

# In Transit

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With the publication of our “Crossing Borders” issue of *In Transit*, we have a new group of individuals to thank, our Peer Readers. Professors Bruce Brooks (*Humanities*), John Chaffee (*Humanities*), John Een (*The English Language Center*), Debra Engel (*Natural and Applied Sciences*), Thomas Fink (*English*), Ximena Gallardo (*English*), Jack Gantzer (*Education and Language Acquisition*), Roslyn Orgel (*LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning*), and Frank Wang (*Mathematics*) read and responded to articles outside their respective fields when articles were still in early stages of development. Extending beyond disciplinary borders to support colleagues in their growth as teachers-writers, Peer Readers brought their expertise to our still-new enterprise - the publication of a journal about teaching and learning, written by LaGuardia faculty and staff for LaGuardia faculty and staff.

Bret Eynon, Gail Green-Anderson, and Michele Piso



# CONTENTS

## Introduction

Suma Kurien, *Director, Center for Immigrant Education and Training* ..... i

## Casting Light on the Shadows Within

Matthew S. Joffe, *Office for Students with Disabilities* ..... 1

## Using a Web Radio Project to Connect Generation 1.5 Students to Classroom Instruction

Erika Heppner, *Humanities*..... 4

## God, Darwin, and English 102

David Styler, *English* ..... 8

## The Ins and Outs of Teaching: Social Identity in an ESL Classroom

Monica Courtney, *The English Language Center* ..... 13

## Critical Thinking as “Rooted in the Social Principle”

Gary Richmond, *Humanities* ..... 17

## Connecting through and to Stories

Felicia Rose, *The English Language Center* ..... 21

## History as Wonder and Connection

Christina Stern, *Social Science* ..... 25

## The Diadoumenos’ Buns

Barbara Comins, *English* ..... 29

## My ePortfolio Journey: Reflections on Praxis

Max Rodriguez, *Education and Language Acquisition* ..... 32

## Bridging the Gap: What Students Need to Know about Internet Research

Dawn Amsberry and Marie Cimino Spina, *Library* ..... 35

## A Community-Based Early Literacy Initiative: Parents as First Reading Teachers

Marcia Glick, *Communication Skills* ..... 40

## Inquiry-Based Grammar Instruction

Laurie Gluck, *Education and Language Acquisition* ..... 43

**Stepping Out in New York City: The Student-Crafted Walking Tour**  
Timothy C. Coogan, *Social Science* ..... 48

**Reflection in Nursing Education**  
Philip Gimber, *Natural and Applied Sciences* ..... 52

**Contributors** ..... 55

**About the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning** ..... 59

# INTRODUCTION

Suma Kurien,

*Director, Center for Immigrant Education and Training*

It takes a great deal of courage to cross borders and emigrate, to venture beyond the comfortable and the known. Familiar ways of thinking may no longer protect or guide, and the unmapped territory is often physically and psychologically perilous. The students enrolled in LaGuardia's Center for Immigrant Education and Training (CIET), part of the Division of Adult and Continuing Education (ACE), are courageous individuals who, here in New York City, are continuously challenged by the unfamiliar. They enter our classrooms seeking to educate themselves, find better work, and create opportunities for their families. As Director of CIET, I am privileged to know many of these brave people and to shape an educational program that responds to their needs.

As I write this introduction to the "Crossing Borders" issue of *In Transit: The LaGuardia Journal on Teaching and Learning*, I think of the ways CIET students encourage us to widen our understanding and definition of "college" to include, rather than exclude, surrounding communities. I am mindful, too, that CIET students and their international peers across campus call upon those of us with multi-national identities to ask ourselves hard questions and to introduce our lives more fully to the college community. Thus, the opportunity to present this issue of *In Transit* allows me to introduce – or reintroduce – myself to LaGuardia colleagues, and for this I am grateful.

When we started the Center for Immigrant Education and Training in September 2001, we understood that our students require more than instruction in English to negotiate life in New York City. CIET students – many in mid-life and with families to support – desperately need to make sense of the rules and patterns that govern their new world, and they must understand how to use that knowledge in their daily lives. In a description of her encounters with her son's teacher, a student in CIET's

Immigrant Family Literacy Program recently summarized what she learned during her time with us. "Before, I was afraid," she recalled. "I said 'Yes, yes,' and I went away. But now I ask questions. I ask about how my son is doing at school." Clearly, she has started to learn the rules structuring the New York City public school, that most powerful and complex of systems, and to speak up on her son's behalf. Asking questions in English, she has moved beyond a limiting definition of herself as a marginalized immigrant mother to become an unhesitating advocate for her child's education.

The presence at LaGuardia of this individual – and so many like her – changes our relationships with surrounding communities and asks us to rethink our conceptions of the college's role. Part of the more than thirty thousand students who attend classes in the Division of Adult and Continuing Education, CIET students have made the long-standing boundary between college and community less rigid, more porous, allowing our college and community to gain vitality and meaning from each other.

This redefined relation between our campus and its environment necessarily requires examining, questioning, and, finally, changing the ways we teach. In CIET, our approaches to teaching and learning are not always associated with traditional classroom work. Our mission is to meet students where they are – in academic experience, age, language, and work needs – and to help them recreate their multiple roles of parents, workers, students, and citizens in their new land. We ask where they would like to go, how they wish to advance, and what they will need to achieve their goals. As they realize that successful progress in these roles requires specific skills and knowledge, students begin to raise important concerns: What are the rules that govern the public school system? Should I just listen to my son's teacher or

should I ask questions? What are the unspoken laws of the workplace? Shall I ask for clarification if I don't understand directions or should I figure out things on my own? What is my role as a worker? These questions provide a foundation for positive negotiation with teachers, employers, and the wide range of individuals encountered in everyday interactions.

Famous for its diverse student population, LaGuardia Community College is certainly an appropriate place for CIET. "Come to LaGuardia and meet the world," we say. The diversity in students and staff prompts the "difficult dialogues" that bring in the world outside our doors, enlarging our community. Sharing ideas and experiences not always familiar to or welcome in the ivory tower, we expand our conversations. Often exhilarated by our work, we move forward. But it is equally important to slow down, stopping long enough to pose this question: As an academic community engaged in broadening the definition of academia, will we embrace the changes that accompany shifts in definition?

At CIET, we welcome questions about our ability to accept change. When faced with the unfamiliar, how do we respond? Do we insist on seeing the world through old lenses? Can we acknowledge difference without the need to defend the familiar? In response to the unknown are we able to change, or do we try to hold on to a pristine image of ourselves?

Those who experience the complexities of multi-national identity on a daily level understand that the tensions framed by these questions connect us to communities and institutions throughout the world. In this regard, I am reminded of the impulse of some members of both native and non-native groups in Europe, as well as in the United States, to hold tight to those cultural symbols that reify identity and establish certainty before what is strange and threatening.

The papers in this issue of *In Transit: The LaGuardia Journal on Teaching and Learning* speak to the desire for change, a willingness to move past the familiar. The authors point to a variety of borders beyond the purely geographic,

drawing to our attention the shaping effect of these borders upon our work as educators. Writing from cross-disciplinary perspectives, the writers mark crucial changes that occur in teaching and learning when a limit to thought or understanding is dissolved. As I read the student experiences recorded here, I am reminded of the mother who stopped saying "Yes, yes," and dared to question her son's teacher. Indeed, the students represented in these pages challenge us to see the realities of their lives, to invite "foreign" matter into our thinking about teaching and learning, and to create possibilities for professional research and conversation that can alter and revitalize our practice.

Last spring, the Difficult Dialogues project invited members of various faiths from within the college and surrounding communities to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. We began the morning in small groups, introducing ourselves and our own belief traditions. In our group, Dr. Innocent Datondji, LaGuardia's 2006–7 Fulbright Scholar, introduced himself first as "Innocent," his "proper" Christian name, a legacy of the colonial powers that once ruled Benin. He then identified himself as "Koovi," using the African name given in his culture to all male children born on a Tuesday.

Innocent/Koovi: with his Christian and African names, Dr. Datondji provided two approaches to identity, one marking individuality, and the other affirming collective belonging. Explaining his syncretic roots, Dr. Datondji held up his identification badge. There on the front for the public to see was "Innocent," but always right behind it, he said, was Koovi, his African name.

Dr. Datondji's introduction to his layered names, and all that I learned about my colleagues at Dr. King's celebration breakfast, affirmed my belief that our many identities should not just sit front to back. Rather, we must engage and speak to one another, confront and learn from one another.

My different worlds and identities must live together, too, and now I present them to you. For me, like Dr. Datondji and many others at

LaGuardia, introduction requires elaboration and explanation. I am Indian, female, raised in Africa, educated and living in the United States, married to an Italian. Up front and for the world to see, I am also a professor and the director of a program for low-income immigrants within the Division of Adult and Continuing Education at LaGuardia. Less publicly, I am Suma Sosamma. Suma is a modern Indian name in a modern country born after colonialism ended. Sosamma is an ancient Syrian Christian name, the name of my long-dead paternal grandmother – fiery and difficult, I am told, and inclined to take things into her own hands – a name from the proud, insular community of Kerala in Southwestern India of which I am a part. Kurien, another marker of my Kerala Syrian Christian identity, is my father's first name, adopted as my last name in deference to the customs of the West. I am also known, sometimes, as Signora Norelli, in acknowledgement of the customs of Italy, my spouse's country.

None of these names and identities exists in isolation; through proximity to the others, each is transformed and new identities are born. I need to be an educator and administra-

tor. I need to be Indian, Syrian Christian, and American. I need to learn how to make my way in Italy, my husband's home, as well as here in the United States where we live and work, and also in India where I visit my large and extended family.

As I express these realities of myself, new possibilities and transformations abound. For example, my female cousins tell me that their young daughters now say that no longer must they give up their professional dreams to marry the man their parents have chosen. "Look at Suma-kochamma (in English, 'little mother' or 'aunt')!" the girls say. Like the mother in our Immigrant Family Literacy Program, the daughters no longer just say "Yes, yes." They, too, ask questions.

The current issue of *In Transit* contains voices from many parts of our college, and is significant for its conscious effort to include multiple perspectives. Introductions to difference in all its forms, and the sometimes difficult dialogues that result, help us all to reflect on our practice and to respond with integrity to the transformations central to our work as teachers and learners.



# Casting Light on the Shadows Within

Matthew S. Joffe, *Office for Students with Disabilities*

I am a lucky man. In the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), which I direct, I am one of two counselors working exclusively with students with disabilities. In any given semester, we have between two hundred and three hundred students registered for our services. My colleague, Jhony Nelson, the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, manages our Assistive Technology Lab and works with visually and physically disabled students. As a learning disabilities specialist, I am the sole provider of services for the entire college community. Each day, from the cradle of my office at LaGuardia, an international depot for people in search of educational roots, I come in contact with people from around the world. Many have journeyed far with the ultimate intent of returning home with newfound knowledge to spread. Others are beginning new lives in a country they view as their new home. For some students, acknowledging a disability begins another journey.

My office's mission is to ensure equal access and opportunity for all students with disabilities as set forth nationally by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the subsequent Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which mandate equal access to opportunity in education and employment, to name but two domains within their jurisdiction. We serve students with any disability; through the Programs for Deaf Adults (PDA), we have a supportive role with deaf and hard of hearing students. We provide counseling, reasonable accommodations, and support services to eligible students, and act as liaisons to the college community.

Many of LaGuardia's students, whether international or native-born, are alone in their academic endeavors, straining to balance family, work, and studies. The special pressures on them have led me to adopt and model the concepts of D. W. Winnicott, the eminent British child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst famous for

his theories of the "holding environment." In psychoanalytic terms:

*the therapist's task is to provide such a 'holding environment' for the client so that the client might have the opportunity to meet neglected ego needs and allow the true self of the client to emerge (Robbins).*

Maintaining consistent counseling relationships and cheering students on when stressors arise are two ways that I can create a holding environment, assisting as they meet their needs, achieve their goals, and develop their true potential.

While OSD certainly is not directed at providing therapy, I believe that the basic tenets of Winnicott's theory apply to my counseling relations with students. However, the approach of the holding environment is not always in harmony with student perceptions of my role. For example, there are times when a student is reported for cheating during an academic test administered in the OSD office. In this instance, it is hard to convince the student that I am being supportive when, after informing him or her of the college's academic integrity policy, I notify the instructor of the incident. My students know that they may not like what I tell them; but they also know that to do my job well, I must be honest, a professional value emphasized in the work of the humanist psychologist Carl Rogers. A proponent of client-centered therapy, Rogers spoke of the need for clinicians to develop in themselves the following qualities:

- Congruence – genuineness, honesty with the client.
- Empathy – the ability to feel what the client feels.
- Respect – acceptance, unconditional positive regard towards the client (Boeree).

For many LaGuardia students with disabilities, the threshold of my office marks a border not easily crossed. Historically, some cultures have tended to hide people with disabilities, resulting in secretive behavior that makes it hard to get help, especially if doing so is condemned as a show of weakness and revealing emotions is taboo. For many international students, entering my office can be even more difficult as they struggle to find the right words. In a recent article in the *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, C. H. Patterson writes:

*Cultural differences impose barriers to empathic understanding – to communications of the client about himself to the therapist and to communication of the therapist’s understanding to the client.  
...The first barrier is of course language.*

A particular challenge for both my students and me is just this – the effective communication of ideas and feelings. As I speak only English, the burden of responsibility often falls on students to express their experiences in a second language.

Many students, especially those with psychiatric impairments, enter my office in search of a safe space to speak freely without fear of being judged. Once established, our working relationship allows them to control the issues which, left to accumulate, could build up and cause dysfunction. My role is to facilitate a rapport that instills both the confidence to be open and the awareness that asking for help reflects courage and the desire to flourish. I draw heavily on my educational and professional experiences to reassure students that all communication is confidential and to make sure that each first encounter provides a foundation for future work. Establishing an alliance and demonstrating commitment are my immediate priorities; the more I can do to create a comfortable first encounter for students, the less likely they will retreat.

When I look back at my graduate education in reading and learning disabilities and at my certificate training programs in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, chemical dependency

counseling, and family and divorce mediation, I feel that I was destined to be Director of the Office for Students with Disabilities at LaGuardia. During my clinical training at Teacher’s College at Columbia University, where I worked with adults in diagnostics and tutoring, I learned about the scars adults bear because of their disabilities. Shame, embarrassment, alienation – all could qualify as stigmata on the spirit. The real spiritual casualties, however, were self-esteem and hope. After years of frustration and failure, few of the people I tutored hoped for success, and I did not always know who would conquer their demons. But those few warriors determined to wage the valiant fight inspired me to pursue a career in special education.

My current holistic approach has evolved over thirty years of experience. As a special educator, I am committed to assisting students in realizing their academic potential. As a psychotherapist, I view the whole person as a Gestalt, a being greater than the sum of his or her parts, which may include a disability. Training in chemical dependency counseling has taught me to work with students one day at a time, never confusing the future’s big picture with present moments. Savoring the small steps students take, I celebrate the energy manifested in their stride.

Over the years, many individuals have bravely entered my office, determined to seek the assistance needed to advance academically, achieve a college degree, and obtain employment. One of these was T, a young male in his twenties, who came to LaGuardia after failing at a senior college. When I met with him and his parents, his self-esteem was low; even making eye contact was an effort. The family desperately wanted to hold on to possibilities, and the air was filled with a mixture of apprehension and hope. Recently diagnosed as learning disabled, T was momentarily defeated, but he was not willing to surrender. In affirmative tones, I expressed clearly that he could still succeed. During T’s time at LaGuardia, we met frequently. Gradually, he had less need for my reassurance and more occasions for my con-

gratulations. He took full advantage of the reasonable accommodations and tutoring for which he was eligible, and fueled by an increased ability to solve problems and think independently, T's self-confidence grew. After graduation, T attended a CUNY senior college. All his accomplishments were the result of his own endeavor.

Another student, a male in his forties, had a history of mental illness. Easily agitated, V was often menacing in appearance. He struggled to understand how systems worked, and his grasp of social and business conventions was uncertain and sporadic. A frequent visitor to my office, his anger bubbled just beneath the surface. Against the backdrop of Columbine, it was conceivable that others might be nervous or frightened around him. But I thought that if I let him vent, we could examine the causes of his frustrations and together try to address them. If V was inappropriate, I gave him feedback. To his credit, he could admit to his errors, an important behavior that I repeatedly praised. When he graduated, not without great effort, we both knew that his perseverance and his willingness to take responsibility for his actions had served him well. V wore these qualities proudly, like badges on a uniform.

Unfortunately, not all students who enter my office will graduate or transfer. When stu-

dents are not succeeding, I attempt to identify the barriers before them. For example, one student whom I met weekly struggled painfully to explain his academic difficulties to his family. We talked about the reasons why he could not be honest with them; in the end, he left LaGuardia, perhaps because of the intensity of his anxiety. Similarly Q tried unsuccessfully to learn English and to do well at college. Behind her difficulties was the abuse, physical and emotional, that she experienced in her family because of her learning disabilities. Not knowing what happens to students after they break off contact is part of the counseling process, though an uncomfortable one.

As a person with a disability and an educator, I have used my own life as an example of overcoming obstacles, and after many years of grappling with being a role model, I have become more accepting of its responsibilities. As a counselor at LaGuardia, I find myself challenged each time I meet with students, and I am grateful when my efforts can help them to discover their individual potential. Along the way, I continue on my own journey. My skills are not allowed the luxury of hibernation and I enjoy the surprise of the unknown. I continue to fill up with lessons and souvenirs, the gifts of others.

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# Using a Web Radio Project to Connect Generation 1.5 Students to Classroom Instruction

Erika Heppner, *Humanities*

In the past three years of teaching oral communication to non-native speakers of English at LaGuardia, I've encountered extraordinary and complex diversity. I've had students with degrees from universities in their home countries who can read and write English but don't have sufficient fluency in English to order food in a restaurant. In that same class, I've had fluent English speakers who are bilingual but don't read or write at the college level in either of the languages they speak and understand. And mixed in with these two extremes, I've also had those who learned to speak English as a third or fourth language while driving a New York City taxi, working as a nanny for an Upper East Side family, or waiting tables in a Jackson Heights restaurant. These combinations of language abilities and experiences in the same class can be maddening because the very teaching methods and classroom activities that serve one group can easily discourage and alienate another.

