am I a character, a narrator, or perhaps organized through exploitative hierarchies of race, class, and gender of institutional manufacture, constellations of recurring literary and rhetorical devices, am I a writer of motifs and clichés, rather than something else that evolves vis-à-vis the creative work and dialogue of teaching? In the 16-week adventures we call semesters (the space wherein our workplace is organized), am I an engaged political agent, a producer of knowledge, an open-minded citizen who, employed by a bureaucracy, fosters resilience when thinking on language and literature? How thoughtfully have I addressed unfairness, atomization, and interconnection at home, in the street and marketplace, in assigned classrooms? In the December 2015 *Clarion*, in an interview of Ben Lerner, a MacArthur Fellow at Brooklyn College, he argues "that language and power are inseparable, that structure (political or poetic) is inseparable from how we experience sense, that the so-called social world is built, to a large degree, from words" (12). Soniya Munshi and Craig Willse ask in "Navigating Neoliberalism in the Academy, Nonprofits, and Beyond," published in *The Scholar & Feminist Online* web journal, how does one grapple "with the role of academics as teachers who hold and reproduce space for political development in the classroom while also offering support and mentorship to the political activities of students on campus?" (5).

In the early nineties, as a Mellon pre-doctoral fellow at Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, I taught Introduction to World Literature, Modern American poetry, and Creative Writing. Many of my students were in the ROTC and majoring in engineering and architecture. Mid-point through the semester they'd express their surprise at the way I presented ideas. Their ROTC officers and faculty told them what to do, when, how to do it, and that both expectations and interpretations could be countenanced when aligned with the intentions of their commanding officer. At the same time, and in ways analogous to how they analyzed the design and engineering of computer circuit boards, or Mies van der Rohe's "skin and bones" architecture of plate glass and steel I-beam mullions, these students explored the work of Gertrude Stein and Cubism, the Harlem Renaissance of Langston Hughes, Jack Spicer's radical theology and poetics of dictation, the "visionary" politics and Objectivist poetics of George Oppen of which, as poet Rob Halpern has written, "Words offer no guarantee that things exist, and opacity disrupts the delusion of their transparency." The student body at IIT was diverse and international, and they wanted to know how things work. That said, in the midst of energetic debate over the reading of an artist's work, the students would turn to me for "the answer," for which idea under discussion I supported. My de-

cision was to withhold my personal position. I wouldn't have argued in favor, for example, of "Hillary," or "Sanders." To do so, I'd explain, might unduly influence their thinking when working through the complexities of arguments they were responsible for coming to an independent conclusion on, without the weight or the value of my preference.

After returning to New York City, teaching as an adjunct at two CUNY campuses and for a continuous bout of seven years at NYU, I jettisoned the reasoning that had guided my neutral demeanor in the classroom. I had thought that I was championing the independent critical thinking of my students in Chicago, perhaps to some extent I had, but I hadn't understood that I was disrespecting how resilient and open-minded the students already were. They knew about the power of naming, and whether they self-identified during any discussion as, for instance, Republican, Independent, or Democrat, information not infrequently shared, they knew that the divestiture from all things public is violence, as Lerner and many other writers remind us, "and should be named thusly." The importance of trusting someone to hear your position, to consider one's soul at work in the objects and fragments one makes, clarified for me that withholding the truth of one's own reasoning was a disappearing act I could no longer continue practicing. To do so guaranteed no greater objectivity in the exchange between teacher/mentor/guide and apprentice/student but rather risked communicating that what is real is identical to, exhaustive of, the possible. Values chauffeur you, and "the energies released," as Lerner puts it, are "real and unpredictable forces that are not limited to what an artist or political agent intended to achieve... Art and political experiment are...committed to seeking out other ways of valuing and measuring value" (12). To my mind, there is a "fundamental affinity" between experience in the classroom with art and political experiment. Thoughtfulness about that affinity fosters responsible citizenship.

A further thought

In 2016, management is empowered and the labor of faculty, staff, and student is belittled. To bear witness to the sacrifice of the heroes and victims of privatization and globalization, artists and scholars, writers and teachers must invent new pedagogical styles using every tool in our collective toolkit—realism, parody of realism, expressionism inspired by the bureaucratic and claustrophobic world of Kafka and of Snowden, and more. Here's the problem: Americans are individualistic, seeking success and prosperity for themselves in a competitive society where everybody wants to climb the social ladder. In a world where xenophobic nativism thinks in more and more peoples' heads and determines in which direction they will turn their more and more sophisticated weaponry, very few people are free. We need inspiration to seek out new ways of measuring value, to turn the workplace in which we teach into stages and our students into actors engaged in the work of composing and mastering scripts of their own communal and individual design.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FACULTY FORUM SPRING 2016

Southern Evangelicals: The Base of the Republican Party

Michael Odom

The American mind was shaped in the mold of evangelical Protestantism. As Richard Hofstadter rightly observes, religion served as the first arena for American intellectual and political life, and thus, in turn, became the first arena for an anti-intellectual impulse:

Anything that seriously diminished the role of rationality and learning in early American religion would later diminish its role in secular culture. The feeling that ideas should above all be made to work, the disdain for doctrine and for refinements in ideas, the subordination of men of ideas to men of emotional power or manipulative skill are hardly innovations of the twentieth century; they are inheritances from American Protestantism.

American identity can be largely attributed to its religious life—"its lack of firm institutional establishments hospitable to intellectuals and to competitive sectarianism of its evangelical denominations"—which, if traced back, explains why evangelical faith remains so pervasive in today's culture, especially in the South.¹

The South's identity as a distinct region is based largely on its vision of itself as a bulwark of Christian morality; its politics grew out of the region's revivalism in the nineteenth century, which stressed the importance of the individual in making life-altering decisions, but of course, with the coaxing of demagogues who mastered the art of rhetoric and emotional manipulation. The voluntarism shared by evangelicalism and American democracy has been key among southern religious culture to elicit assent in political persuasion. Historian Charles Reagan Wilson points out how southern evangelical churches were "the most effective morale-building agencies" during the Lost Cause period of 1865-1920. By sanctifying the virtues of southern culture, churches consolidated support for states' rights in the face of centralized government.² Writing in 1935, historian Edwin McNeill Poteat extended the famous phrase "the Solid South" to include not only its political tendencies but also its singular religious orientation, noting that the "hold of orthodox Protestantism upon Southerners of the twentieth century is a likely explanation of why the region, in the face of earth-shaking changes in industry, transportation, and education, has kept its identity as the most conservative portion of the United States." During the height of the civil rights era, Francis Simkins claimed in 1963 that "faith in the Biblical heritage is a factor second only

¹ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1963), 55-56.

² Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA, 1980), 5, 9.

to White Supremacy as a means of conserving the ways of the South.”³

While fundamentalists were certainly routed in the American culture wars of the early 20th century, the arena of politics after World War II afforded evangelicals a new, broader coalition and punitive capacity in which to wield power, as Hofstadter argues:

The political climate of the post-war era has given the fundamentalist type powerful new allies: rich men, some of them still loyal to a fundamentalist upbringing, stung by the income tax and still militant against the social reforms of the New Deal; isolationist groups and militant nationalists; Catholic fundamentalists, ready for the first time to unite with their former persecutors on the issue of ‘Godless Communism’; and Southern reactionaries newly animated by the fight over desegregation.⁴

While southern scholars ranging from C. Vann Woodward to the Nashville Agrarians argued that with further assimilation the South would enrich the rest of American society with its virtues, later scholars have observed how the South’s vices have been more visibly exported to the rest of the nation. Since Richard Nixon’s “southern strategy” in the 1968 presidential election morphed into the “new American majority” by 1972, conservative politics to this day have brought about a national force of “mostly white, mostly middle and upper-class voters who vastly outnumbered the poor, the racial minorities, and the white liberals” to bring about the “Americanization of Dixie,” an acceptance of issues “Southern in origin” regarding race, class, government, and economics.⁵