On the other hand, this type of situation can prove to be a feast for instructors like me who savor linguistic variety and student diversity. I've discovered that even though the difficulty of teaching students with such a wide variety of language abilities can be daunting, it can also be inspiring. This particular situation has pushed me to think of new ways to integrate my passion for oral history, radio, and digital media into my oral communication classes. I've discovered that by focusing syllabi on a production-focused project such as a radio show, I can successfully engage a wide variety of students placed in my classes. The story of Carla Fuentes (not her real name) shows the difference that this type of project can make.

Carla emigrated from Ecuador with her parents when she was ten years old. She attended public schools in New York's Washington Heights neighborhood and graduated from a public high school before beginning her college

career at LaGuardia in Fall 2004. At that time, she enrolled in Communication and the Non-Native Speaker (HUL100), which the LaGuardia catalog describes as a three-credit course designed to help students develop facility with English when it is not their native language. Carla was a fluent English speaker who was comfortable communicating orally in two languages, Spanish at home with her family and in her neighborhood, and English at school and at her part-time job in an Upper West Side grocery chain. When I met her a year after she had taken HUL 100 for the first time, she told me that she never thought of herself as an ESL student and was very embarrassed and discouraged to be in an oral communication class with students who couldn't speak English as well as she could. She conveyed to me that most of her classmates were still struggling to express themselves in accurate, fluent, and idiomatic English, and some, in fact, were reluctant to speak at all.

Even though Carla felt that she might not be in the right class during her first week of college, she didn't say anything to her instructor since, as she told me, "I was new and didn't want to drop a class. I thought then that I would lose my financial aid if I did." However, as the semester progressed, her behavior reflected the way she felt. A few weeks into the semester, she alienated herself from the instructor and her ESL classmates by not attending class regularly and by not completing any of the required homework assignments. She told me that when she did attend, she always arrived at least twenty to thirty minutes late with what she described as "an attitude." As a result, she earned an "F" in HUL 100 at the end of her first semester in college.

Fast forward from Fall I 2004, Carla's first semester at LaGuardia, to Fall II 2005, more than a year later. Repeating the course, Carla enrolled in the section of HUL 100 that I was teaching. She was absent the first day of class

when I typically videotape students individually to assess their speaking abilities. I also ask them to complete a questionnaire that gives me snapshots of their language use along with their cultural and educational backgrounds. Carla missed this important first day diagnostic. She was absent for the second class and arrived thirty minutes late on the third day. When she entered the room, she seemed oblivious to what was going on and made a beeline to one of the empty seats in the back row, distancing herself from the rest of the students. She didn't take off her parka, nor did she unpack any books from her backpack; it was obvious that she would have preferred to be anywhere but in this HUL 100 classroom.

As soon as class ended, Carla got up and left, avoiding eye contact with me or with any of the other students. I approached her before she reached the door and asked her to stay a few minutes. As we walked to my desk at the front of the classroom, I asked why she had missed the first couple of days and why she had arrived late on the third day. There was a long silence as she looked down at the floor. I began to explain that because Fall II was a short semester with only six weeks of class, missing one class during this time was the equivalent of missing a week during a regular twelve-week semester. My students in past HUL 100 classes almost exactly matched Carla's behavior and attitude, so I was not at all surprised when she answered me in fluent English, "I took this class before. Last year I got an F. I need a higher grade now. I want to go to nursing school." I asked her a few more questions about her background: where and when she was born, where she went to school in the U.S., and what type of instruction she had received in English. I listened as she told me her story.

As what Carla said confirmed my assumptions about her situation, I didn't insist she drop the class, even though she had missed almost a week of instruction. Carla's language use, life experience, and the way she described herself all indicated a college student who was not typical of either first or second generation immigrants. Rather, Carla was somewhere in the middle.

Language scholars Linda Harklau and Mark Roberge refer to students like Carla as "generation 1.5 students because they share characteristics of both first and second-generation immigrants" (Harklau 1; Roberge 107). Generally speaking, first generation immigrants arrive as adults, and are educated, fluent, and skilled in their native language. Second generation immigrants are often from immigrant families and are wholly U.S. educated. "Because they were born in the United States, they usually end up English dominant" (Roberge 108).

Born in Ecuador and partially educated in schools there and in the U.S., Carla fit Harklau and Roberge's description of a generation 1.5 student, as did many students I had encountered in my LaGuardia classes. In addition, since her education in the U.S. took place in mostly overcrowded, urban public schools, her instruction in English consisted of drills, short answers, and some writing from models. She told me she had had little exposure to reading and essay writing before coming to LaGuardia. She also mentioned that she didn't like to read and couldn't write that well in either Spanish or English. She preferred to talk.

This information suggested why she might have been placed into HUL 100 during her first semester. LaGuardia enrolls students into oral communication classes based on placement test scores in reading and writing, not on a test that would assess a student's oral and aural skills. As in Carla's case, many generation 1.5 students attend substandard public schools and therefore begin college having had very little or poor writing and reading instruction in high school. In addition, many generation 1.5 students live and work in neighborhoods where English is not the primary language of communication. These students often place into ESL writing classes because their writing reflects how they speak. That is, it often contains some linguistic characteristics of non-native speakers even though there is a level of fluency that traditional ESL students don't always have. Their inexperience as writers, along with a Hispanic or Asian surname, may also guarantee them a placement in ESL. As a result, many generation 1.5 stu-

dents like Carla often feel misunderstood and invisible once they get to college.

After speaking with Carla, I drew this conclusion: In 2004, when Carla first enrolled at LaGuardia, her writing and reading placement test scores probably led an advisor to assume that she was an ESL student and suggest she take HUL 100, a course designed for traditional second-language learners of English, not students matching Carla's profile and experience. I've discovered that courses such as HUL 100, originally designed for and taught primarily with the more traditional ESL profile in mind, can discourage and alienate generation 1.5 students unless instructors acknowledge and build on students' strong oral communication skills and familiarity with life in the United States. Engaging generation 1.5 students in classroom instruction that builds on their strengths rather than focusing solely on their deficiencies as readers and writers can help students stay in school rather than drop out.

Based on my understanding of her situation, I empathized with Carla and decided to let her stay in the class. Even though she was off to a shaky start, I thought she would be able to receive a passing grade and contribute to the class in a meaningful way. If Carla could finish with at least a "C," she would not have to repeat HUL 100 yet a third time.

After listening to her story, I gave her a copy of the course syllabus, emphasizing the attendance and participation requirements. I explained the course objectives and policies; she listened attentively. She nodded a couple of times and thanked me for taking time to understand her particular situation. Smiling, she assured me that she would be on time and wouldn't miss any more classes. As I watched her leave, I felt as if we had reached an understanding.

The second week of classes began; Carla arrived twenty minutes late. Without acknowledging me or anyone else, she walked to her seat in the back row, again separating herself from the rest of the class. I was disappointed. I felt betrayed. I thought she knew I wanted her to succeed. When I had spoken with her the week before, she assured me that she would

arrive on time. Given that she had arrived late again and seemed as uninterested as she was the first week, I gave up on her. I didn't say anything to her after class. My new plan was to calculate the number of times she had been late and suggest she drop the course. With twenty-six other students needing my attention and energy, I did not have time to continue dealing with a student who was unwilling to cooperate and take advantage of a second chance.

To my surprise, the following day Carla was already in her usual back row seat when I began taking attendance. After a few general announcements, I introduced the class project: producing a radio show for LaGuardia's Web Radio Station. As I glanced around the room, I noticed that Carla was actually paying attention to what I was saying. I began describing plans for the class radio project by explaining that each student would have an opportunity to create a radio segment that would be broadcast live on the Web Radio station at the end of the semester. I observed that Carla was carefully reading the information about the project that I had written on the board. She raised her hand and in a challenging tone of voice, asked, "Is this for real?" When I asked her what she meant, she continued, "I mean, are we really going to be on the radio? Or is this just some kind of homework assignment or something? Like, are people outside our class really going to be able to listen to us?" I smiled and answered, "Yes."

As I began explaining the concept of web radio broadcasting and the steps involved in creating a radio show, there was a change in Carla's body language and level of attentiveness that I had never experienced in twenty years of teaching. Carla changed from being uninterested and dismissive to being attentive and curious. Until that time, I had thought this was a classroom moment reserved for teachers in Hollywood movies like *To Sir with Love* and *Stand and Deliver*.

As the project developed over the following weeks, Carla took a leadership role. She organized a production group called the DJs, whose five members included other South American

students who spoke English less fluently and accurately than she did and who weren't as familiar with New York City. The focus of their show developed into what to do and see in New York City that was free or inexpensive. Carla became the group leader and expert. Her experience growing up in New York City and her oral fluency were essential to the work the DJs accomplished. Her ability to use English to organize, negotiate, persuade, and explain along with her knowledge of local culture raised her overall profile in the class. Rather than separating from those who spoke English less fluently and comfortably, Carla patiently interacted with them and listened as they began to express themselves with more confidence. Who she was and how she spoke became classroom assets rather than liabilities.

By the time the class was ready to go live on the air, the DJs had produced an entertaining show with strong and original content. A few days following their broadcast, Carla told me that she and another student from the DJs wanted to continue working on radio projects for the Web Radio station. She even asked me if it would be possible for them to have their own show because they wanted to talk about, among other things, the importance of accurate placement and advising at LaGuardia. As she put it, "I'd like to share my experiences so other students don't have to feel so discouraged and experience what I did."

The Radio Web project succeeded because students created program content that relied heavily on discussions within the class and interviews with other faculty, staff, and students out-

side of class. All students, regardless of their level of oral proficiency, found these interactions meaningful, gaining confidence in their writing by transforming their interviews into written reports and ultimately into radio scripts. In this way, they learned to trust their voices and gain an understanding of how language use can vary depending on the purpose and audience. I was able to target grammar and pronunciation instruction using authentic material they created both individually and with their production team.

Everyone benefited from vocal instruction that emphasized using the voice to enhance meaning. While they prepared and practiced for their radio debut, students with more accurate pronunciation helped those who spoke less accurately. In addition, during the required lab hour in the Speech Center, students listened to themselves and to each other, and addressed specific problems related to pronunciation difficulties and vocal expression.

All students were motivated to do their best work because the project involved a real audience outside of the classroom. The novelty and thrill of sitting in a real radio station on the LaGuardia campus and broadcasting to a potential audience around the world made the project come alive, making it relevant to the students and what they care about. In the end, that realness and relevancy motivated the entire class, including Carla, to work together to do creative and meaningful work, and to increase their confidence and strengthen their oral skills while having fun.

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# God, Darwin, and English 102

David Styler, *English*

*But Yahweh God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he answered, "I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?"*

– Genesis 3:9–11

*Lucy,  
blessed among women,  
three million years ago,  
when there were no legends,  
just the loving search  
for dandruff in fur.*

– Miroslav Holub

Writing Through Literature (English 102) is a course that I have taught many times over the years. But in Spring 2006, spurred by the anti-scientific mood of our country, I altered my ordinary approach to the course's canon-based selection of readings. My ambition was to incorporate biological science and the theory of evolution into the syllabus in the hope of creating a true interdisciplinary knowledge base for my students.

As LaGuardia composition faculty are aware, English 102 students produce four essays plus a longer research paper over the course of a semester. Unlike English 101, this successor class stresses literary analysis as the basis for student writing. Typically, students read and write about two or more literary genres, one of which must be poetry. Within these parameters, LaGuardia's English Department accords its faculty wide latitude in the choice of texts as well as teaching styles. In other words, I was free to develop a curriculum that would best present the theory of evolution to a group of mainly non-science majors.

Guiding my course preparation was the assumption that most students came to class with a belief in a religious agency responsible

for creating life on earth, a view amply supported by polls conducted over the last twenty years. In 1982, for example, forty-five percent of the Americans polled by the National Science Board agreed with the statement, "God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years." As reported by Steven D. Verhey of Central Washington University, in 2004, twenty-two years after the NSB poll and despite a nearly twenty-five percent increase in college-educated respondents, fifty-five percent agreed with the CBS/*New York Times* polling statement, "God created human beings in their present form" (Verhey). Given the rise in creationist belief, it is not surprising that a 1997 Gallup poll concluded that over two-thirds of Americans thought "creationism should be taught along with evolution in public schools" (Moore).

With these results in mind, my teaching goal was to prepare my students to address a complex and emotionally charged set of beliefs from a critical perspective strengthened by a variety of readings, films, and writing assignments. Creation stories appealed to me for reasons both practical and philosophical. First, they fulfilled the genre requirement for the short story. Second, creation stories offer evidence that all cultures desire explanations for the origin of the universe and of living things. Finally, a variety of unique stories would prompt writing students to question the predominance of one creation story over another.

During the course of the Spring semester, students were required to read the Greek myths of Prometheus and Pandora, *Genesis*, the Inuit story "Sedna," an Apache and a Pueblo origin story, several African myths, and ten poems related to evolution. Together these imaginative pieces formed a prelude to a series of readings with a scientific orientation toward creation: the final chapter of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, and two essays by Stephen Jay Gould, the late Harvard biologist. Students also

read Lawrence and Lee's play *Inherit the Wind*, the lightly fictionalized account of the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, and viewed the PBS Nova program, "Darwin's Dangerous Idea."

Because I also wanted to know more about my students' attitudes toward evolution and their commitment to religious beliefs, I conducted a pre- and post-survey, the idea for which grew out of my participation in Dr. John Chaffee's Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum seminar. Using a scale ranging from one to four, students responded to the following statements:

- I have a strong religious belief.
- My belief comes from what I have read.
- I consider religion a better guide than science to my understanding of the world.
- I do not believe I will change my mind significantly about my religious beliefs.
- The basis of life on earth is biblical, not biological.
- Evolution as theory is not a valid means to understand life on earth.

A quick analysis of the responses revealed that my students' beliefs were not unlike those surveyed by CBS/*New York Times* and Gallup. Most considered themselves religious; most read and believed religious texts; most did not consider changing deeply held religious beliefs; and most did not believe in evolution.

These results were not surprising; over the course of two decades of teaching, I had become acutely aware that our student population tended to have strong religious affiliations. Only recently, however, have I begun to subject anecdotal observations to systematic pedagogical inquiry. The difficulty of persuading college students to question tightly held anti-evolution positions, especially those formed before entering college, has been studied extensively. "Unless students are engaged at the level of their initial understanding and helped to come to terms with the new information," writes Verhey, "they often simply memorize the new information for the duration of the class."

Verhey's emphasis on active engagement of prior learning is echoed in Matthews' 2001 survey of mixed majors in a general biology course at a New York community college. Testing her thesis that "consideration of students' existing ideas is important for conceptual change to occur" (404), Matthews conducted a statistical study in which students were asked their views before and after a four-week section on evolution. After exposure to a variety of creation myths and scientific texts, her post-surveys showed a slight increase in the acceptance of evolution as a valid explanation for life on earth. Matthews concludes:

*These results support a conceptual-change approach to evolution education. While the teacher is ultimately the agent of scientific enculturation, students should be allowed and encouraged to consider their own existing ideas. . . . the exclusion of discussion of students' existing views about the origin of life from the science classroom has contributed to the failure of traditional evolution education, perhaps even giving students the sense that "a cover-up" exists. Discussion of contrasting creation stories may allow students to critically examine the reasonableness of this explanation, which is based on a belief system and lacks scientific evidence, with the scientific explanation of the origin of life (408).*

Rather than contrasting creation stories as Matthews did in her class, I chose to emphasize thematic similarities, primarily the consistent human desire to explain origins. A central learning objective was that, so guided, my students would perceive these stories as the science of their times, the forerunners of later empirical discoveries. Therefore, prior to our first comparative analysis, students identified likenesses among the geographically disparate creation myths, exploring the universal need for the human race to discover its beginnings. In response to the question, "What do these

origin stories have in common?” several students noted that in both the Greek and Old Testament stories men were unwilling to assume personal responsibility for their actions, blaming everything upon women who lacked “importance and significance.” Another student, not “one for religion” herself, perceived that “back then” she would have nonetheless believed these stories, too, as she would have had little choice to do otherwise. “That is all I would have been exposed to,” she remarked, “...back then, people believed in what they were told. They believed in religion.”

The results of this exercise displayed a compelling thoughtfulness and honest evaluation. Students were learning that these stories had been created and told by human beings for the purpose of demystifying and explaining their environment. While I knew that students would still see their own culture’s story as possessing greater validity, the systematic process of comparative analysis challenged them to view those stories from a more critical perspective.

For some students, Darwin’s scientifically detailed language was difficult to absorb. Nevertheless, the final chapter of *The Origin of Species*, for example, presents a neat summation of Darwin’s findings, and as a primary source, met course requirements. But beyond the science, there was another complexity in Darwin’s thinking that I wanted to share with my students. Anticipating public resistance to his revolutionary idea, Darwin sought to reconcile the theory of evolution with the belief in a Divine Creator:

*I see no good reason why the views given in this volume should shock the religious feelings of any one. . . . A celebrated author and divine has written to me that he has “gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conception of the Deity to believe that He created a few original forms capable of self-development into other and needful forms, as to believe that he required a fresh act of creation to supply the voids caused by the action of His laws” (421–422).*

Intensely dramatized in the assigned viewing of the PBS video *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, Darwin’s struggle between his scientific findings and his religious beliefs presented a moving human conflict with which my students could identify. Indeed, Darwin’s anguish delayed the publication of his master work, and in his ambivalence my students saw a believer who deeply regretted that his fossil discoveries might overturn religious conventions of the nineteenth-century.

Our discussions of the content of creation stories taught me about the depths of my students’ religious beliefs. Most significant, I was learning in greater detail about the ways selected literary works influenced their belief systems. One theory guiding my selection of class readings was that their degrees of difficulty or familiarity, together with their qualities of tone and other literary attributes, would bear significantly upon my students’ acceptance or rejection of implied meaning.