The rise of the Christian Right and its association with the Republican Party on a national scale reached its twentieth-century apogee with the 1980 presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan, who conspicuously announced his candidacy in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the infamous site where three Civil Rights activists were murdered in 1964. Reagan’s appeal to southern Democrats and their passion for states’ rights led to a Republican ascendancy and served as bitter symbolism for African Americans; moreover, Reagan’s administration openly welcomed evangelicals to take part in policy formation far beyond his predecessor Jimmy Carter (who was ironically a southern evangelical). Coined the new “Religious Right,” this evangelical movement, came “into its own through modern media and technology, seeking to dislodge the liberal establishment in favor of traditional, conservative, and moral consensus.” The mass exodus of white evangelicals to the Republican party—embodied most visibly in the South—crystallized during this period, embodying what Mark Noll describes as “one of the century’s most dramatic shifts in political allegiance.”⁶ Undoubtedly, the South now comprises the

³ Edwin McNeill Poteat, “Religion in the South,” *Culture in the South*, Ed. W.T. Couch (Chapel Hill, 1935), 253; Francis Simkins, *The Everlasting South* (Baton Rouge, 1963), 79.

⁴ Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*, 134-35.

⁵ John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York, 1974), 130, 138; Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising* (New York, 1996).

⁶ Samuel S. Hill and Dennis E. Owen, *The New Religious Political Right in America* (Nashville, 1982), 33; Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1994), 161.

base of today's Republican Party.

Many evangelicals envision voting as a religious imperative to promote and protect their cherished values. Evangelical voters had an enormous impact on the 2004 re-election of George W. Bush. As amendments banning same-sex marriage were placed on the same ballots as the presidential candidates, cultural conservatives were galvanized in many key swing states. This political approach was pregnant with implications: Republicans carried the mantle of traditional Judeo-Christian values while Democrats were saddled with a secular liberalism that sought to overthrow the family structure upon which society stands. In closing, I find it stunning to revisit Hofstadter's 1963 remarks concerning the political instincts of evangelicals as I consider the current Republican primary that embodies the very characteristics he outlined:

it looks upon the world as an arena of conflict between absolute good and absolute evil, and accordingly it scorns compromises and can tolerate no ambiguities. It cannot find serious importance in what it believes to be trifling degrees of difference: liberals support measures that are for all practical purposes socialistic, and socialism is nothing more than a variant of Communism, which, as everyone knows, is atheism.⁷

This evangelical revolt against American liberalism and its suspicion of intellectuals is a legacy that continues in our current political and cultural landscape. Evangelicals gravitate to right-leaning conservative politics, sensing a comprehensive and theological worldview that acknowledges the innate sinfulness of humanity and the primacy of individual responsibility. Politics supply the arena in which a sense of absolute rightness about the world, akin to religious orthodoxy, might be realized in the evangelical's engagement with broader secular culture.

In the 2016 Republican Presidential Primary, I anticipated Ted Cruz would win the southern states, particularly after his win in Iowa where he performed retail politics like a circuit riding evangelist, visiting all 99 counties, praying with supporters and quoting scripture liberally in his stump speeches. However, Donald Trump and his supporters continue to overthrow conventional political wisdom, nearly sweeping the southern states on Super Tuesday, winning Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia (Cruz won Oklahoma and his home state of Texas). After decades of unfulfilled promises made by Republican politicians, perhaps many evangelicals are using their vote to disrupt the power structure of Washington.

⁷ Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*, 134-35; See George Packer, "Southern Discomfort," *The New Yorker*, 21 January 2013, for a recent commentary on the return of conservative political isolation during Obama's presidency.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FACULTY FORUM SPRING 2016

return of radical black art in the time of #blacklivesmatter

Syreeta McFadden

It is not a coincidence that our cultural wars have resurrected with potent veracity over the past several years as we assert and insist on expanding equity and equality in plural America.

Last June, I attended a day long conference at the Ford Foundation, focused on the relationship between art and identity. Jeff Chang, whose recent work, *Who We Be*, chronicles the ongoing cultural transformation of the body of the American republic, began the day's events, posed critical observations about our current American moment. Chang pointed out that the shape of the world in which we find ourselves, the places where our political and culture wars have flattened identity to the dream-politick of erasure, its insistent pleading for color blindness, yet believe their own "identities somehow transcends all others" brushes up with the reality that by the year 2043, white Americans will no longer be the majority race.

We've matured to a great degree after decades of push/pull between conservative reasoning and insurgent movements, cracking old modes of being. We broke the canon of what is "traditionally American" representation in music, art, dance, and literature. And yet, these recent years have been fraught with persistent and expanding inequities in class and gender, surges in police violence against poor communities of color, statehouse battles that block women's reproductive freedom and black votes, all of this as we mark the anniversaries of the toil and sacrifice of the activists who pulled America forward (activists from Civil Rights, Anti War, Feminist and LGBT movements) to recognize the plurality of her people.

Paraphrasing Karl Marx, Chang opened his remarks deconstructing big news stories events of late June, "History appears twice, first as tragedy, then farce." In this case, farce preceeded tragedy. While the nation was embroiled in the drama and confusion of Rachel Dolezal, a woman born "white" who adopted the identity of "blackness," our gaze and hearts pivoted from that spectacle to the horrific mass murder of nine people, killed in a church during their bible study.

These were (and are still) strange days indeed.

In this cultural moment, where we've witnessed the resurgence of social justice movements to wrest a kind of equity and balance in American life, from Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter, to the realized aspirations of families, partners and lovers from the Marriage Equality movement, we are witnessing yet another paradigm shift. And if we're to be honest here again, it is a kind of vital reckoning and shift, vital to our very survival as a people.

"These new social movements take seriously the question of seeing," Chang said. "They protest to erase the invisibility of the 99%. They protest to show how modes of 'unseeing,' to flip a phrase of the writer China Miéville, such as color-blindness and implicit bias, produce vast, brutal, deadly structures of segregation

and violence.”

We are being challenged to adjust our gaze inward and outward seamlessly.

I have been a participant on panels and conferences similar to the Ford Foundation’s June convening, for more than two decades now, where I had been tasked with publicly interrogating the construction of my American identity. My first moment of that kind of facilitation was as high school senior, where my classmate asked me to come to her former suburban high school to help educate the teachers about how to engage black students bused from the city to help integrate their district. I told them stories. I was deliberate in my dress and articulate in my speech. I was seventeen years old when I told a room full of adult white women and men to be aware of their bias when engaging black students and students of color, because we were more sophisticated than how the culture represented us. I responded to the burden of explaining black lives to white people all my life.

I tried to teach people to see.

But, for too long, the purview of diversity and identity has rested squarely on the shoulders of people of color, primarily because our work created a world in which we can be seen and access our own humanity. There’s a weariness in that unwanted responsibility, of having to be the translator, or compel white Americans to resist their natural tendency to reduce my identity to a set of fixed and innate biases.

Over time, however, I realized or rather, was reaffirmed in my belief, that individuals and institutions must do the work of unpacking identities and resist anti-black racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. I only echo an assertion so plainly defined by Baldwin in his 1955 essay, “Autobiographical Notes” where he spoke this harsh truth, “no one in America escapes its effects and everyone in America bears some responsibility for it.” And in doing that work, to recognize the other, to not eschew difference, and most importantly, to not rely on people of color to be the teachers or to address the ways we are complicit in the culture of whiteness that erases all identities is ongoing, and perhaps requires us to embrace a fluidity in being. What I’m trying to say here is this: that to do the work of recognizing and engaging people and the multiplicities of their identities is our movement.

Chang argued that the function of justice movements is about the transformation of seeing. We have been blind to a system and set patterns of inequality. “Perhaps now is the time when we need the arts to help us see through the fog to clearly apprehend what our new realities are,” Chang offered.