Clearly, detections of these differences in tone and audience are necessary to the appreciation of the ways writers create emotional effects and essential to my teaching goal to explore with my students the relations between a text and personal belief. Distinctions in literary style, if not theory, are nowhere more evident than in a comparison of Charles Darwin and Stephen Jay Gould, whose two essays “The Evolution of Life on Earth” and “Evolution as Fact and Theory” followed our reading of Darwin. In an impassioned manner altogether different from Darwin, Gould makes no bones of his disdain for creation science, eviscerating its arguments without regard to his readers’ sensibilities. For these reasons among others, most students found Gould’s essays more immediate than Darwin’s. “The Evolution of Life on Earth” became our science text, as it recounts the creation of all matter from the Big Bang to bacteria, to the finale of the dinosaurs during the Cretaceous period, and the rise of mammals.

The second essay, “Evolution as Fact and Theory” (analyzed by students in groups as described below), easily dispenses with the defense that evolution is “only a theory,” a position held by creationists (now advocates of

“Intelligent Design”). To summarize briefly, the beauty of Gould’s essay is that he builds upon Darwin’s theory of gradual change by introducing a theory of “punctuated equilibrium” which holds that mass extinctions have occasionally occurred in the half-billion years since multicellular life appeared on earth. In contrast to Darwin’s theory of gradualism, species can undergo evolutionary changes in much shorter time periods following these cataclysmic events. Unlike faith-based epistemologies, evolutionary theory presented by Darwin and Gould is testable science based upon factual evidence – and it is a theory because it is yet being expounded upon.

Once more the assignment for this unit was an essay in comparative analysis. Students compared and contrasted two writings, this time choosing among three options: comparing Darwin’s writings to Gould’s; comparing the two scientists’ writings to *Genesis*; or simply making a case for any one of the writings perceived to be more convincing. Analyzing the power *Genesis* holds for the believer, one of my students, Kwesi, writes:

*For a firm believer in Christ, the idea of a superior creature is not improbable at all. They feel Genesis is the only explainable foundation for creation. Many feel that someone or something of a greater power has to be held accountable for something as complex as the human body and the creation of the world. I think that many people can't fathom the complexity of the human existence or the creation of things past our knowledge such as the solar system. People cannot accept the fact that our existence might just be a series of accidents by nature. That is why I think that many people opposed Charles Darwin.*

Another student, Bertrand, focuses his analysis on the emotional effects of words upon our understanding of the issues:

*Word choices and terminology used to explain the earth's origin and creation process are salient differences between creation and scientific narratives. In Genesis, "In the Beginning," the words used are simple to read and easy to understand because they illustrate and give descriptive examples of the subject and show how each is connected with the subject [of] God and its supernatural forces used to create earth. . . . In contrast, Darwin's and Gould's articles are far more difficult to read because the level of scientific terminology used is more technical and often refers to the subset fields of biology.*

In the second half of the semester, we studied the concept of evolution by way of poetry – shorter readings, considerably lighter tone, and vivid imagery. An example of “evolution poetry” is Helen Ehrlich’s “Two Sonnets,” which suggests that humans have not yet reached a perfected stage of being. Instead, Ehrlich’s sonnets, “Love Song to Lucy” and “Lucy Answers,” place evolution on a continuum that reveals modern humans as but another species in the long line of hominids:

*Your turn will come – time upon time your bones  
Will also sweep the sun, and from the clay  
Strange creatures, on a far and stranger day,  
With eye and hand the primal mind disowns,  
Will find you there among the silvered stones –*

The verses of Ehrlich and other poets provoked no controversy; instead, my students enjoyed the alternative to prose. The poetic devices of allusion, mood, and image formed yet another literary approach to evolution’s premise that we are only the latest genetic descendants of ungainly-looking ancestors.

But the apotheosis of our literary exploration of evolution was reached when we read the play *Inherit the Wind*, which was the focus of both the final essay and the research paper. Condensing themes about human origins that had surfaced in a variety of forms throughout

the semester, the central characters, Henry Drummond and Matthew Brady, represent the two sides of the evolution-creationism debate. I had designed this as an analysis of the conflicting views of creationism and evolution, and in these final assignments I would learn whether my students, particularly those holding strong religious convictions, had been encouraged to critically examine both positions. Had they maintained their pre-existing religious beliefs, or had they opened their perspectives to include other ideas?

As I returned papers and handed out grades on the last day of class, students responded to the post-survey questions about the semester. In the pre-survey, the statement “Evolution as a theory is not a valid means to understand life on earth,” was supported by nearly sixty percent of the class. The post-survey showed a change in this view; now about seventy percent of the class *disagreed* with the claim. Perhaps this reversal in attitudes is best represented by Diana, a Pentecostal Christian, who wrote in one of her final assignments:

*I was against the theory of evolution before I took this class. This made me very skeptical and I even considered dropping the class. I came from a very Christian background where they teach that men and animals...were created by God, so every time I heard anything to do with evolution I would completely shut down. God still created us, but we have been evolving, something I would never have thought before, because I assumed we were created in the image of God.*

Like many others in our class, Diana had tested the limits of her belief. If, through literature, students who would not have previously admitted evolution into their worldview prior to my course now found merging both religion and science into one philosophy acceptable, or allowed the two competing ideas to co-exist in their outlook, then my semester was more successful than I could have hoped.

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# The Ins and Outs of Teaching: Social Identity in an ESL Classroom

Monica Courtney, *The English Language Center*

*Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech.*

– Susan Sontag

Not all silences are the same. Some are reflective and peaceful; others are stubborn, fearful, gripping. As with the spoken word, silence has its nuances and shadings of context and emotion. An instructor of English as a Second Language, I have come to accept the protracted pauses and unforeseen stretches of quiet that can occur in my communication skills classes. Unhurried, these may lead to self-reflection and change, as happened several years ago in one of my high-intermediate ESL classes. On that morning, during a lesson on sexual orientation discrimination, a young gay man's abrupt coming out at first startled, and then stopped the discussion. The brief essay that follows offers my recollection of that morning, addresses the possible transforming effects of silence in a communication skills classroom, and raises a broader question about social identity among our international students.

Differences among languages and communication styles, geographies, politics, or religions can separate cultures from each other, sometimes resulting in conflicting perceptions of race, gender, class, age, appearance, and sexual orientation. For the ESL teacher and learner at LaGuardia, exposure to this unusually wide range of cultural perspectives is particularly relevant. Fortunately, a variety of workshops, common readings, and professional development seminars at our campus continue to support examination of social diversity as it relates to disciplinary teaching and learning. In my case, these opportunities have led to the development of ESL lessons that integrate two primary learning goals: increased competency in the English language and heightened awareness of perceptions of social identity. Topics on diversity can allow critical reflection upon commonly

held cultural assumptions, enliven class discussion, and accelerate language acquisition. Equally significant is the sense of authenticity of communication, especially for those students who speak less openly about ideas and values foreign to their native cultures. Speaking is obviously essential to communication skills; however, silence is as evocative and, at times, as instructive as speech.

In my class, more than any other activity falling under the heading of diversity, the one that introduces the concept of bias based on sexual orientation has aroused the most intense reaction. When presented with information about the pivotal Cracker Barrel 1991 dismissal of employees "whose sexual preferences fail to demonstrate normal heterosexual values" (*USB Today*), students have typically responded in several ways. Some have engaged heatedly with students whose positions are contrary to their own. Others have refused to even consider opposing opinions; and still other students have slipped into a perplexing silence. In exceptional cases, a single response has been a revelation that has altered the class dynamic in ways for which there is no preparation and, perhaps, no words.

My lesson on sexual orientation discrimination follows a simple structure. Groups of students discuss perceptions of homosexuality, considering, for example, the status of homosexuals in their native countries; whether knowledge of someone's homosexuality would change their behavior toward that individual; and if there are occupations that homosexuals should not have. Afterwards, students view a taped segment of *20/20* that presents emotional interviews with the dismissed employees, as well as information about laws concerned with discriminatory hiring practices.

When I have presented the lesson, responses to the preliminary questions have reflected a range of attitudes: "There are no

homosexuals in my country;” “Many people in New York City are gay;” “It’s against my religion;” “Homosexuals should not be allowed to teach young children or to be religious leaders;” “My hairdresser is gay;” “I found out that one of my friends is homosexual.” As I see it, my role as a facilitator is not to express my opinions, but to provide a forum for students to communicate with one another. Expressing views and listening to the views of others should lead to an examination, or re-examination, of personal beliefs.

On this particular morning, many of the students were, as usual, emphatic that homosexuals could be identified by effeminate body language, or distinctive ways of talking and walking. Impatiently, they explained why all homosexuals should be avoided. After enumerating the characteristics of homosexuals, the majority of the class settled into satisfied mutual agreement.

One student, however, sat silently and rigidly among his classmates. Sam was an affable and verbal person who had often socialized with his classmates; many had enjoyed his warmth, humor and ability to draw out even the most reticent individuals. After his initial silence, Sam expressed amazement at his classmates’ certainty that visual cues could definitively identify a homosexual. He wondered if any of those so facile with stereotyping had ever known anyone who was gay. Slightly ashen, his eyes fixed straight ahead, Sam nervously said, “I wonder if any of you ever thought that I am gay.” To barely audible grumbles, whispers, and gasps, Sam continued, “Because *I am gay*.” His words silenced everyone.

Sam talked non-stop for several minutes longer, stiffly upright and looking only at me. His admission was clearly irrevocable, but I remember only snippets of what he said. Distracted, I thought about what to do next. The students seemed restless and began to whisper again, “What did he say?” “Was he joking?” Sam’s interruption was significant for several reasons. First, Sam revealed a covert aspect of his social identity and he did so in English, a language that was not yet natural to him. But

equally significant and authentic was the students’ silence. Whether speaking or not, the language learners were attempting to achieve balance between their cultural identities and a non-native communication style.

As foreign language teachers and students come to recognize, linguistic competency is only part of language acquisition; paralinguistic, or non-verbal, elements of communication are integral to understanding and interpreting the spoken word. For some students, silence is an indication of respect for the teacher/speaker. These groups of learners may respond only when asked to, and even then, from a Western perspective, there is often a considerable period of silence during which the student may be searching for the appropriate words and also trying to comprehend the situation before commenting. Utterances are brief since offering a lengthy or unsolicited opinion could be considered inappropriate. Similarly, whispering among students from shared cultures can be an essential part of forming an opinion and a way to confirm that their views are held in common. Finally, a style of communication considered the norm in the target language may create discomfort among non-native speakers which, if not overcome, may distance them from the target language and force them to rely on more familiar modes of communication.

I did not know if Sam had ever planned to tell his classmates about this part of his life, or if it was his frustration upon hearing their comments that prompted him. No one had ever come out in any of my classes before and I was uncertain about Sam’s ability – or mine – to deal with his classmates’ reactions. Potential repercussions zigzagged through my mind, and I realized that I was worried. Perhaps some of the students would be abusive or threatening, and I wondered if I needed to protect him in some way, or if I could.

The class seemed to fracture into two factions: Sam, who continued talking to me, and his silent classmates. In the hope that Sam’s nervousness would lessen, I gave the class a short break; once resumed, perhaps our discussion could continue in a more inclusive way.

Some students bolted from the room, others lingered, but everything they did, no matter how mundane, assumed a heightened significance. I did not know if the whispered exchanges between those who had remained in the room related to Sam's declaration of identity, or if they were the friendly sharing of stories about life outside the classroom. Nor did I know if students who hurried from the room merely wanted to smoke, get coffee, or create distance between Sam and themselves. In fact, I wasn't entirely sure if Sam's classmates had actually understood what he'd said, or how they had interpreted my silence when he spoke.

In the hallway, I asked Sam how he felt about his classmates' comments and if he was ready to go back to class. Almost too cavalierly, he said their comments had been predictable and that he wasn't very bothered by them. Once the break was over, we returned to our room with the rest of the students, most of whom took their usual seats. But a group of men moved their chairs, jamming them into a part of the room far from Sam. Their silence was impenetrable and ambiguous. I considered asking this separate group about their migration, thereby extending to the whole class an opportunity to discuss any discomfort caused by Sam's revelation, and I thought about asking these men to return to their original positions. But I did neither. I chose instead to accept their silence as I had accepted Sam's coming out, deciding to interpret the gap in communication as passing, one that might eventually be bridged. In the fifty minutes that remained, I opted to say nothing about the repositioned chairs, and simply returned to the lesson. Reluctant at first, the class gradually became involved in the exercises related to the *20/20* video.

For me, this incident initiated a spiraling of questions about how students, particularly for foreign students like Sam, identify themselves. When asked to identify ourselves, what information do we consider important? A self-description might include information about gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, occupation, education, language(s), religion, marital

status, political affiliation, social circle, income, family background, or sexual orientation.

However, context influences identity, and what we emphasize in ourselves varies according to the situation. This variation is particularly true for international students who, in the setting of a new country, may begin to question their identity. As a result, they may adopt new social parameters by which to classify themselves and others. For example, students who enjoyed certain privileges or suffered punishment in their native countries because of family background, marital status, or religion might find that particular aspect of their identity irrelevant in another country. On the other hand, international students who perceive acceptance in the United States of persons belonging to social groups marginalized in their native countries can be confused or angered.

International students need to gain an awareness of the differences in values accorded to the various aspects of social identity by native and non-native cultures if they hope for a successful transition between both. But how do foreign students gain this awareness in the United States? Mass media presents images that my students believe to be accurate until their time spent in the United States proves these images to be exaggerated or false. For many ESL students, their teachers are the only contact they have with someone who is representative of the new culture. As a result, the classroom may be the sole forum in which students are exposed to and can discuss new concepts of socially relevant or irrelevant values, behavior, and beliefs. It was my hope that by presenting an activity on employment discrimination, I could introduce and clarify some of the many variations in cultural perceptions. However, it was apparent that the design and presentation of the lesson needed improvement.

In order to enhance classroom reception of previously unfamiliar variants in social and cultural identity, certain pedagogical choices can be considered. In "Sexual Identity in the ESL Classroom" Cynthia Nelson observes, "In terms of engaging learners and teachers whose experiences and viewpoints are diverse, a focus

on analysis may be more effective than a focus on advocacy” (337). Seen from Nelson’s perspective, my lesson on sexual orientation bias could have been designed as a subset of a broader inquiry-based approach to employment discrimination. In this way, our activity on sexual orientation discrimination may have more readily encouraged greater social sensitivity among students who might recognize that, if perceived as belonging to marginalized ethnic, racial or religious groups, they could also be discriminated against. In addition, guest speakers who promise the immediate “personal contact and interaction” most crucial for behavioral change could have been invited to discuss this topic with the class (Een, 2006). Sam’s revelation provided immediacy, and the uninterrupted silence that followed allowed students time to reflect on their feelings and beliefs – both pivotal to this lesson.

Somewhat tentatively, I entered our next class to see a very relaxed Sam sitting and talking with a small group of classmates. Scattered

throughout the room in their regular places were those students who had literally distanced themselves the day before. For the rest of the semester, Sam and his classmates worked together on projects, discussing various topics without any apparent discord or aversive behavior. It was not clear if they had accepted his homosexuality, or simply compartmentalized this piece of information to avoid contradictory daily interactions with a person they liked.

Possibly students empathized with Sam, sensing his separation from self imposed by his native country, an alienation perhaps familiar to them as they tried to understand cultural norms in New York.

In the end, the evidence that a new sensitivity to diversity had been heightened and social identities recategorized was simple and persuasive. On the final day of class, there was a party celebrating all that had been learned that quarter. The party was given in a small Elmhurst apartment; Sam was the host, and every student in the class was there.

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# Critical Thinking as “Rooted in the Social Principle”<sup>1</sup>

Gary Richmond, *Humanities*

## Introduction: A Generative Conundrum

Teaching in both the Philosophy/Critical Thinking and the Speech Communication areas of LaGuardia’s Humanities Department has allowed me to look at the relationship between thought and language from two deeply related but, at first glance, apparently quite different perspectives: One seemingly valorizes thinking as such, the other language in communication.

However, I increasingly perceive a deep interpenetration of these two perspectives and have even begun to wonder whether in establishing our academic disciplines we may have set up somewhat artificial boundaries separating that which is integral and continuous in thought and language. While it was no doubt historically necessary and, from the practical standpoint, highly useful to establish our myriad separate disciplines, issues of cross-disciplinarity appear to be emerging in several fields including science and education (Cundell 41–48; Nubiola 271–281). Perhaps the most obvious support of a thinking/language division is that there appears to be an “inner world” of intrapersonal communication and an “outer world” which includes the artifacts<sup>2</sup> produced by this inner activity and which may contribute to further critical and/or creative thinking.

In any event, I begin both my critical thinking and oral communication courses examining an ancient riddle in order to introduce what I consider to be the deep inter-penetration of language and thought. I draw an egg and a chicken on the board illustrating the famous conundrum: *Which came first, the chicken or the egg?* Whatever the responses of the students (and some of these can get me into subtle evolutionary and even theological discussions if I’m not careful), we usually reach at least a tentative agreement that we cannot in truth come to any absolutely satisfactory determination as to which came first. We finally admit that one must have a chicken to lay an egg and, conversely, that there must be an egg out of which

a chicken can hatch. In short, we conclude that there is a real generative puzzle here.

I then write *thought* and *language* below my chicken and egg drawings to suggest that these may possibly also be related in this *generative* sense: *Which came first, language or thought?* One student may suggest: “Thinking is first because the thinking *process* has to precede any particular thought or word or phrase.” But thought as such always already involves language even when one is thinking about ‘feelings’ and even as visual and other images are thrown into the semiotic mix. I sometimes reinforce this point by noting that while we can certainly experience a feeling without thought<sup>3</sup> (imagine, say, the pain of a fleck of sand suddenly blowing into your eye before you’ve even thought of the source of that pain), yet we cannot think a single thought without language. Thinking may not be its *sole* purpose, but language is characteristically used to convey thoughts to ourselves, for example, as *reflection*, and to others in *communication*. Even possible exceptions (for example, some expletives) tend to occur within the context of some thought process or event. So my class typically concludes that thinking appears to be language’s primary purpose, that we use language principally to think about and to share our thoughts and feelings about things and events in the world. In short, thinking, if it really qualifies as such, *relies on language in an essential way*. It would appear then that if a student wants to develop her thinking abilities maximally – especially her critical thinking skills – it is of the greatest importance for her to develop as fully as possible her written and spoken language skills.

## Critical Commonsense and the Social Nature of Inquiry

The disciplines and processes needed for the growth of those language competencies at the logical core of our intellectual being are developed near optimally through inquiry-based

projects involving research and writing. Such a research assignment can help a student to develop competencies in actively finding, critically evaluating, and purposefully and creatively using information.<sup>4</sup> It has been my experience that such projects are deepened and socially energized when structured speaking activities are also incorporated into the project, especially near its conclusion, thus giving each student an opportunity to present an oral summary of her findings to the class and to respond to class questions of these findings in a Q&A.

Facilitating disciplined and critical reflection on cultural issues is, I believe, important in developing reasoning skills efficiently and effectively. In my experience these can be impacted to some measurable extent in the course of even a single, well-structured project, while the opportunity to verbalize findings (as well as additional oral and written reflections on the inquiry process itself<sup>5</sup>) enhances the learning experience. Indeed I have found that it can significantly influence the growth of student self-confidence on several intellectual and expressive levels.

It seems to me that the inquiry process is catalyzed, so to speak, when projects involve a principle at the core of Charles S. Peirce's theory of learning which he calls critical commonsense.<sup>6</sup> This is a kind of thinking which, while granting ordinary common sense its due, finds areas where critical analysis and the development of a thoroughgoing *reasonableness* in relation to other people's thinking are considered essential in developing an individual's intellectual capacity or, to put it simply, for *real learning* to occur (de Tienne 37–51). This is basically the procedure of the special sciences where a developed critical method (*viz.*, experimental method) has allowed the physical sciences to progress as far as they have, the fruits of their discoveries leading to the development of such great technologies as those involved in, for example, the creation and evolution of the internet.

I begin discussion of these ideas by considering how, as a first methodological step, Peirce reflects on the fact that we hold some matters to be, as it were, quite certain that we have all

come through our life experiences to see *some* things as veritably “indubitable,” his most famous example being that every rational adult does not doubt that if he were to put his hand into a fire it would be burned (Peirce CP 5.498<sup>7</sup>). No one, except perhaps a very young child, would try inserting her hand into the fire in order to, say, “settle her doubts” in the matter.<sup>8</sup> Peirce extends this notion to suggest that we do something like this when we reach agreement (or quasi-consensus) in such rigorously inductive procedures as those required by the sciences.

Yet, while it is certainly possible for scientists to arrive at consensus in relation to such controlled experiments in a given field, the question for classroom discussion is: How are *we* to reach agreement in less controlled contexts such as those involving decisions to be made by a group of students working as a team on a research project, for example our Symposium Project (see below)? Peirce holds that it is reasonable to imagine that we can indeed reach agreement to some extent when we are able to “look together” at the same data, etc. by employing the equivalent of a *diagram of the relationships of the component parts*, discussing what we can more or less *objectively* see there together.<sup>9</sup> One increasingly familiar approach to this is the use of concept maps, for example, the mind maps at the head of each of the chapters of our primary textbook (Chaffee 2, *passim*). Throughout the course the class explores concept mapping in homework and in-class assignments culminating in their use in a final project which I'll now discuss.

### The Symposium Project

It has seemed important for me to explore approaches which tend towards this ethic of critical commonsense in practice, for example, by considering issue-oriented topics taken up as group projects. In my critical thinking classes I assign a Symposium Project to facilitate this kind of learning. Assuming students have engaged in a sufficient amount of critical collaborative learning involving, especially, analysis-synthesis and group problem solving, some-

what after midterm I introduce them to the concept of critical inquiry as expressing the *social nature* of research (and this involves, not incidentally, the need to triangulate sources – our first collaborators being the authors of the sources themselves).

Each symposium involves (a) a panel discussion on a significant social issue presented before the entire class by a small group of students; preceded by (b) brief comments by each of the panelists summarizing the findings of the paper she or he has researched, written, and submitted to me; and concluding, following the panel discussion itself, with (c) comments and questions from the class. The project requires not only individual *critical thinking* in researching and writing the paper, but also *critical commonsense* as the panelists work together towards creating their own symposium. For example, they discuss how they are going to tie their various separate research topics together, the speaking order for the day of the symposium, the best kinds of questions to stimulate a vital panel discussion when it occurs, etc. Many of these issues are analyzed with the help of individual and group concept maps.

In class we begin to connect this work to broader cultural concerns, for example, that in our tumultuous era the very hope of enjoying a reasonably satisfying and successful life together on this planet may require much more critical thinking and critical commonsense being exercised by many more people. As we “look together” at the facts regarding such

pressing ecological concerns as global warming, among others, the challenge is for students to begin to see that critical commonsense is involved in being responsible citizens. In this way we may hope to create together the conditions bringing about positive change in our communities and, perhaps, in society more generally. This can only occur as more fully developed critical thinking is exercised wherever it seems important for any one of us to do so, for example, whenever an individual is called upon to responsibly do her part in support of a group project in a class at LaGuardia or, beyond the borders of academic life, in a community of which she is a member.

As my students strive to meet the challenge of developing critical commonsense in the classroom, they seem to become in the process more reasonable and less dogmatic in their discussions with each other. This suggests to me that the expression of critical commonsense is both a means and a sign of their exercising critical thinking in ways leading to improved communication. Naturally I hope they will extrapolate this kind of behavior into their lives far beyond the classroom. In truth I would like to imagine that when critical commonsense is valued it has the potential of benefiting not only individuals but also their communities, perhaps even society as a whole. This can happen because, as Peirce observed, not only language but reason itself is “rooted in the social principle” (Peirce CP 2.654).

## NOTES

1. The phrase is Charles S. Peirce’s, American logician and scientist, the founder of philosophical pragmatism which in its classical form is best represented by him, William James, and John Dewey, and in our own time is *misrepresented* by the “vulgar pragmatism” of Richard Rorty (Haack 182–202).
2. For simplicity’s sake I refrain from introducing visual thinking into this discussion except to note that in the semiotic division of signs into icons, indexes, and symbols, a visual image can be any one of these (Sebeok 1–7).
3. Feelings in themselves are not essentially “rational” – that is, they don’t require thought as such (although they certainly may be effected by thought and/or effect it).

4. These information literacy skills are emphasized by both the ALA and AASL (Stripling, *passim*). There is a growing awareness of the importance of such literacies not only in college but also for life-long learning. To address some of these issues Charles Keyes, Edna Boris, Michele Piso and I are developing the Building Information Literacy in the Disciplines (BILD) seminar series within the LaGuardia's *Center for Teaching and Learning*.
5. This "thinking about thinking" constitutes almost a definition of critical thinking (Chaffee1, *passim*).
6. For a general discussion of the topic see my paper, "Trikonc Analysis-Synthesis and Critical Commonsense on the Web" (Richmond 158–161).
7. CP refers to the *Collected Papers* of Peirce. The number before the dot is the volume number followed by the paragraph within that volume. For example, CP 2.232 refers to volume 2, paragraph 232.
8. As learning may be through experience or reasoning – that is, be external or internal – this example is not sufficiently representative of all the kinds of indubitable ideas we might and indeed do have.
9. Peirce holds that *all* thinking – so, for example, even reading this sentence – involves a kind of diagram observation.

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# Connecting through and to Stories

Felicia Rose, *The English Language Center*

*Discussing stories helps us connect with others and create community. When we do so, we may be surprised by what we share.*<sup>1</sup>

Written by a student in my intermediate-level English language acquisition reading class, the above quotation reveals a fundamental desire underlying my teaching: I want to guide my students across divisions toward connections with one another and with literature. Age, time, language, culture, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, socio-economic situation, and fear of the unknown – these categories can divide us, separating us into groups and places that feel familiar and safe. But divisions into the safe and familiar may also limit our chances to experience understanding and connection.

As a teacher, my emphasis on helping students to discover connections stems from various observations. First, language learning and reading both require the strengthening of conceptual connections on many levels. Reading ability (whether in a native or non-native language) is improved by relating schemata from previously acquired knowledge structures to a new context or task. Extensive background knowledge facilitates textual understanding; in other words, by drawing upon social, cultural, literary, and philosophical schemata to construct meaning, the sophisticated language learner compensates for gaps in specific linguistic knowledge (i.e., structure and vocabulary). Unfamiliar grammatical forms and vocabulary are then more easily decoded.

Second, readers who perceive links between their own experiences and ideas and those expressed in stories are motivated to engage more deeply with the texts and each other. And in doing so, they progress both in their reading and in verbal communication of ideas. But I have a third reason, admittedly political, for encouraging students to seek relatedness. As they learn to see how their own thoughts, emo-

tions, and experiences connect with those of others, they become not only more accomplished language learners and readers, but also more empathic citizens of our interdependent world.

My approach to fostering these cognitive and cultural connections has been influenced by Edward Said, for whom the value of integration is central as it prompts the reader “to read philologically in a worldly and integrative, as distinct from separating or partitioning mode and, at the same time, to offer resistance to the great reductive and vulgarizing us-versus-them thought patterns of our time” (Said 50). While not asking my students to ignore difference, I try to increase their awareness of the dynamic and multifaceted ways in which individuals, cultures, and histories connect. Understanding the concept of integration, they can challenge the belief that cultures, languages, and identities are static, monolithic, and disparate with the more nuanced view that these structures are dynamic, complex, and intertwined. In sum, one of my primary teaching goals is to increase opportunities for students to consider how they connect – within a text or in their own lives – experiences and ideas that may at first appear unrelated. A rich resource for the practice of this skill is the short story.

A typical semester in my class includes several short stories, for example William Maxwell’s “What He Was Like,” John Steinbeck’s “The Chrysanthemums,” and “The Bridegroom” by Ha Jin. In Maxwell’s story, a daughter deals with the shock she experiences upon reading the journals of her recently deceased father. This semester, we approached the narrative by forming general questions about reasons for keeping journals, as well as about the ethics of reading the journals of the deceased. Students reflected upon the consequences of sharing all of our feelings, fantasies, attractions, and experiences with an intimate partner, which lead to further questions about

differences between public persona and inner life. They wanted to know if “bad” fantasies make us “bad,” whether journals reflect permanent emotions, momentary truths or both, and what they would do in a similar situation.

Directed by their preliminary questions, the students reflected more directly upon the specifics of the story, imagining the details possibly revealed by the father in his journals, judging the morality of the daughter who read them, and predicting the consequences of having done so. In the course of the discussion, students shared a deep interest in the questions and discovered many similarities in experience and idea with classmates from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Several, for example, shared the experience of privacy violated by parents who read their journals.

Students were required to keep a journal as a way to practice English and further the overall objective of the course of integrated thinking. On the second day of class, those willing to reveal some of their journal entries discovered that what they had written often reflected similar themes – friendship, romantic love, competing loyalties to family and self, loneliness, anger at parents, and concern about the future. Another commonality among the students was that many had actually kept a journal at some point in their lives.

A specific example of the course’s emphasis on engaging across difference was a journal assignment to write from the perspective of someone in their eighties. In this particular class, most students were between eighteen and twenty-five; the oldest was in her mid-thirties. By projecting their current lives into an imaginary future, they could reflect upon the concerns and experiences of people who are aged. Later, when we discussed our entries, we saw that the themes we held in common were, once again, family, love, achievement, and regret. And like the father in Maxwell’s story, students too wrote about their fears of death. Prompted by their journal reflections, students established deeper connections not only to their imagined future selves, but also to older people, other students, and literature.

Steinbeck’s “The Chrysanthemums,” like Maxwell’s story, is characterized by language accessible to the comprehension levels of the non-native English students in my class. Equally important, its theme of conflicting desires for security and freedom resonates for students living far from home, as reflected in the following journal entries:

*Elisa Allen’s [the protagonist] life is very protected. She doesn’t have to worry about basic things such as enough food or a comfortable place to live...but her life is boring for her. For a while, she has the fantasy of being like the traveling repairman who lives in his wagon and has many adventures...This situation gave me a lot to think about. My life is filled with stress. I dream of having a safe life. But I also like adventure. That’s why I came to the U.S. to study...It’s a beautiful idea to write about this conflict...I will return to this story many times...It is a story that’s close to my heart.*

*Elisa Allen wants to be free, but at the same time she’s afraid. What is better, to have a life under the stars, but sometimes without dinner or a boring life with many comforts? This is something I am struggling with here in New York. Sometimes I really like being here, but other times I want to go back to Korea where things are more familiar to me. I miss the comforts of home.*

*She [Elisa Allen] demonstrates the desire to know a typically masculine way of life, but her wish is not fulfilled...In all this I see the historical conflict between men and women where, unfortunately, women of great sensitivity and fine intelligence do not have the economic independence to express their talents...As a man, I try to understand what this situation has been like for so many women.*

In the first two entries, the writers identify with Steinbeck’s protagonist Elisa Allen; they, too, struggle to balance adventure and security.

The writer of the third entry, a young man, sympathetically defines Elisa Allen's unfulfilled desire as a "masculine way of life," and tries to imagine what it would feel like to be a woman whose potential has been suppressed. During their discussion of "The Chrysanthemums," these young men and women from different parts of the world acknowledged that conflicts previously considered private were familiar to everyone.

But not all of the stories we read promised sympathetic connections. An example of narrative as potential obstacle is Ha Jin's "The Bridegroom" through which runs the theme of homosexuality. Set in China, the story is about a homely young woman, Beina, ostensibly heterosexual, and Baowen, the handsome young homosexual man whom she marries. Anticipating some students' feelings of disconnect from the narrative, I wondered how to suggest connections between the characters in the story and students' own experiences. How could students for whom the theme of homosexuality might be foreign, perhaps even anathema, avoid the "us-versus-them thought pattern" warned against by Said, and arrive instead at empathetic connection?

With the goal of these connections in mind, I scaffolded questions prompting students to examine first their own beliefs and values, and then to consider how these might relate to or differ from the experiences and emotions of "The Bridegroom." In lively conversation, they identified the qualities most desirable in an intimate partner, commenting along the way upon specifics of love, money, status, beauty, education, sexual compatibility, gender, shared values, and similarity of interest. Students clearly enjoyed describing the factors of family, education, religion, television, tradition, personal eccentricities, and friends that contributed to shaping their values and perspectives.

When appropriate, I highlighted the similarities underlying the students' apparently disparate responses. For instance, one student wanted a partner who shared her religion, while for another student shared political views mattered most. During discussion and questions,

these two students eventually agreed that both desired to be with someone who shared certain important values. When asked which factors may have contributed to shaping their preferences, both responded that the values they had absorbed while growing up contributed in large measure to their current beliefs.

Question and reflection: together these techniques created the links between students' interests, values, experiences and Ha Jin's story. Questioning the ways our lived experiences often differ from or even contradict the narratives we shape about ourselves, we could then reflect more closely upon the ways the cultural factors implied in the story may have shaped the narrator's antipathy toward his son-in-law Baowen. The following journal entry is an example of the revelatory power of questioning:

*Old Cheng [the narrator of the story] says things that seem so traditional. He wants his adopted daughter Beina to get married and have children. But why didn't he ever have any of his own children? Why did he promise Beina's father, his close friend, that he'd take care of Beina after he [the friend] died? Do you think that Old Cheng and his friend were closer than Old Cheng admitted? Do you think Old Cheng didn't have any of his own children because he never had sex with his wife?*

Although "The Bridegroom" does not provide enough evidence to answer these questions, they are worth asking for the light they shed on a possible connection between the narrator and Baowen, a link possibly implied by the author but left unrecognized by the central characters.

For homework, students explored Baowen's conflict between his desires and the mores of his society, and then identified situations in which their own desires might be at odds with those society deems acceptable. The four responses below succeed in finding connections to the story:

*Almost everyone in the story, including Baowen himself, displays a shocking, near superstitious ignorance of homosexuality...The author wants to show a conflict between society's values and individual preference. I experienced this sort of situation when I decided to study archeology in my native country, but my parents and high school teachers thought I should study something that would be more practical (I think they meant it would pay more money). I felt very alone in my choice. But then I decided it was what I really wanted to do, so I did.*

*Whenever I visit Thailand [the student's native country], I feel so different there. And then when I'm in the U.S. I feel like I don't fit in here either... I'm like Baowen. In many ways, I feel like an outsider in society.*

*When I was reading this story I was very shocked because the matter of homosexuality is very strange for me...But on the other hand, reading this story gave me the opportunity to think about the matter of homosexuality and social values. I think members of society make social values, and citizens live in the boundary of values and rules that they make. Baowen was raised in his society, so he accepted its values and thought of him-*

*self as a sick man because of his homosexuality...Do we have to accept the values of our society just because we live there? I was a psychiatric nurse in Korea, so I had the chance to notice that a lot of people that society called "crazy" just didn't fit into society's ideas of "normal."*

*In the town I'm from in Mexico, it was common (almost expected) that the youngest son in the family would be gay. Personally, I don't mind sharing a bed with a woman or a man. Still, I try to understand what Baowen's life is like, since he comes from a society that doesn't have that value.*

Even those who had apparently thought little about homosexuality before reading "The Bridegroom" learned that they could relate to Baowen's experience of having desires antithetical to those sanctioned by society. Regardless of sexual preference, all of the students in my class responded to the theme of romantic love. By focusing on these more deeply structured similarities in emotion and experience, many students began to blur or even erase the lines between "us" and "them." And in doing so, they strengthened their rapport with one another, and came to understand more deeply a character to whom at first glance they may have felt little or no connection.

## NOTE

1. The student quotations included in this article have been revised collaboratively by the student writers and the instructor to make them conform to the rules of Standard English.

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# History as Wonder and Connection

Christina Stern, *Social Science*

Many years ago, on the first night of a class in medieval history, our professor opened the semester by turning off the lights. Burning candle in hand, she moved to the center of the room, and whispered, “History is the act of communing with ghosts. To become a historian you must listen to the spirits of those who lived long ago.”

This was a dramatic beginning to a course. The professor startled us with the revolutionary idea that history can be intriguing, even mysterious. Over the decades, the field has become even more compelling, enriched by a multiplicity of perspectives – social history, women’s studies, environmental history, and postmodern theories – and today’s scholars study a fascinating array of topics, from the history of families and children to the histories of emotions like anger and cheerfulness.