For me, taking pictures was my way into the arts, to help me “see through the fog.” The earliest visit to the art museum when I was a child taught me very subtly the power of seeing yourself part of a larger American narrative. And in that past, the larger American narrative dehumanized black bodies, rendered us grotesque. So I picked up the camera, and later still, the pen, to reorder this world. I had to for my own survival. Recreating and crafting the visual naturally extended itself to the written word for me. I write and take photographs now because I wish to see my own experiences represented in the world. In that selfishness, I created space for beauty, visibility, equity, and maybe a truth. And in creating that space, it has become an invaluable tool to connect with students, helping them, too, see that there’s space for them in the academy and America.

“One writes out of one thing only—one’s own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give,” writes Baldwin in his 1955 essay “Autobiographical Notes.” It is one of many works of Baldwin I return to when I consider the question of how my work as a writer, artist, teacher and citizen, or when the work of interrogating social identity in modern American society for some becomes exhausting in that some audiences regard it as performance or oversimplify it. Baldwin metes out the struggle for black creatives in modern American life, “This is the only real concern of the artist, to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art. The difficulty then, for me, of being a Negro writer was the fact that I was, in effect, prohibited from examining my own experience too closely by the tremendous demands and the very real dangers of my social situation.”

I’ve written recently about the radical art and activism of Nina Simone, Jacob Lawrence and Beyoncé, each artist of a very particular sociocultural and political moments where they’ve harnessed the energy of the zeitgeist, able to communicate and render black American stories visible. This isn’t an argument to say that their works are equal, only to note that each artist’s impulse to create their works were and are borne of a black pride, and in fact, and that assertion alone in America is a radical act. Lawrence created the Migration Series because there was an absence of his American story. Simone wrote “Mississippi Goddam” because she was fighting a culture that sought to erase a social justice movement and a story of murder: four little black girls in killed Alabama. Beyoncé used the weight of her own body (and by extension, her stardom) to illustrate the impact (and her support) for the Black Lives Matter Movement in her recent music video, “Formation.”

In February, a student asked me if there was a deliberate connection to the work presented by popular black artists, whether or not Kendrick Lamar’s Grammy politically charged performance, a visually and lyrical commentary of mass incarceration and police violence and Beyoncé’s Super Bowl performance, which was a deliberate nod and homage to the Black Panther Party as we approach the 50th Anniversary, insisted upon his attention, that these two popular recording artists meant to deliberately draw connections to mass incarceration, to Black Lives Matter. It was the class discussion on the assigned reading for that day (Plato’s “The Cave”) that inspired the question. He felt like, and here were his words, “Feels like they’re trying to get me to see.” I answered him only as Miss Nina Simone would if she were standing in the classroom, “An artist’s duty... is to reflect the times.”

Art is a kind of technology, it creates space for imagination, experience and understanding, leading us to embrace of a kind of “ethics of identity.” Art that provokes questions, challenges us to see, to touch the hem of the divine and to connect to our true selves to empathy.

The work of the American democratic experiment (and by extension, in its classrooms) should no longer be centered on the faulty notion of perfection, but rooted in an earnest and unceasing effort towards cultivating equity, beauty and justice for all.

On the Spring 2016 Joe Doctor Colloquium

Lauren Wickstrom and Quinn Minor
Science

BMCC full- and part-time faculty gathered at the Joe Doctor Colloquium to discuss and reflect upon the importance of faculty scholarship and research and the challenges faced by BMCC faculty in maintaining productive scholarship. The theme of the Joe Doctor Colloquium, held on April 20, 2016, was “Building a Community of Scholars, Supporting Faculty Research.” The Colloquium featured a roundtable discussion which was followed by questions from the audience.

The roundtable discussion involved a panel of three academic scholars from BMCC and CUNY who have different perspectives on research based on their own personal experience as both researchers and administrators. The first panelist Karin Wilks, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at BMCC, has 30 years of experience in educational research and is primarily interested in applied scholarship relating to evidence-based retention and success strategies for students. The second panelist, Jim Berg, the Associate Dean of Faculty at BMCC, has been actively involved in archival research for 15 years focusing on the work of writer Christopher Isherwood. The last panelist, Annemarie Nicols-Grinenko, University Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs in the Office of Academic Affairs at CUNY, focuses on research pertaining to applied faculty development and advancement in particular scholarly production at intensive teaching institutions. The panel was led by Yolanda Medina, an Associate Professor in Teacher Education.

The first question addressed the importance of research and scholarship for BMCC faculty members. Wilks discussed how scholarship is necessary for BMCC’s institutional priorities and strategic plan which promotes college readiness, academic retention, developing the 21st century workforce, and sustainability and transferability. Wilks further explained how research, scholarship and creative activity strengthens institutional goals: “there is a natural connection between being both an effective teacher and a scholar.” Nicols-Grinenko discussed how faculty research is important for enhancing both the college and CUNY as well as personal satisfaction. “I believe creative scholars benefit students, particularly by providing motivation and inspiration. Mentoring students enhances student success.” Berg added that “research is also valuable for its own sake and for the public good.”

A prominent issue which came up during the discussion was the tension between the high teaching load of CUNY faculty, particularly at the community colleges, and the expectation to engage in research. “Reduced funding by New York State exacerbates this issue,” Nicols-Grinenko pointed out, as it would be very expensive in general to reduce the teaching load for full-time faculty—although she added that a new negotiated contract would be a good start. Applying for funding opportunities that would include reassigned time was also stressed; one example Nicols-Grinenko points out is the CUNY workshop “Moving From Associate to

Full Professor,” which has a separate cohort for community college faculty. As for the perception that external funding agencies find reassigned time undesirable: “definitely include it in your proposals,” says Berg. “Most agencies understand that we need reassigned time and cannot get the work done without it.”

All the panelists stressed the importance of faculty research to the overall mission of BMCC, pointing out that research enhances both the college and CUNY, while mentored research aids student retention and success. Interdisciplinary and pedagogical research was especially emphasized—Wilks cited for example the CETLS “Global Competencies in a Diverse World” faculty development program as an effort to foster interdisciplinary research, while Nicols-Grinenko discussed the CUNY CIRG (Collaborative Incentive Research Grant) program. Finally, when asked what is the most pressing issue related to faculty scholarship at BMCC, Wilks replied that recognition of research achievements needs to be improved. “We are working with academic affairs to do a better job of spotlighting faculty research,” she said.

Both the Advocate and the Devil's Advocate: Moving beyond Debate in Addressing Intellectual Conflict in the Classroom

Neil Kernis

Academic Literacy and Linguistics

Introduction

Since becoming an instructor of critical thinking here at BMCC, I've become more interested in conflict and conflict resolution, particularly the potential role they can play in facilitating student learning. I'm not referring to the sort of conflict that affects war-torn regions of the world, or about interpersonal conflicts among students or between students and instructors; rather, I'm talking about intellectual conflict of the sort that often arises in the midst of class discussions about contentious topics. We at BMCC are profoundly lucky to be teaching students who bring an endlessly diverse range of perspectives, life experiences and cultural orientations that frame their understanding of important social and political controversies that we discuss in many of our classrooms. With that diversity often comes intellectual conflict—conflicts over ideas and interpretations of the world that are often personal and which often involve students confronting each other's strongly held beliefs.

In many classes, intellectual conflict happens in the context of a good old-fashioned class debate. It is a reliable way to fire up a class, get students more interested and invested in course material, and to take greater interest in civic and other important topics. Aside from the possibility of emotions taking over and derailing the activity, debate is often spoken about as an unambiguously good and worthwhile way to spend class time. After all, it teaches students the fine art of argumentation, demands that they do substantial research, and helps them hone their public speaking skills as well as their ability to think on their feet. It is a wonderful and worthwhile skill to develop.