Yet it would appear that outside of academia many people are not aware of these innovations. In my U.S. History and Western Civilization survey classes, I find that most students still associate history class with memorizing dates, long lists of them. To these skeptics, history is an endless narrative, occasionally interrupted by events both tedious and irrelevant to their lives. A discouraging picture, yes – but at the same time, this scenario presents a dynamic pedagogical challenge: How *does* one design a history class that will spark the curiosity of even the most alienated student?

There is no single answer to this central question. The teacher’s task is to find ways to draw the student into the lives of those who lived decades, centuries, or thousands of years earlier. Like the professional historian equipped with a repertoire of analytical skills and a personal capacity for empathy, the student’s task is to practice *thinking historically*, opening portals to the past to look into the lives of fellow humans – an ancient Mesopotamian woman, a nineteenth-century factory worker, a suffragette of the Progressive era: Who were these

individuals? What did they see and hear and feel? What influences shaped their lives? What experiences motivated their actions? At its heart, the study of history is the humanist’s quest, an imaginative traveling through time to discover the sensual, cultural, and psychological realities of earlier human beings and their societies. To make these connections across time and space, the student historian learns to “listen” to the voices preserved by primary sources – art, artifacts, and written documents ranging from law codes and letters to excerpts from diaries and literary works.

In LaGuardia’s Social Science Department, the primary source approach is fundamental to teaching and learning. Recently enhanced by “smart” classrooms outfitted with Internet-ready computers, projectors, and large screens, these rooms enable instructors and students to access and share a rich selection of reproductions of historical art, photos of archaeological sites, and excerpts from primary documents. With the increasing availability of digital-based media, it is simpler than ever to afford students multiple and sometimes spontaneous opportunities to encounter diverse geographies, thinkers, writers, and artists.

But availability of sources is one thing; *interpretation* of sources is a classroom challenge of a different order. In his provocative book *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (2001), Stanford professor Sam Wineburg explores the complexities of teaching historical interpretation. Historical inquiry, in Wineburg’s view, is neither natural nor easy; at times less focused on answers than on the process of creating fruitful questions, it may feel murky or uncomfortable. Posing hypothetical or tentative conclusions, Wineburg’s historian is an “expert at cultivating puzzlement,” one who “generate[s] a road map” of questions leading to fresh insights about the subject (21). In his emphasis on “cultivating puzzlement,” Wineburg echoes the recommendations of the

medieval historian Caroline Walker Bynum. In her 1997 address to the American Historical Association, Bynum suggested that “our job as teachers is to puzzle, confuse, and amaze” and to “rear a new generation of students who will gaze in wonder” at history’s artifacts and texts (26). Both Wineburg and Bynum champion the use of primary sources in the classroom, particularly those that highlight history’s complex nature.

Encouraged to read actively from a set of Lincoln’s speeches and letters, for example, students can discover for themselves the contradictory ideals that were part of nineteenth century American history. In my own experience, the use of visual objects can spark interest in an unfamiliar topic: the mystery of an Egyptian sphinx, a medieval gargoyle, a bold modernist painting, or a provocative political cartoon are particularly helpful when modeling for students forms of thinking, interpreting, and questioning historically: What clues can we detect in these historical artifacts? How can we interpret them to understand better the people who made them? How can we relate the meanings of the images to the meanings of the texts from the same era? As they prepare to present their own hypotheses about the historical significance of these artifacts, students realize that thinking historically requires thinking creatively.

Questioning, then, leads to discovery; students in my Western Civilization class are surprised by the material conditions of earlier pre-industrial eras, expressing shock, dismay, and genuine concern when they learn that until recently average life spans were half their own. Life without antibiotics and aspirin? No anesthesia? No dentistry? Women dying in childbirth? Many students are absolutely aghast. Teaching us “to go beyond our brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we have been born, history educates (‘leads outward’ in the Latin) in the fullest sense” (Wineburg 24). If animated by the wonder and mystery of lives remote from her own “fleeting moment,” the student historian who reads ancient primary sources, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, for example, or *The Iliad*, will under-

stand more deeply why themes of loss, suffering, fear of death, and the search for spiritual meaning have inspired so many works of literature over the ages.

Forming and pursuing questions encourages students to see themselves as independent and active learners. At the beginning of each semester in my Western Civilization and U.S. History classes, I introduce the interdisciplinary nature of history with an exercise that requires small groups of students to answer one of the following questions: What is the meaning of existence? Why is there violence in the world? Why has there been so much war over the centuries? Why, historically speaking, do men usually have more power than women? How did humans come to exist? What happens after we die? In U.S. History classes I may also ask: Do humans want freedom? What does it mean to be American?

Controversial and without definitive answers, these questions lead students to reflect upon heroism and compassion, callousness or cruelty, freedom or tyranny, and point toward a variety of disciplines - psychology, sociology, philosophy, science, and religion. In the next session, each group makes an informal presentation, and we discuss their responses with the entire class. At this stage, students recognize that their questions have elicited not consensus but a spectrum of responses of increased complexity and purpose. In the end, the class is better prepared for the next, and essential, step of forming independent questions and challenging their own formerly held assumptions about a range of issues, including the most sensitive like gender and religion.

The goal of this activity is to show that tough and tricky questions about human nature require a multidisciplinary approach vital to meaningful reflection and analysis. On the whole, students enjoy the intellectual challenge posed by these questions, and many will begin to reference ideas from other classes, thus embracing a multidisciplinary framework and highlighting broader questions to be revisited throughout the term. For example, a particularly favorite reference is Plato’s *Allegory of the*

*Cave*, often first encountered in critical thinking and philosophy courses. Removed from modern life by over two thousand years, Plato's emphasis on the power of human thinking resonates with many LaGuardia students. One of the many rewards of teaching an introductory course in Western Civilization is the opportunity to share history's rich philosophical traditions with students energized by discovering the connections between the *Allegory* and Hippocrates, Thucydides, and other Greek writers.

Similarly, in my U.S. History and Western Civilization II classes, I find that many students are attracted to the Enlightenment thinkers of the late 1700s - those writers who dare their readers to ask troubling questions. Few experiences are more exhilarating than reading Voltaire's stirring pleas for religious tolerance or Thomas Paine's defense of individual conscience or Mary Wollstonecraft's argument that women have the right to an education. Reading these original documents, students experience momentous ideas and their consequences more directly, as they begin to connect Enlightenment thought to the political and social revolutions that have shaped our modern lives.

One of my favorite examples of the transformative power of thinking historically centers on a student, Raymond. A father in his thirties, Raymond was an exceptional student in my Western Civilization II course - energetic and engaged in almost every discussion. One day, after we had completed the chapter on the nineteenth-century social thought of Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, Raymond stayed to tell me how much he enjoyed this particular period of knowledge. Since childhood, he had wrestled with questions about politics, philosophy, and religion. "Always a thinker, always a bit skeptical," was how he described himself. His parents, however, were not happy with their son's analytical inclinations; his mother ridiculed his ideas and punished him as a child for saying "crazy things."

But for Raymond the study of history had been liberating. In particular, he enjoyed the Enlightenment philosophers and the nine-

teenth-century thinkers who urged critical thinking. After years of enduring insults from family and friends, he found a safe place to discuss his questions about politics, religion, and society, and he was surprised to see that throughout history others shared his reservations about hierarchical forms of authority. Raymond appreciated Marx's critiques of the economic structure, and sympathized with Nietzsche's views on religion. "I take this class," he wrote:

*and I learn that not only is it okay to ask my questions but there's a whole group of people throughout history who have done just that, and they're considered the great minds. With this last group [the nineteenth-century thinkers], it's like I found my soul mates or something. You have no idea how happy this class has made me.*

A few semesters later, Raymond told me he had followed up by taking more liberal arts classes and hoped to become a high school teacher. Although Raymond's story is one of the more memorable, many students over the years have shared similar experiences.

Wonder. Humanism. Empathy. Contemporary scholarship on the teaching of history abounds in terms that accentuate discovery and amazement. In generating student excitement in the history class, primary sources play a pivotal role. "As teachers, we must astonish and be astonished" (Bynum 26). Voltaire, Marx, and Nietzsche spoke directly to Raymond, astonishing him with the immediacy and catharsis of nineteenth-century ideas that have meaning in his twenty-first century New York life. Direct engagement with primary documents - with the ideas and values of his "soul mates," Bynum's "spirits of those who lived long ago" - liberated Raymond, opening him to the reality of the past, challenging him to construct his own historical and social interpretations, and prompting him to question the complexities of his present.

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# The Diadoumenos' Buns

Barbara Comins, *English*

"He looks like he needs glasses," quips one student, gazing at the young Florentine who stands with one hand on his hip, the other pressing the spine of an almost closed book against a table top so that the book stands upright. He marks his place with an index finger. Slightly wall-eyed, the young man seems at once to be staring back at us, and also looking at Michelangelo in the portrait hanging in the corner across the floor. Would he have benefited from eyeglasses? Were they invented, and were they available where he lived? We wonder about the book he is reading. Was it printed on a moveable-type press? He is clad all in black, a color favored by many New Yorkers, and his jacket has stylish slits "like my jeans," says one student. The Renaissance comes alive for these students in my Humanism, Science, and Technology (LIB 200) class as they view and brainstorm potential research questions related to Bronzino's *Portrait of a Young Man* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

During the same visit, students enter the space of a Renaissance man, *the Liberal Arts Studiolo from the Ducal Palace at Gubbio*, a small study with illusionary perspective *trompe l'oeil* wooden intarsia panels depicting shelves filled with books, musical instruments, a compass, an hourglass, as well as pieces of armor – objects which signify the attributes of the fifteenth century Duke Federico da Montefeltro (Radista et al. 35). How do these objects depict the desirable qualities of an educated and accomplished Renaissance man? What emblems might contemporary liberal arts students choose as symbols of education and accomplishment if they were to construct a modern *studiolo*?

While today's general marketplace might require increasing specialization of the worker, the world also needs those who can travel across disciplinary boundaries and analyze information from multiple fields to understand and solve human problems. Those who can see

connections across disparate fields and apply them in global ways can be the trailblazers, discoverers, innovators who will build our future.

The scholarship of teaching and learning advocates bridging the artificial constructs of intellectual boundaries between disciplines. "It's the boundaries themselves that are dumbing us down," writes Louis Menand (14). In shedding light on interdisciplinary learning communities, Phyllis van Slyck points out the value and "the intellectual benefits of showing students that it is almost impossible to research, understand, or write about a work of literature, a moment in history, a global scientific or technological problem, without exposure to a number of disciplinary perspectives" (167). As a cellist and English professor, I began these border crossings in my courses years ago. Guiding students through disparate fields is a natural part of my pedagogy in teaching English composition and elective courses in addition to the capstone liberal arts course "Humanism, Science and Technology." My courses chart routes that cross disciplinary boundaries, enabling students to embark on life-long intellectual journeys.

Launching their multidisciplinary research paper projects, students in my section of Writing through Literature (English 102) view Edward Hopper's painting *Nighthawks*, listen to Ives' piece *The Unanswered Question*, and read Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean Well-Lighted Place." Frequently anthologized in texts for freshman composition courses, Hemingway's short story can be the well-worn subject of humdrum writing assignments. Reading this work in light of other twentieth-century artistic productions invigorates the research process. Students become authorities who read, view, and listen, discovering connections among the story, painting, and musical composition. The result is a richer understanding of the story as well as the zeitgeist of the time period in which it was written.

Effective scaffolding of activities – reading, viewing, and listening – are crucial to the assignment’s success. Students first engage in a close reading of Hemingway’s story, examining this tale of a lonely old man who has recently failed an attempt at suicide and seeks refuge from existential loneliness by frequenting a café late at night. Students compare the attitudes of the two waiters who discuss the elderly patron behind his back; the older is sympathetic and the younger resents keeping the café open late because he is eager to return home to his wife.

Students then view Edward Hopper’s painting *Nighthawks*. They seem fairly visually oriented, able to do a close reading of the painting, analyzing its relatively somber colors, stark lines, and its subject matter – a couple, an isolated man with his back to the viewer, and a waiter at a café late at night. One student recognizes that the scene places the viewer outside the café on the deserted street. Students then complete a “low-stakes” writing assignment, describing the painting and relating the painting to elements of Hemingway’s story.

Crossing into music, students listen to Charles Ives’ piece for solo trumpet, winds, and strings. After the initial hearing, one student comments, “It sounds like movie music.” Though students have noted elements in the lines, composition, and colors of Hopper’s depiction of the scene at the late-night diner presenting a theme of loneliness and isolation, their first response to hearing the Ives piece is the reductive “movie music” statement. This comment, one that students have made in other classes upon exposure to classical music, signals that they need help picking out salient elements in the music. I hum the trumpet’s arching five-note motif, so they can listen for its iterations as they hear the piece again. I then ask, “If the trumpeter’s five-note motif is the question, what is it asking and what kind of answer does it get?” On a second hearing, one student says that the trumpet sounds as though it is asking, “Why do human beings suffer?” Other students note that the woodwind instruments respond to the trumpet’s motif with

“gossiping”-like chatter, cacophony that does not satisfactorily answer the trumpet’s query. Students think about the relationship between Ives’s piece and Hemingway’s story. Several feel that the sole trumpeter in the music is like the lonely old man in the story who attempts to drown his deafness and isolation with alcohol. Exploring “texts” in different media – literature, painting, and music – students discover similar underlying themes or emotions and are able to articulate well-substantiated observations.

In Hemingway’s story, one of the waiters at the café recites the Lord’s Prayer, replacing key words with the Spanish word *nada*, nothing. Tracing the rapid changes that occurred in twentieth-century America, some students are able to draw conclusions about how and why a tone of loneliness and malaise pervades these three works. They find resonances among the nihilism expressed by the older waiter’s distorted prayer and the old man’s desperate loneliness in Hemingway’s story, the seemingly disconnected and disaffected people in Hopper’s diner, and the sole trumpet player in Ives’ music. Students begin to trust their ability to make their own observations about works they have read, viewed, and heard, and then extrapolate broader conclusions about modern America. They substantiate their conclusions with evidence drawn from the three works, producing lively, engaged papers.

Curiosity is a bold border-crosser. All disciplines are its destinations. The question is its passport. Students’ questions, reactions, observations about a work of art, a piece of music, a text constitute an ideal passport to inquiry, an occasion for research. If students view the research paper as merely a pre-set itinerary to construct a mosaic of words from the ideas of “authorities” found in libraries or through Internet sources, the results will be lifeless and engagement in learning almost nil. But having contact with art and exploring art through different disciplines changes their horizons.

Interdisciplinary assignments move students towards deeper understanding as they stretch their critical thinking skills and chart the crossroads among various fields. Reflecting upon

works of art and music in conjunction with literature or aspects of science and technology can help students become engaged, active, life-long learners who are prepared to further pursue various avenues of inquiry and draw conclusions from many diverse sources. Critical thinking across disciplinary boundaries develops the agility of mind needed to keep up with the rapid changes in the workplace and in the world. And I, through these multidisciplinary excursions become a traveler, too, a learner still.

Ultimately, multidisciplinary excursions link learning with pleasure – the pleasure of literature, art, and music. That pleasure is apparent as my Humanism, Science, and Technology students behold the famous *Kouros* statue in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Greek Galleries. He steps forward, eyes set straight ahead; his is

a world of idealized forms, proto-Euclidean space, with his squared shoulders, his head's "front and side planes [that] meet at right angles," and the two smooth semi-orbits of his derrière (Norris 76). Students marvel at his ornate bands of beadlike locks that remind them of their own intricately multi-braided hairstyles. Next, they view another unclothed youth, the *Diadoumenos*, a Roman marble copy from the first century AD of the Greek sculptor Polykleitos' bronze statue of the fifth century BC (Norris 127). Clear afternoon sunlight pours over his developed muscles, more anatomically molded than those of the *Kouros*. Two female students, slender, clad in jeans, their hair long, dark and free, sidle around the figure, admiring him. One smiles when her classmate says, "Nice buns!"

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# My ePortfolio Journey: Reflections on Praxis

Max Rodriguez, *Education and Language Acquisition*

My journey began approximately seven years ago, in the midst of the third decade of my career teaching modern language and literature at LaGuardia Community College. LaGuardia's ePortfolio project inaugurated this journey. An electronic portfolio is a multimedia collection of artifacts, assembled over several semesters, that shows student learning together with personal and professional development. ePortfolio has the feel of published text; therefore, it engenders dedication, skill development, and creativity. It has a central theme that emerges as students reflect about their own identities and their professional and career goals. Furthermore, its public nature addresses important questions about the selection of materials and the connections that exist between learning and the acquisition and generation of useful knowledge. The ePortfolio has become the engine behind a transformational experience which has benefited students and my teaching in ways I did not anticipate.

The decision to integrate ePortfolio into my classes occasioned the reevaluation of three courses I teach every year: The Puerto Rican Community: A Minority Group Experience (ELN194); Introduction to Bilingualism (ELN101); and Humanism, Science, and Technology (LIB200), a capstone course for Liberal Arts majors. I needed to determine where and how I might incorporate ePortfolio in my sections, while remaining faithful to the subject matter and goals of these courses, a task that took several semesters. The reevaluation of the course syllabi, assignments, and class projects in a digital environment led me to subscribe to a new mantra, *less is more*. Creating a venue for students to consider their own educational process, the ePortfolio promotes reflective thinking and academic growth in ways that are immediate and tangible.

As I learned to incorporate new technologies into my pedagogy, I reflected upon which assignments might be more suitable for the

ePortfolio and considered ways to redesign and create new ones for my courses. In a typical semester in which I teach three sections and work with seventy-five to ninety students, redesigning and/or creating new assignments is a formidable task that requires reviewing weekly assignments in these writing-intensive urban studies and capstone courses. The prospect of reconsidering some assignments forced me to rethink assumptions about my own teaching practice and its relationship to the subject matter.

The process of rethinking my courses made me aware that an element missing from my pedagogy was a rubric describing the criteria by which student work would be evaluated thereby drawing a relationship between a grade and demonstrations of learning. The public nature of the ePortfolio helped to crystallize the need for more transparency in the classroom. At this point, I discovered a new conceptual frame that permits students and instructors to agree on the rules of engagement before the work begins.