While debate is indeed an important activity in the classroom and in the democratic process (even as our own Presidential debates become increasingly trivial and farcical), some of its epistemological implications for our students do not always sit well with me. I will discuss this below, but at this point, let me just start off by proposing that we critically assess the value of traditional debate in class, or at least rethink how we as instructors structure and harness intellectual conflict in the classroom in the service of enhancing academic literacy in general, and critical thinking in particular, in our students.

Class debates can be fun. And students often enjoy them for good reasons—they involve strategy, argumentation, rhetorical flair and creativity, and of course the opportunity for competition. But while the competitive aspect of debate is partly what makes it so engaging, it is also problematic because it encourages black and white, right or wrong thinking about the topic at issue. The structure of a debate gives incentives to the participants to adhere to their chosen or assigned

positions, invent new and cleverer ways of defending them, and to chip away at the arguments marshaled by their opponents.¹ This kind of strategy is to be expected of competitions of all kinds. But I wonder if this is the kind of relationship to intellectual conflict that we want to foster in our students. When students hold steadfastly to their position, even in the face of valid arguments to the contrary, in order to “win” a debate, they miss an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the complexity of the subject being discussed.

In my own classroom experiences at BMCC and elsewhere, I’ve seen how traditional debates can lead to dogmatism, rigidity and dualistic thinking. As a method for teaching effective argumentation, debate can be very useful, but it should not be the only tool at our disposal for helping students negotiate divergent perspectives on a given issue. When thinking about other ways we might effectively manage intellectual conflict, we might consider what we want our students to learn from the process itself—in other words, from the experience of being in and resolving an intellectual conflict amongst peers. The experience can be competitive, as in a debate, but it can also be a cooperative endeavor. Learning how to cooperatively resolve intellectual conflicts requires more than canny rhetoric and strategy; it requires participants to be able to see, understand, respect and appreciate viewpoints different from their own, and to acknowledge that the world is not the black and white, binary, “I-win-you-lose” place envisioned in the debate format. Workable solutions to real-world conflicts happen when participants work through an issue in a cooperative context rather than a competitive one (Deutsch, 1973) and in doing so compromise to the benefit of both sides. This idea, I argue, is as valid in the classroom as it is in the political or, dare I say, academic world.

Constructive Controversy as an Alternative to Debate

In an intellectual space, students can manage intellectual conflict to their benefit when they see others who disagree not as adversaries, but as cooperative partners in knowledge-building. Focused, structured interventions by an instructor can facilitate this perspective shift. I want to focus here on one method in particular, known as *constructive controversy*. Developed by David Johnson and Robert Johnson in 1979, it is a process for negotiating intellectual conflict with an eye toward cooperation leading to compromise, rather than on producing winners or losers. Unlike *debate*, in which two sides clash over opposing views and rigidly adhere to their respective viewpoints, and *concurrence-seeking*, in which the minority views are strongly encouraged to concur with the majority, constructive controversy ensures that both sides of an issue will necessarily have to incorporate opposing views. The purpose is not necessarily to win; rather, it is to arrive at the best possible conclusion, which is defined as a synthesis of the viewpoints developed upon good faith consideration from all sides.

Johnson and Johnson (2009, p. 40-41) summarize the requisite steps for the constructive controversy process:

¹ The very word “debate” has its origins in Latin, specifically as a combination of “dis” (reversal) and “battere” (to fight).

- 1) Preparing the best case possible for the position
- 2) Persuasively presenting the best case possible for the position
- 3) Engaging in an open discussion
- 4) Reversing positions
- 5) Creating a synthesis or integrated joint position.