The emphasis on transparency brought me to a slippery slope. After many years developing my teaching practice, I felt some insecurity. Fortunately, I was joined and supported in my exploration by the LaGuardia ePortfolio team, as well as members of a faculty seminar that focused on best practices in the development of ePortfolios. My colleagues were very supportive and encouraging every time I shared with them a new or modified assignment. During this time, I realized not only the value, but also the necessity of having a professional learning community to validate or negate my ideas. Discussions about what worked and did not work with particular assignments became essential to my ability to revise them. I had formerly approached teaching as a solitary enterprise, subscribing to the standard that professors work with students in their classrooms, plan lessons, and grade exams and papers by

themselves. Membership in a professional learning community empowered me to try new ideas, dispel the angst failure sometimes brought about, and stimulated me to continue to explore ways to enhance my practice.<sup>1</sup>

As I worked with students on the development of their ePortfolios, I observed important changes in student learning. I realized that students were not only grasping concepts that had been difficult for previous individuals but they were retaining them far longer than in previous semesters. That observation steered me to question the reason for my students' apparent new gains. Upon further investigation, students reported spending more time completing writing assignments and thinking about how each lesson was part of a larger whole; their ePortfolio now included work from other courses they were taking that semester and courses they had recently completed.

The experience of one student in *The Puerto Rican Community: A Minority Group Experience* is characteristic of the learning process engendered by the use of ePortfolios. Juxtaposing familiar material with readings and class discussions prompted her to write:

*The subject matter of the class would otherwise not intrigue me, mainly because history is not a topic I choose to explore for entertainment, but once I began to add to previous knowledge and to explore the topic in more detail I became more and more interested.*

This student felt engaged and eager to further explore topics in the course because the ePortfolio allowed her to connect areas of knowledge in a new way, helping her and others to see course work as part of a larger opus. The ePortfolio also makes student learning more visible, motivating learners to be more thoughtful about assignments that they may expect to be viewed by a larger Web audience of peers, professionals, and faculty. An awareness of target readers also helps students to shape their voices.

Most profoundly, the ePortfolio project increased my regard for the role of reflection in learning. Miles Kimball points out that "...neither collection nor selection [of artifacts] are worthwhile learning tasks without a basis in reflection" (451). A student in *Humanism, Science, and Technology*, in which we explore the concept of discovery, made the following comment in her reflection essay about course content and use of the ePortfolio:

*For me, this course is like a prism, which joins together and reflects different fields of knowledge, thus enabling me to see separate pieces of information as a whole. It offers a synthetic point of view that helps to develop a large picture of the world we live in. I think that it is crucial, at this stage of my education, to be able to perceive things in a wider perspective and not be closed-minded about the surrounding reality.*

Reflecting on an assignment after its completion gave students an opportunity to state, in their own words, their understanding of a concept, its application, and its relationship to some other concept or idea with which they were already familiar.

Through the act of creating ePortfolios, my students became active participants in their own learning. As Judith Brown's research on the effects of the electronic portfolio on student learning suggests, my students came to understand how their learning takes place in the academic environment (228). The comments of a student in *Introduction to Bilingualism* show this understanding:

*Each day as I learn new things, I am also learning to own everything about me (the good, and the not-so-good), and to always be conscious of the boundless possibilities of my thinking mind. Therefore, my college learning process continually gives me a chance to reinvent myself.*

In sum, the integration of knowledge, heightened student visibility, and reflection on learning have become part of the daily routine in my classroom. In the end, LaGuardia's ePortfolio project has helped my practice to be more reflective as well, expanding my pedagogy to include digital media and reflection as tools for acquiring and retaining new knowledge.

The ePortfolio is not a panacea; there remain many questions to be asked and many issues to be resolved, for example, the institution's commitment to continuing this project in light of cost and value-added issues. Will the electronic ePortfolio continue to demonstrate

over time that it is an accurate measure of what students have learned in the process of acquiring a two-year college degree?

For me, the most pressing questions concern the impact of changes in my teaching on students' futures. How does the shift in my pedagogy affect students' chosen career paths? How does the electronic portfolio help students to be competitive in a job market dominated by multinational corporations? Does the electronic portfolio help students narrow the divide between the urban working-class and middle-class students? These questions suggest new directions for the continuation of my journey.

## NOTE

1. From 2002 through 2004, the ePortfolio team consisted of Assistant Dean Bret Eynon and Professors Maureen Doyle, J. Elizabeth Clark, Phyllis van Slyck and Paula Nesoff.

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# Bridging the Gap: What Students Need to Know about Internet Research

Dawn Amsberry and Marie Cimino Spina,  
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Arna was about nineteen. She sat next to Babette, an older student who wanted to become a nurse. Babette, speaking in both French and English, explained her crisis of not knowing anything about computers. “Don’t worry, it is easy,” whispered Arna as Babette sighed, “Ah, c’est so facile pour you, mais pour moi, ah!”<sup>1</sup>

We were about to begin the 2005 Summer session of Internet Research Strategies (LRC 103) a one-credit course developed by the authors with assistance from the Library’s Coordinator of Instruction, Professor Louise Fluk, and the advice of the Chair of the College Curriculum Committee, Professor Cecilia Macheski. The course was designed to teach students to find reliable information on the free Web and in online subscription databases supported by the Library. Our intention was that the course could help students like Babette, who have little computer knowledge, as well as students like Arna, who are technically adept with computers, but undiscerning about information they find on the Web. We hoped the course would help students cross the border from uncertainty about their skills as researchers to well-founded confidence in their ability to navigate in the world of online information. We wanted to help stem the tide of information travel in the “Columbus mode” – land on the first thing you find and call it India. All members of the Library faculty teaching Internet Research Strategies had marshaled forces to support substantial exploration of online sources.

The two students in the summer class, Arna and Babette, had different reactions to computers, but they were both aware that most students today are regular users of technology. Based on the abundance of technological devices on college campuses, one might conclude that students are tech-savvy, and by association computer savvy. This assumption is sup-

ported by data collected on college campuses; for example, a Fall 2000 survey of more than four hundred thousand incoming first year students conducted by UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute showed that 78.5 percent of respondents had used computers regularly during the year prior to their first year of college (Jenson 108).

LaGuardia students appear to be as computer literate as their counterparts on other campuses. In surveys given in the Library’s Internet Research Strategies classes during Spring and Fall 2005, and Spring 2006, 75 percent of respondents indicated that they used computers several times a week or more, and 90 percent indicated that they used a computer at least once a week. Not only do students use computers frequently, they consider themselves adept at using the Internet. In the Internet Research Strategies class surveys, 70 percent of respondents rated themselves as “comfortable” or “very confident” with using the Internet. These responses are mirrored in studies at the California State University Hayward where a survey taken in 2000 revealed that 90 percent of respondents claimed to be expert Web searchers (Manuel 199).

This data provokes a question: Given students’ familiarity with computers and their positive assessment of themselves as Internet users, shouldn’t they be conducting competent research using all of the electronic resources available to them? Conversations with classroom faculty and our Library teaching faculty’s classroom experiences indicate otherwise. In fact, students’ lack of ability to identify best resources, modify their search strategies, and evaluate materials for accuracy, bias, currency, and relevance are among the biggest roadblocks to more successful research.

These roadblocks emerge from student use of search engines. College-level research

requires searches in peer-reviewed or scholarly resources which are not available through most search engines. When the search engine students are in the habit of using yields millions of hits, they do not know how to find the most reliable and relevant among those results and resort to using the first one or two on the list. This habit indicates a lack of understanding about search engines – in particular, how search engines rank results and about how to modify a search, as well as how to test relevancy, accuracy and appropriateness using standard evaluation criteria.

To assess students' understanding of online research before they received any instruction, and to establish a benchmark for development, the instructor in the 2005 Summer Internet Research class asked students to find information using a resource of their choice. Out of thirty-six students, only five used one of the Library's subscription databases; the others used Google or another search engine, even though a subscription database might have yielded better results.

There is then an apparent gap between students' assessment of themselves as researchers and their actual ability to find reliable information online. In a study conducted at the University of North Carolina, students scored surprisingly low on post-tests after receiving either traditional classroom or computer-aided instruction; however, two-thirds to three-fourths of the students expressed confidence in their research skills when surveyed (Holman 58). Jenson attributes the gap between perceived confidence and actual research ability to the fact that students "simply do not know how much it is that they do not know" (Jenson 108).

In the Internet Research Strategies classes taught by the authors, we address this gap. Early in our course we introduce the notion of Web evaluation. Students are invariably surprised to find that much of the information on the Web is not checked or verified in any way, and that anyone from a precocious fourth-grader to an opinionated adult with an axe to grind can put up a Web page. Students believe that Web sites undergo a filtering process, as

indicated by the California State Hayward study, in which 28 percent agreed with the statement, "Central Internet Authority reviewed[ed] all Web information for its accuracy" (Manuel 199).

An important tool for Web evaluation is the "5W's and the H." Once a student locates a Web site or document, we have them consider "Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How." This familiar guide to writing for the print news is an excellent way to get students to question the validity of a Web site:

*Who wrote the piece?*

Provides idea of authorship and leads to investigation of signatures, bylines

*What authority?*

Leads to investigation of Web sites and ownership and also credentials of author or of the site including domains and links

*When was it written, and is that time frame appropriate to the research at hand?*

Currency and appropriateness to the topic can be investigated and questioned if no dates or updates are located

*Why was it written?*

Leads to investigation of purpose and bias; sites selling products or promoting a political agenda can be questioned in terms of appropriateness for research

*Where was it issued?*

Helps understand format and print information redistributed online, leading to exploration of host site

*How was it transmitted?*

Helps to further identify format and nature of the online or print media in which the information appears

Instead of beginning the Web evaluation process with a checklist of criteria, some instructors ask students to compare two Web sites on a similar topic, one good and one questionable. For example, after looking at "The Smoking Section" (<[www.smokingsection.com](http://www.smokingsection.com)>), a pro-smoking commercial site whose author and/or sponsor are not apparent, and a government site sponsored by the Center for Dis-

ease Control (<[www.cdc.gov/tobacco](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco)>) students can begin to list their own criteria for evaluating sources. Meola points out that “comparative thinking plays a key role in evaluative judgments” (340). Comparing the good and the bad on the Web helps students understand that Web sites are created for various purposes.

Another exercise moves students to a more extensive evaluation of a Web site’s purpose. Instructors ask students to evaluate a Web site from “different perspectives: as an information source; as a marketing tool; and from a usability viewpoint” (Johnston and Webber 346). This activity helps students understand the audience and purpose of a Web resource; it shows them that many sites are created solely for the purpose of selling a product or service and have no value in a college research paper. In researching sexual harassment on the Web, one student came across a site sponsored by Alliance Training and Consulting (<[www.alliancetac.com](http://www.alliancetac.com)>). She at first thought this site would help her research, but after considering audience and purpose, she realized that the site had very little information and was created primarily to sell its services to businesses.

As mentioned above, students in the Internet Research Strategies classes initially rate themselves highly as Internet users, but very few of them make use of or even know about the electronic subscription services available through the Library. In a study of student research papers in two English classes at Shelton State Community College, none of the students took advantage of the subscription databases provided by the Library, although they did use sources from the free Web extensively (Grimes and Boening 21). Students, then, need to be guided to the wealth of information available through subscription services accessible through the Library’s homepage.

In the Internet Research Strategies class, we encourage students to note characteristics that separate information located through subscription services from information found on the free Web. In some Internet Research Strategies classes students are offered *Wikipedia*, a resource with which many are familiar. Since

students have already had some instruction in Web evaluation, they quickly see that *Wikipedia* articles lack authors, dates, and sources, and one student pointed out with surprise the subtitle of *Wikipedia*, “the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.” Students then look up the same topic, for example global warming, in one of the Library’s online encyclopedias, such as *World Book Online Reference Center*, noting that articles include names of contributors, their degrees, and affiliations. At the end of this activity, one student commented that she would use *Wikipedia* only for her own personal information, indicating an understanding that different information sources are appropriate for different uses. Recent articles comparing *Wikipedia* and *Britannica* come to the same conclusions students do: both sources have their place (Berinstein 26).

The encyclopedia exercise introduces the idea of corroboration, or verifying information against other sources (Meola 341). If a student has doubts about the accuracy of a source found on the free Web, the information can be checked against a reliable source, such as an encyclopedia. Given the recent controversy surrounding errors found in both *Wikipedia* and the print version of *Britannica* (Giles 900), verifying questionable information in at least three sources is advisable.

Online (and print) encyclopedias are excellent sources for providing background information on a topic, but even the best encyclopedia is not appropriate as the sole source for a research paper. Subscription databases that provide the full text of journal, magazine, and newspaper articles are gold mines of accessible information, but our experience indicates that students are not aware of these resources, or do not use them. Even after students are shown how to search a database, they may lack a fundamental understanding about information formats, referring to articles found through subscription services as “Web sites” and mistaking the abstract of an article for the full text. Jenson attributes this confusion to students’ lack of “hands-on experience in an actual library with actual library materials” (Jenson 108). Given

students' exclusive experience with information online, where every "page" looks the same, it is understandable that they have trouble distinguishing an online article in an academic journal from a Web site selling a product.

To address this issue, Jenson suggests building students' knowledge about information formats by asking them, in groups or pairs, to compare and contrast print copies of magazines and journals, noting differences in layout, graphics, vocabulary, advertising, etc. This exercise helps students become better able to distinguish differences between these types of sources when viewing the electronic versions (Jenson 111). In the Internet Research Strategies class, this type of activity is part of a larger lesson directed at helping students understand that academic journals are generally better sources for research papers, although there may be times when a magazine article is appropriate; for example, a personal story in a magazine about someone suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome might be a good source for a paper on that topic.

It is essential that faculty guide students in their ability to bridge the gulf created by unfounded opinions to get to the shores of solid ground of fact. Information is a commodity, but knowledge is a human value. Illustrating this distinction to students has enormous ramifications. As critical thinkers and educated citizens, students must be able to apply evaluative skills not only to academic issues but also to their professions, political, economic, and even entertainment choices. The task is enormous as more open access literature and more full text appears on the Web. More than ever, we have a responsibility to help students locate information and determine its value.

## NOTE

1. The names and statements of students are changed to protect their identity. The situations and comments are not fictitious.

The Internet Research Strategies course is the initial step toward bridging the gap between what students know and what they need to know in order to be effective college researchers. By the end of our course, students have learned new skills and their confidence in themselves as Internet users is more in line with their actual ability to conduct online research. As one student put it, "I feel more confident getting on the computer and searching the net. Personally, I learned to go beyond Google.com to find information."

Arna, the student from the Summer Internet Research class, learned more about early childhood education terms from both her exploration of Web sites and in her conversations with her classmate, Babette. Arna earned an "A" for her wonderful evaluation of search engines and Web sites, and for her ability to distinguish peer-reviewed articles from popular Web news and blogs as well as her development in search strategies. After a struggle, Babette managed to do work that merited an "A-." Now in a four-year nursing program, she recently wrote to her instructor that she earned an "A" in her medical research class at her university because of her familiarity with search engines and choice of good databases in her new school's library.

Research shows that students understand and profit from credit-bearing library courses in areas far beyond the initial class experience (Wang 80). Students in our courses indicate growth in their confidence and consequent improvement in their research capability. The Library's Internet Research Strategies course is a valuable plank in the bridge to cumulative learning and attainment of lifelong skills in an Internet world awash with unfiltered information.

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# A Community-Based Early Literacy Initiative: Parents as First Reading Teachers

Marcia Glick, *Communication Skills*

In the past twenty years, studies of literacy have focused on research related to early literacy development. These studies have provoked increased interest in the factors that affect a child's literacy development including parental, social, and cultural influences. The current understanding of children's literacy development recognizes the importance of home and community as settings for the growth of literacy skills prior to formal education.

Y. M. Goodman was among the first to describe the importance of the home environment, calling written language in books, letters, and newspapers the "roots to literacy" for children (2). As Trevor H. Cairney in "Literacy Within Family Life" affirms, "Educators continue to view the home environment as an important foundation for later learning and where learning begins" (85). Researchers agree that a supportive environment is essential to emergent literacy. Within this environment, a responsible and responsive adult will be the guiding force for early literacy education.

Early literacy education focuses on the first five years of life as a time of enormous growth of linguistic, conceptual, social, emotional, and motor capabilities. Right from birth, healthy children become active participants in the process of acquiring skills for language and literacy development. They explore their environment, learn to communicate, and in a relatively short period of time, develop the skills to construct ideas about their world. The rate at which children learn depends on whether, and to what extent, their willingness to learn is met with support.

Research by neurologists and psychologists proves that the a child's development, learning, and growth depends on the relationship among nature, genetic ability, environment, and the care and teaching he or she child receives (Arnold 15). According to Rima Shore and the Families and Work Institute, these

influences are crucial to the intellectual development of a child. Many parents and child caregivers instinctively understand the value of the language activities they share with children in the first years of life. These activities can include reading, storytelling, singing, and conversations; each aid in promoting literacy development. Sharing books and reading to children can lay the foundation for the language and critical thinking skills needed later in life.

There is growing consensus among researchers regarding early education: the earlier the better. This consensus gives support to the need for parental participation in the early education of children. Parents have the opportunity to teach their children at a very young age. They are the entry point to the learning process (Epstein 277).

In 1999, Dr. Arthur Lau, my colleague in the Communication Skills Department, and I inaugurated "Parents as First Reading Teachers (PFRT), a series of workshops focused on LaGuardia students whose children were enrolled in the Family College Program. In the early workshops, we instructed the participants in approaches that would help them become their children's first teachers of literacy. The positive response of the parents to this initiative encouraged us to reach out to the surrounding community through the YMCA of Queens.

Invited by the YMCA, parents, caregivers, grandparents, siblings, or family friends attended a workshop on a Saturday in March 2001. Plans were made to have translators available for parents who spoke languages other than English. The YMCA staff and tutors from LaGuardia Community College's America Reads Challenge<sup>1</sup> worked to organize crafts, play, and reading related activities for the children of the fifty-six parents and caregivers attending the workshop.