These steps describe a roadmap for structuring a cooperative context for an intellectual conflict resolution, even though the process seemingly begins in a somewhat adversarial way. The linchpin of the process is to be found in steps four and five, as this is where participants must step away from their well-researched and presented arguments, and must focus their energies on how to accept and validate the arguments that challenge their own. As the participants move through the steps, their objective moves away from being an individual achiever (“presenting the best case possible”) to being an effective collaborator (“integrated joint position”); the stages, therefore, represent not only a change of behavior, but also one of perspective. The participant’s perspective changes not only with respect to the subject being discussed, but also in how the participant sees him or herself as a contributor in the endeavor. As Johnson, Johnson and Tjosvold (2014) point out, participants take on the roles of researcher, advocate, devil’s advocate, perspective-taker and synthesizer, all of which require a different set of cognitive skills in conjunction with an open mind. I believe that this practice represents an important learning process that could strengthen students’ critical thinking capacity, an essential piece of the academic literacy puzzle.

Seeing Conflict in a Different Light

What makes constructive controversy such an interesting pedagogical approach is how it views conflict itself. The model sees conflict as a heuristic, rather than as merely a contentious argument between opposing sides, as the term can sometimes suggest. In educational contexts in particular, intellectual conflict is sometimes viewed as a destructive element leading to disengagement and disinterest in learning (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 2000). It is not difficult to see how “conflict” can easily be conflated with “debate,” which of course is also a form of intellectual conflict, but one characterized primarily by competition, with winners and losers often emerging at the end. Such a competitive atmosphere might very well result in divisiveness, resentment and a hardening rigidity of perspectives, particularly in classrooms with students with limited experience engaging in constructive discourse. But, as Johnson, Johnson and Smith (2000) point out, the avoidance of conflict causes students to miss important opportunities to develop important intellectual skills. Constructive controversy represents one such important opportunity; it presupposes a conflict that initially divides interested parties into factions, but a gradual receding of conflict is built into the process, avoiding much of the destructive potential of other intellectual conflicts. It does this partially by embedding norms of participation into the activity in the service of building “skilled disagreement,” which include, but are not limited to, being critical of ideas but not of people; differentiating ideas before integrating them;

changing one's mind when the evidence demands that one do so; and separating personal worth from criticism of ideas (Johnson, et al 2014).

There is considerable research documenting the use of constructive controversy in the classroom. The method has been associated with greater creativity, expertise-sharing, task involvement and interpersonal relations between participants when compared with other methods of intellectual conflict management (Johnson and Johnson, 1993). There have also been recent studies that demonstrate the diversity of applicable areas for use of constructive controversy in higher education settings. Marcketti (2007), for example, looked at the effect of using constructive controversy to engage in structured class discussions about design piracy, and found that college student perceptions and outcomes supported greater critical thinking and problem solving in students. Bird and Erickson (2010) found that a constructive controversy approach to teaching students about inequality in college moved students away from individualistic thinking to structured analysis, an indication that the method facilitates more complex thinking. The entire scope of constructive controversy research is too broad to include here, but the two examples suggest that its use in managing intellectual conflict can strengthen critical academic literacy skills across different disciplines.

Summing up, I like to think that in critically questioning the efficacy of classroom debate, we begin to think more broadly about not only what we want our students to learn, but also how we want them to learn—in this case, how they learn to skillfully negotiate a complex intellectual conflict, which they will have to do over and over again in their academic careers. Constructive controversy is presented here as one, but by no means the only, possible way to do this while avoiding the pitfalls of the traditional debate format. It is a way to help students learn that building academic literacy often involves the realization that unambiguously right and wrong answers are often elusive, and that an effective way to address the resulting disequilibrium may be a more cooperative orientation toward their intellectual conflicts. This orientation requires hearing, understanding and seriously considering the validity of other perspectives, as well as dispensing with rigid, uncritically accepted beliefs and ideologies. I argue that this technique is essential to building academic literacy skills (critical thinking in particular) in our students, and to preparing them to grapple with ever greater intellectual (and perhaps even personal) conflicts that will no doubt confront them as they continue their journey at BMCC and beyond.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Inquirer is a journal devoted to teaching, learning, and scholarship at BMCC. The editors welcome manuscripts on any number of topics for Issue 24, including but not limited to the following:

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All submissions should be in Microsoft Word, double-spaced and in 12 point font, with text, notes, and references formatted in the style (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago) or of the author's discipline. (please note which style).

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