Dr. Lau and I began with a brief explanation of how reading establishes the foundation

for a child's learning and a presentation of information that demonstrated the importance of parental involvement in the reading process. Our introduction emphasized research findings citing The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth study which found that children who had been read to on a daily basis at the age of two or three did substantially better in kindergarten than children who had not been read to as often. We also presented findings from the same study showing that children who experienced a stimulating preschool environment had significantly higher scores on standardized vocabulary measures. Finally, we stressed that children who become good readers in the early grades or before are more likely to become better learners throughout their school years and beyond.

After our introduction, participants were encouraged to share their experiences reading to their children. Parents and caregivers were candid, recalling both positive and negative experiences. Some demonstrated to the group their method of reading to their children, eliciting agreement by those who used similar approaches. Parents posed questions which determined the direction of much of the workshop: How do you read to your children when they are all of different ages and you don't have the time to read to them separately? How do you select a book to read? Can we read the same book more than one time in response to our children's request for their favorite book? Do I have to finish the story? How do I know if my children understood the story?

Anticipating many of the questions posed by the parents in our workshop sessions, we decided to respond to the group by offering our personal experiences as parents and literacy professionals. The family stories that Dr. Lau and I shared about reading to our own children demonstrated several different methods for introducing children to literacy. Agreeing with Cairney that there is no single pathway to literacy development, we encouraged the parents to try each of these methods until they discovered an approach comfortable for both parent and child.

We also provided participants with practical guidelines for reading to young children: read a story as frequently as possible; set up a reading area in your home where the children can find books and look through them on their own; talk to your child about the story you are reading; use different voices and read at different speeds to give the story excitement; ask questions about the characters in the story; ask your child to draw a picture about the story; read books with rhymes to practice the sounds of the language; practice the alphabet by pointing out letters whenever and wherever you see them; read wherever you go—the labels on supermarket shelves or signs you see on the subway or when driving; and, take turns reading if your child is able to read to you. Taken together, these guidelines offered parents sound and practical pedagogical practices, and a plan to follow as their children's first reading teachers. To further enhance the learning process for the parents, we screened a video in both English and Spanish that showed how parents and children might engage in a number of these practices.

One concern repeatedly expressed during the workshop by parents and caregivers was the difficulty of finding time to read to their children. In the midst of their busy lives, having the time to become their child's first reading teacher was an enormous challenge. To address these concerns, Dr. Lau and I offered the observation that the way a parent interacts with a child during reading time is more important than the amount of time the reading takes. We suggested that most of the reading interactions could be accomplished in fifteen to twenty minutes a day. In this brief time, a child's language and reading skills could be enhanced by a parent reading all or just part of a story, or telling a story about everyday occurrences.

For the workshop participants, this information increased the likelihood of accomplishing a daily language development task. We emphasized that finding time each day to read or tell a story with the child sends a clear message that, regardless of how busy parents are, reading and being with the child are priorities.

At the end of the workshop, with the goal of helping parents build personal home libraries, we distributed free age-appropriate books. When the children returned to the workshop, each parent and child found a space in the room and began to apply the reading skills and methods they had learned. Parents were encouraged by their new-found knowledge, skills, and confidence in their abilities to accomplish this task. The children were delighted with the new books, the stories being read, and the time spent with their parents. The workshop instructors supported these activities by offering praise and gentle suggestions when necessary.

Everyone was pleased with all that had been accomplished on a Saturday afternoon. Dr. Lau and I were able to extend our work in the field of literacy acquisition beyond the walls of LaGuardia Community College into the surrounding community. We were gratified to see

parents become more confident in their ability to promote their children's language and literacy development. While parents gained a great deal of knowledge during this and subsequent workshops, those who truly benefited from the "Parents As First Reading Teachers" program were the children. With the help of their parents or caregivers, the door was now open to explore the wonder of books and enter the realm of flying animals, talking plants, magical tales, and awe-inspiring adventures.

While literacy educators are often not of the same mind or opinion on issues of pedagogy, there is considerable consensus about the benefits of early literacy acquisition for children and the vital role played by parents and the environment. The Parents as First Reading Teachers series is one example of how, as educators and parents, we can open up the world of words to another generation.

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1. America Reads Challenge is a federal work-study program that recruits, trains, places, and supervises college students to assist elementary school children with reading skills.

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# Inquiry-Based Grammar Instruction

Laurie Gluck, *Education and Language Acquisition*

It is accepted that language learners benefit from explicit grammar instruction (Ellis, “Current Issues” 85). Norris and Ortega made the same conclusion in a meta-analysis of research in this area. But in the current state of research, teachers still face the question of how to teach grammar (Ellis, “Current Issues” 86–89). Grammar instruction does not lead directly to more correct writing, but some approaches may lead students to look at their errors differently or to understand grammar in terms of communication. Grammar instruction can range from requiring rote memorization of rules to providing a method of analysis for understanding how grammatical structure interacts with meaning.

For a while, early in my career teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), I abandoned teaching grammar. I didn’t find explaining verb tenses in isolated sentences a valuable use of class time since those explanations made no apparent change in students’ use of verbs. Rather, my explanations produced knitted brows and frequent confusion. It became evident that explanations of verb tenses provided only part of a complex picture; in English grammar exceptions seem to be the rule. I found the path for change in *The Ways of Written English* by Lou Inturissi, a book which follows the X-Word grammar approach to analyzing English. X-Word grammar, which emphasizes the discovery of sentence structure and patterns in written English, emerged from Sector Analysis, a grammar developed by the late Dr. Robert Allen, a linguist and professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. Dr. Allen’s graduate students developed X-Word grammar, named after the core of Sector Analysis, English auxiliary verbs (Hart). These future teachers of English wanted to give teachers an accessible, classroom-friendly English grammar that highlights qualities of English “helpful to students” (Haskell 227). The first quality is that words can be categorized into word classes grouped by their function; these different functions fit into identifiable sectors in

English sentences. The basic sectors, subject and predicate, create clauses. Clauses can be expanded with other clauses, adverbials, and inserts, to name a few other sectors. Students identify and observe these different structures through grammar discovery. These grammar elements are more predictable and readily observable than verb tense choice.

X-Word grammar is an inquiry-based approach to teaching grammar that provides the vocabulary and framework to integrate inquiry learning into grammar lessons. In “Methodological Options in Grammar Teaching Materials,” Rod Ellis advocates for wider use of “a problem solving approach” to teaching grammar. He suggests some advantages:

*First, it is possibly more motivating than simply being told a grammatical rule and, for this reason, students may be more likely to remember what they learn. Second, it can encourage students to form and test hypotheses about the grammar of the L2, processes that are believed to be central to ultimate acquisition... (164).*

Students gain tools to extend their observations and learning beyond the classroom. Ellis continues, “They [discovery grammar tasks] help to develop the skills learners need to investigate language autonomously – to become field linguists” (“Methodological Options” 165). It opens the classroom to conversation about language in the target language. Since I have begun using grammar discovery, students’ questions about grammar are motivated by what students see in the provided text (the input) and their efforts to create rules and order within the text. Students can find answers to their questions by making generalizations from the text.

My grammar instruction begins with a review of traditional grammatical terms, the

parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and determiners. I start with traditional terms but will, throughout the discussion and discovery, add complementary concepts – open and closed word classes – which distinguish two major functions of words. Open classes, also known as lexical classes, are nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Closed classes, also known as functional classes, include grammatical words: prepositions, conjunctions, determiners (an expansion of the notion of article), and pronouns. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs tend to carry the lexical meaning of sentences. Closed class words make grammatical connections between the lexical words in sentences. It is possible to write a comprehensible sentence without function words although nuanced relationships will be lacking: “Yesterday went store buy juice.”

In an activity meant to establish a common vocabulary and emphasize that words accomplish different tasks, students read a story written by a former student and use a handout listing the parts of speech (Appendix I & II). The list subcategorizes the parts of speech as open and closed classes. Comprehensible to ESL students, the story has no surface errors, but it does have some non-native speaker weaknesses in vocabulary and sentence variety. After students have read the text, they work together in groups to organize words from the text into lists of the different parts of speech as provided on the handout.

As students try to remove words from context and put them in a list, many questions arise. When taking some words out of context, it is difficult to categorize them into any one list. In this sentence, “One day my friend Cagatay and his girlfriend Sinem went to Macy’s in Manhattan to buy some clothes and a kitchen knife,” students read “kitchen knife” and wonder where to list “kitchen.” They recognize it as a noun but also recognize that it fills a different role in this sentence. The solution is to keep the words “kitchen knife” together and put them in the noun column. Indeed, the two words create a noun phrase.

Thus the concept of phrase is introduced, illustrating that chunks of words work together to fill particular roles in sentences. Students observe that words are more than their dictionary definitions; they can see that words change their functions based on textual contexts and that words work in groups. The lesson covers important grammatical terms and moves students’ observations from word level to phrase and sentence level and shows that understanding of words and phrases must be made in context.

The extended nature of the input, the student story, provides rich data to allow inquiry and acquisition (Ellis, “Methodological Options” 166). It underscores the fact that grammar is not the reason for language learning; it is a means of communicating a message. Real understanding of grammar cannot be achieved in isolated sentences but needs to be extracted from discourse. Students need to observe structures in a larger framework and in relation to other structures (Celce-Murcia 120). Later in the semester when students are comfortable with longer texts, verb tenses will make more sense. It’s important to note that intermediate student texts present limited sentence structures, making them less authentic but accessible to intermediate ESL students. Students enjoy reading these stories but also need to be exposed to more complex and native-like texts at other times.

The next activity leads students to identify basic sentence elements and independent clauses to distinguish them from dependent clauses and other structures. Students transform each sentence of a text into a yes/no question. (In class, I provide a new text, but for simplicity I refer here to the same text that appears in Appendix I.) There are three guidelines: no words can be added, no words can be omitted, and words can be moved. The examples begin with simple independent clauses:

- 1a. *Two women got in line after them.*
- 1b. *Did two women get in line after them?*

A clause that transforms into a yes/no question is an independent clause. In the yes/no question, the subject is found between the auxiliary

verb and the main verb. The simple past tense requires the reappearance of the auxiliary “did”:

2a. *The thieves had stolen his wallet.*

2b. *Had the thieves stolen his wallet?*

This is another simple sentence but with an overt auxiliary in the verb phrase. Inverting verb and subject reveals the two major elements of English sentences: subject and predicate.

Sentence three has two main verbs, so the transformation requires that both verbs be changed to the base form. We also see the noun phrase “one of them” revealed as the subject:

3a. *One of them shoved Cagatay and apologized.*

3b. *Did one of them shove Cagatay and apologize?*

Students will ask if they can change sentence four into two yes/no questions, which of course they can. This is a compound sentence composed of two independent clauses:

4a. *Sinem gave them directions to find the knife, and one of them tried to reach into Sinem’s purse from behind.*

4b1. *Did Sinem give them directions to find the knife?*

4b2. *Did one of them try to reach into Sinem’s purse from behind?*

A final example in sentence five illustrates a third sentence pattern:

5a. *As they waited, they looked nervous and jumpy.*

5b. *Did they look nervous and jumpy as they waited?*

Beginning with a subordinate clause, this sentence requires moving the subordinate clause before the yes/no question is discovered. The dependent clause emerges. Students write and re-write their questions, read them out loud to each other, and hear how they sound. Trial and error, intuition, and asking questions are keys to completing the exercise. Writing sentences as yes/no questions reveals patterns students know implicitly but are not conscious of. Students identify subjects, verbs, tense, and the presence of structures outside the independent clause, all prime elements of English sentences. At this point, students are asking questions about sentence structure elicited from a text and

showing their understanding of grammatical concepts. Students use their prior knowledge of English to develop greater explicit knowledge.

X-Word grammar privileges the regularity of word order which English relies on to establish grammatical relationships. After students discover the prime elements of English sentences by making yes/no questions, the next lessons highlight the regular subject, verb, object word order of English. In a very different text (Appendix III), I present sentences of a story individually with the sentence elements – clauses and phrases – scrambled. Students, in groups or pairs, reconstitute the sentences by reordering the elements into correct English sentences. To represent the dominant pattern of English word order, students also rewrite the sentences into a grid divided into the basic sentence sectors – subject, verb, object/complement, and adverbial. Such a graphic illustration shows the rigid pattern of subject and verb and the variations around this base.

As students present their responses to this exercise, I define a hierarchy of features that determine sentence patterns. First, the subject and verb and object (or other structure) must be in the correct position. Second, in a compound sentence, like sentence three (Appendix III), the verbs and objects must match to make sense. This story includes many adverbials of time and place that create the setting and advance the story, “late one afternoon, last summer, at the bank.” In strict grammatical terms these structures go before or after an independent clause. But usage, text cohesion, and style also come into play. We discuss the kinds of choices native English writers prefer and choices that enhance cohesion. Beginning sentence three with “at the bank,” rather than placing “at the bank” in the middle of the sentence, moves the story along more effectively. This grammar lesson, based on student efforts to recreate a text, evolves into a discussion of many issues of concern to writers.

These lessons are the foundation for inquiry-based grammar instruction. This foundation enables students to go on to discover seven basic sentence patterns, characteristics

of verb tense choice, and sentence combining. Inquiry-based grammar instruction leads students to move beyond rule memorization to discover patterns and discuss grammar in context. Advancing past word-for-word analysis to observe groups of words functioning in larger contexts, students progress from focusing on

errors to developing complete, clear writing. Ultimately, using inquiry-based methods, learners will approach grammar as a framework for meaning not found in grammar guides, but in every sentence written and uttered, making all interactions a source for learning.

## APPENDIX I

### Pickpocket in the Store

One day my friend Gagatay and his girlfriend Sinem went to Macy's in Manhattan to buy some clothes and a kitchen knife. They got Sinem's clothes and went to get a knife. They found a good cheap knife and brought it to the cashier. Gagatay and Sinem got in line with five other people. Two women got in line after them. One of them shoved Gagatay and apologized. As they waited, they looked nervous and jumpy. One of them said to Sinem, "That's a nice knife. Where did you find it?" He thought a second and started to tell them. Gagatay wondered why they didn't have anything to buy while they were in line. Sinem gave them directions to find the knife, and one of them tried to reach into Sinem's purse from behind. Gagatay saw and shouted, so they ran away. Everyone watched what happened. Gagatay wanted to run after them, but Sinem held him because she didn't want any problems. They turned around to pay for the knife. Gagatay had some advice for Sinem about pickpockets who robbed people standing in line. When they were ready to pay for the items Gagatay got a shock. Gagatay looked at Sinem; Sinem looked at Gagatay. The thieves had stolen his wallet. They laughed and Sinem paid for the knife.

## APPENDIX II

### Parts of Speech

Words are grouped into different classes. Each class has its own role. Find words from the story above and place them in the correct column.

#### Open classes

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb

#### Closed classes

Preposition	Conjunction	Determiner	Auxiliary verb

## APPENDIX III

### The Mugging Scramble Example

*Instructions:* Organize the groups of words below into correct English sentences and rewrite on a separate sheet of paper.

1. live/, which is a dangerous city/ in Mexico City/ we
2. walked/ late one afternoon/ last summer/ to the bank/ my father/ about two blocks from my home
3. he/ put/ at the bank/ cashed/ the money/ a check for \$350/ in his left pocket/ and

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# Stepping Out in New York City: The Student-Crafted Walking Tour

Timothy C. Coogan, *Social Science*

*It is a delightful little jaunt to go out...on foot...and see the sunset...A hundred years hence...what an appearance that walk will present, on a fine summer afternoon! You and I, reader...won't be much thought of...Then these immense stretches of vacant ground...will be covered with houses; the paved streets will... resound to deafening cries; and the promenaders...will look down...Then New York will be more populous than London or Paris, and, it is hoped, as great a city as either of them...*

– Walt Whitman,  
“Murray Hill Reservoir”

Whitman would love the multi-faceted energy of LaGuardia, and its people from every earthly place. He would invent opportunities to walk all of us up and down his beloved New York, so that we too would feel his ecstatic joy for the beauty in the city's everyday life, its crowds, and histories. Walking and exploring, we would breathe in “the democratic funkiness of New York's streets,” coming face to face, in the words of *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnick, with “the city that endured” as well as “the city that [is] disappearing” (74–76).

Whitman and Gopnick are only two of the city's long line of gifted writers who can bring teachers and learners at LaGuardia closer to the city's historical roots. But while New York literary and visual artists are often full of revelatory urban insights, our students also possess unpredictable awareness of our city and its diverse neighborhoods, jobs, and people. Rather than trailing behind as astonished onlookers and tourists, they too can be our guides through the city, historical detectives digging up, turning over, and examining perceptions, past and present, of our shared urban life. LaGuardia students *are* the city; who better to take us through it?

The student-crafted walking tour is a key learning activity in my urban studies and American history courses. Assuming the role of historians, students gather, select, and critically evaluate primary and secondary sources, in this case, about New York City. The pedagogical soundness of the student-crafted walking tour, however, only became clear to me during a mishap on a recent visit to Long Island City's historic Hunter's Point district.

Unfortunately, the site that I had planned for my History of New York City course field trip, and passionately wanted my class to see, was closed, and I felt myself facing the crisis of a class gone awry. At that moment, a student suggested that we all trek to nearby Gantry Park, an idea that did much more than save the day – it showed me how easily students can become teachers. On that afternoon, as I followed my students to Gantry Park, I changed my approach to teaching.

Imagining that my student's pleasure and pride in taking the entire class to Gantry Park was not unlike what I feel when I teach, I used him as a model, and added a student-designed walking tour requirement to all my courses. As I developed new syllabi, I reviewed my course objectives, the most important of which, naturally, is to sharpen historical thinking. My hope was that by designing their own walking tours students would discover compelling reasons to think skeptically about primary and secondary sources.

In addition to focusing student work on the critical evaluation of historical records, I wanted students to acquire an understanding of the research process, and I believed that the walking tour would provide an accessible and imaginative structure for practicing several related skills – choosing a topic relevant to course content; identifying an underlying rationale; submitting project outlines; gathering and evaluating evidence from a variety of primary and sec-

ondary sources; writing drafts of their research results; and, finally presenting their findings in oral form. Staged throughout the semester, and accompanied by regular reports on the progress of the design of the walking tours, these linked activities would reveal, to teacher and learner alike, the degree to which the steps of historical analysis had been internalized.

At this point, I must mention that in my classes an early introduction to creating a walking tour is by way of *Out of This Furnace: A Walking Tour of Thomas Bell's Novel*, a short video by film historian David Demarest based on Bell's *Out of This Furnace*. This wrenching, semi-autobiographical working-class novel of struggling immigrants depicts the daily drudgery and tragedies three generations of Slovakian steel workers endured while toiling in Andrew Carnegie's factories in Braddock, Pennsylvania from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth-century.

As a practical historical lure for teaching American history, I find that Demarest's approach to Bell's novel – embedding the mill town's past in selective readings from *Out of This Furnace*, revisiting key historical monuments and actually walking the old streets, and filming Braddock's industrial growth and post-industrial collapse – ably documents life in Braddock as experienced by the factory workers. By reading specific excerpts about central figures of *Out of This Furnace*, Demarest uses Bell as a map and guide to reveal Braddock's industrial past, all the while retracing on foot the very paths these immigrants trod to work.

Demarest's film and Bell's proletarian novel – along with such primary sources as Eric Foner's *Voices of Freedom* – deepen students' understanding of the larger societal processes of industrialization, urbanization, immigration, class relations, aspirations, ethnic conflicts, family patterns, and gender roles in work and leisure. Bell's novel, Demarest's video, Foner's documentary history, and my own walking tours of Long Island City are integrated into the semester as models for the design and purposes of the students' own tours, real and virtual, of New York City.

## Bringing History to Life: Examples of Student-Crafted Walking Tours

*In just 30 minutes – within a few short blocks – we [can] take in many virtual and existing sites, which were key to Lower Manhattan's history...This walking tour demonstrates that one can truly see so much history in so little space.*

– David, student

David's class project is one persuasive example of the pedagogical value of the personalized walking tour. His is a carefully documented "virtual" tour – that is, a depiction of non-extant historical landmarks – that reveals the historical significance of Manhattan's earliest theater district. Most impressive in David's detective work into the city's richly textured past is a supporting structure of excellent maps, elaborate directions, and twenty-seven footnotes. Circling the streets surrounding City Hall, David notes the pleasant effects of the gas lamps in the evening, and the enjoyable patches of green, and points out Nassau and Beekman Streets, and Park Row, where theater houses once offered everything from comedy, musicals, and Shakespeare, to ballet and opera. Most important, David's detailed description of Lower Manhattan's theater district conveys an appreciation of the concept of change over time, pointing out that by the mid-1880s all these performance arts gradually moved north, eventually settling in the present-day, more affluent, midtown.

The decision to research the northward migration of Manhattan's theaters suggests that David has absorbed a strong awareness of the evolutionary changes in New York's urban development, helping him to better imagine New York's older cityscape and to identify its expansions. Once uptown his tour takes in such major historical sites as the Woolworth Building, also known as "The Cathedral of Commerce"; P.T. Barnum's Theatre (1841); and McKim, Mead, & White's Municipal Building, the city's "first skyscraper" (1915). As he shares his passion for unearthing manuscripts and

maps, he demonstrates his ability to interpret historical sources and to discern subtle historical patterns.

Sylvia's tour also takes us to midtown, where she focuses on the importance of place, specifically Time Square and its various transformations. "Making the personalized walking tour and learning about the history of New York," notes Sylvia, "is especially...important for those who live in such a cultural[ly] diverse place." With a growing sense of historical perspective, her life "would be more meaningful and enjoyable." Learning about the symbolic value of place encourages Sylvia to explore more extensively the way the past and present are intricately linked by historical events.

The recurring theme in student work of the relation of past to present surfaces again in Laura's tour, which crosses the East River to the neighborhood gardens of Jackson Heights, Queens. "Tucked in the mid-blocks, mostly hidden from view by the buildings surrounding them," these gardens are the pride of Queens, which has, she writes, "more private parks – historically called 'gardens' by its residents – than any other city in America." By the 1920s, Jackson Heights was not only "the first garden community built in the U.S," but one of the earliest to "become part of the international Garden City Movement."

Fascinated, too, by Jackson Heights as an "urban melting pot" of many ethnic populations of Latinos, Asians, and "small populations of multi-generational Europeans," Laura offers an abundance of bibliographical information, making apparent that she has learned to read and interpret, select and organize factual information about the diversity of parks, gardens, and people of Jackson Heights. In her search for accurate details about patterns of a historically significant New York community, Laura, like her peers David and Sylvia, analyzes, synthesizes, and documents primary and secondary sources, especially the local newspapers.

## Pedagogical Reflections

*The curiosity that marks great teaching produces an abiding desire to learn as much as possible...[and] to view teaching itself as a scholarly subject, not [just] sealed off from the great and serious texts but...inextricably intertwined with those texts, worthy of serious inquiry and reflection.*

– Howard Tinberg

Tinberg's *Border Talk: Writing and Knowing in the Two Year College* asks that academics endorse the view of teaching as a subject worthy of scholarship, inquiry, and reflection, a position most eloquently framed in Ernest Boyer's seminal *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. A scholarly approach to my own teaching begins with reflecting upon the design of my course, i.e., the combination of content and activities from syllabus to final project that prompts my students to think historically.

The development of historical perspective about New York requires the practice and integration of several supporting skills, among these the critical interrogation of the city's past and present; the ability to follow questions to new interpretations; and the discipline to pursue and critically evaluate a variety of historical documents. But as a teacher in a community college with an exceptionally large international population, I am well aware of the need for multiple teaching strategies to engage a diversity of students in the acquisition of these skills. Accordingly, my syllabi and teaching methods offer a wide range of opportunities to practice thinking historically. Of these, the one under inquiry here is the walking tour itself, and the degree to which its pedagogical value can be assessed.

End of term student work, examples of which are cited above, suggest that students acquired the skills basic to critical evaluation of sources, and learned to revise their writing to incorporate credible research about broad

themes of immigration and ethnic patterns of survival and assimilation in New York City. Deeper reflection on teaching and learning in my courses reveals that most valuable to me is the enthusiastic curiosity my students expressed as they uncovered the mysteries and myths in the histories of their individual communities.

Although I cannot claim that every student developed the historian's eye for nuance and paradox in daily life, I can easily report that most student projects demonstrated an increased level of analytical skill in thinking, reading, and writing about history. And this increased skill will contribute in turn to the success of a learner who is more informed and better prepared to understand society's rich complexity and diversity. In the end, those students genuinely thrilled by the detective work crucial to good historical analysis questioned their sources more systematically and skeptically, widened their knowledge base, and opened to the wonders of historical inquiry and interpretation.

One student's moving observation about the workings of history in her own life may serve as a closing example of "learning by

doing." When asked why she planned to write about Ellis Island, Jennifer explained her desire "to see the place that my grandparents came to when they first came to America." With daughter in tow and a video camera to film their journey, she waited anxiously for the ferry to take them to the Island:

*I imagine my grandparents coming across the water...looking for a better life...I wondered what all those immigrants must have thought... I know it was totally different...when immigrants came there many years ago.*

*Coming across the water.* Jennifer's reflections reveal one student's encounter with the city's historical paradoxes celebrated by Whitman and Gopnick. Spurred by a personal quest for her roots, Jennifer's questions confirm that, like her fellow student historians, she learned to think beyond the present into the past, successfully applying concepts of historical imagination not only to her life, but to the multitudes of lives that came before.

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# Reflection in Nursing Education

Philip Gimber, *Natural and Applied Sciences*

It was a Tuesday, and I was on clinical rounds with a group of nine senior LaGuardia nursing students on the medical-surgical floor at Jamaica Hospital Medical Center. Suddenly, through the overhead speakers came the announcement of a “code blue,” a hospital’s way of signaling an imminent loss of life—someone has stopped breathing, or a heart has stopped beating. Only a moment earlier, I had been in a patient’s room observing a nervous student nurse administer an injection; now as I stepped into the corridor, the hospital’s director of nursing rushed by me. Flying past, she asked over her shoulder if any of my students would like to observe the code. “I would!” shouted Tiara (not her real name), one of my most motivated students. Before I could utter a word, Tiara flew after the nursing director, following her down the hall and disappearing into the stairwell. Based on my work with Tiara, I knew that she hoped that this new clinical experience would offer the chance to get her feet wet. But I knew something that Tiara did not know—that the code blue would send her back as a changed person.

Fifteen minutes later, a student came to tell me that Tiara was not well. “Tiara is in the nursing conference room,” she said. “She’s crying. She looks sick.” Once in the room, I saw several classmates holding and reassuring Tiara. As we talked, I discovered that the code blue patient had been resuscitated by the code team, but only briefly. Minutes later, the person died before Tiara’s eyes.

Gradually, Tiara composed herself, aware that three patients needed her care before the day was over. But Tiara was aware of something else, too; she knew, as I did, that she had crossed a threshold. She was now a student nurse who had witnessed the death of a patient. In the clinical experiences of nursing students, confronting death is a milestone. Each clinical experience encountered by students has the poten-

tial to increase knowledge and change perspectives. But witnessing a death is an event of particularly significant power, one that may shape a nursing student’s future career. During the time that Tiara, her classmates and I were together after the code blue, the quality of their conversation persuaded me that the process of reflection should be fundamental to the education of nursing students.

In the nursing conference room, we listened as Tiara expressed her feelings about the patient’s death. Its swift surprise had clearly frightened Tiara. Brought back to life and seemingly stable, the patient suddenly worsened and died. As she spoke, I watched the experience of loss heighten Tiara’s awareness of the unexpected—for the first time, she faced one of nursing’s most important “never’s”: *never* assume a patient is stable; *always* check. Observing Tiara, I was learning, too; I saw that the lesson of the unexpected had two sources: direct practice on the floor and reflection upon the experience afterwards. I realized that her important teachers in this moment were practice and reflection; they were not my lectures in our classroom. That “code blue” afternoon and the intensity of Tiara’s experience had unexpectedly affected me too, ultimately transforming the ways I approach teaching and learning.

As a first step, using real hospital situations as the basis for classroom activities, I brought the practice of reflection into the classroom. My early clinical experiences provided a wealth of material for assignments; from these, I eliminated any trace of my own solutions to the medical cases or their final outcomes. Instead, students were responsible for determining how they would react to and resolve a specific case. The first assignment focused on a controversial case related to death and dying and drew on my own past experiences as a new nurse in an oncology unit. Students were asked to imagine that Mrs. J. was a patient in their care:

*Mrs. J. is eighty years old and has late-stage breast cancer. Some chemotherapy treatments are available to her but they are rigorous and have a small success rate. She confides in you that she is ready to die and is only taking the treatment because her daughters want her to fight the disease. Mrs. J. tells you that the only reason she has said yes to the treatment is not to upset her daughters.*

*As a new nurse, what would you do with the information the patient confided in you? What might you say to the daughters? Would you administer the treatment as ordered?*

The assignment worked beautifully! In small groups, students briefly described the case and responded to the small set of related questions. Each group then determined a general plan of care for Mrs. J., and each member jotted down any additional personal feelings.

Group discussions were thoughtful and passionate. Divided by opposing views, the members of one group debated the nurse's role in the patient's care. One side wanted to break patient confidentiality and inform the daughters of the patient's desire to terminate treatment; the other side wanted to protect the patient's confidentiality and not tell the daughters. In the end, all the groups reached a consensus position supported by sound nursing ethics: the nurse's responsibility was to encourage more communication between the mother and her daughters and to provide the counseling that would help the family members understand each other's needs.

As the discussion continued, points of view changed. Wanting to emphasize the implications and process of these changes, I asked that the students step back to reflect not only on their own ways of thinking, but also on the thinking of others. For me, this "stepping back" was the key to reflection, which in this activity unfolded in three stages: First, students reflected upon the ways group discussion affected their initial perceptions of the case. Second, in an activity that many found extremely

beneficial, pairs of students read each other's "reflection on perception" pieces, and responded in writing. Finally, students reported out on how these several layers of reflection helped them to think critically about their first reactions to the case of Mrs. J. By exchanging and reframing perceptions within a relatively short period of time, students confronted biases and judgments related to death and dying that could never have been so directly and quickly addressed in a lecture.

A second change in my approach to nursing training took place outside of the classroom. Motivated by the positive effects of the assignment, I decided to recreate the reflection interaction with the key modification that we would practice reflection in the clinical setting, on the hospital floor itself. I thought back to Tiara's pained response to the code blue, the way her classmates held her hands in the conference room, and my own responses to Tiara's distress. I considered other kinds of questions, additional guidance, that I might have offered Tiara and her classmates during our brief conversation. Unlike the classroom, most days in a fast-paced hospital do not allow a nurse time to reflect on experiences, even those that are life-altering. But I was committed to directing my students towards this new phase in our teaching and learning. I knew, too that this evolving process of identifying and reflecting upon their fears, strengths, and weaknesses had to be fast and effective.

Thus, in the midst of student nursing rotations, I began to spur different types of dialogues by asking more open-ended questions, for example: "What experiences were 'firsts' for you today?" "What worked best and was most useful in the patient encounters that followed?" "What did you fear most or avoid today?" "What would you have done if your worst fears about a particular medical case had been realized?" Accepting that prolonged give and take is impossible in the clinical setting, I asked for brief "free writes" in response to my questions – right there in the hospital on any paper they had at hand.

My nursing students wrote about their fears, but they also described the strengths that helped them overcome those fears. One student wrote about being afraid that she could not handle more than a single patient; she felt that administering medications to several patients at a time would confuse her. However, when asked to identify her positive attributes as a nurse, she wrote, “I pride myself most that I am organized. Maybe I am afraid to make a mistake because being unorganized is my biggest fear. Therefore, since I am so organized in my life, I am the most unlikely person to make a mistake!” Even brief spurts of reflection can result in crucial insights; in this case, the student found in herself the confidence to care successfully for the full number of patients assigned to her. Thinking inwardly, recognizing and acknowledging personal abilities and limits, asking questions and looking for bias or incomplete information in the answers are reflective stages that lay the foundation for the kind of learning necessary to nursing education and practice.

As Tiara progressed through her clinical rotation at Jamaica Hospital, I observed that the

experience of the code blue had stayed with her. It was her last semester in the hospital. I assigned her two additional patients for whom, under my guidance, she had full responsibility. In both cases, Tiara was always prepared to accurately describe the conditions of the patient and the care she provided. I realized that Tiara’s attentiveness to possible variations and fluctuations in her patients’ conditions were the result of the code blue and the shared expression of feeling afterwards. These had been her strongest teachers.

I am grateful to Tiara and her fellow students for the conversation following the code, and to the students who voiced passionate responses to the assignment about Mrs. J. and her daughters. I am grateful as well to the student whose reflection on her organizational skills calmed her fears and helped her to see that she didn’t have to do less than her best in caring for patients. From these individuals and others, I’ve learned the value of reflection in nursing education and remain convinced that, as a learning tool, reflection will make a significant contribution to the education of nurses.

## NOTE

For information about the role of reflection in LaGuardia’s ePortfolio project, see the ePortfolio section of the La Guardia Center for Teaching and Learning website at <<http://www.ePortfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu>>.

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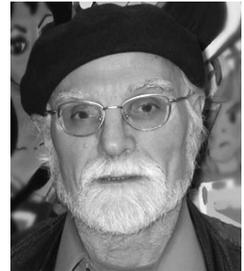
Dawn Amsberry was the Collection Development Librarian at LaGuardia from 2003 to 2006. She is currently a reference and instruction librarian at Penn State University. She has an MLS from San Jose State University, California and an MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages from Hunter College.



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Timothy C. Coogan is an Assistant Professor in the Social Science Department where he has been teaching history and sociology for many years. A former Peace Corps volunteer, he earned his PhD in American history from New York University. His scholarly works appear in *The Dictionary of American History*, *Diplomatic Claims*, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History*, *Labor in Massachusetts: Selected Essays*, *New England's Disharmony*, *New York History*, *Who's Who in America*, and *Working in the Blackstone Valley*. He is currently doing research on public opinion in Revolutionary America.



Monica Courtney is a faculty member in The English Language Center where she has taught for over twenty-five years. She has participated in programs offered through the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning and credits her involvement with the Center for stimulating her interest in teaching with technology. In her capacity as technology coordinator for The English Language Center, she developed training materials for faculty focusing on incorporating technology into teaching. She is currently involved in The English Language Center's reading curriculum committee and has a particular interest in the role reading plays in language acquisition.



Philip Gimber is an Assistant Professor of Nursing. He holds a Master's degree in Nursing from Stony Brook University, SUNY in Adult Health Nursing with a specialty as a Certified Adult Health Nurse Practitioner. His clinical background includes home care, intensive care, and nursing management. Philip currently co-facilitates a LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning seminar that supports faculty in their classroom use of professional ePortfolios.



Marcia Glick is an Associate Professor at LaGuardia Community College where she teaches courses in the Communication Skills Department. Director of the federal work-study America Reads Challenge program at LaGuardia, Marcia has created a community-based initiative, "Parents as First Reading Teachers." She has conducted many workshops in the metropolitan area, and presents at professional conferences across the country. Her publications include "Teaching Early College High School at LaGuardia Community College," and she co-authored "The Appreciative Approach to Strategic Planning at LaGuardia Community College."



Laurie Gluck is a Lecturer in the Education and Language Acquisition Department. She holds a Masters in TESOL from Hunter College and is a doctoral student in Linguistics at the CUNY Graduate Center. She has been teaching ESL writing and creating X-Word grammar materials integrating all language skills at CUNY for twenty years. She is now teaching linguistics and literacy in the Education Program. Her research interests include responding effectively to student writing and developing listening skills through syntactic awareness.



Erika Heppner has taught English, theater, and video production to native and non-native speakers of English in Louisiana, England, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Vietnam. In 2006, she co-produced a segment for PBS about life in post-Katrina New Orleans and is currently at work on a project about recovery efforts on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. At LaGuardia, she teaches oral communication in the Humanities Department. She earned an MAT in English and an MFA in Drama and Communications from the University of New Orleans.



Matthew S. Joffe, Director of the Office for Students with Disabilities, came to LaGuardia in August, 1994. He has over twenty-five years experience as an educational therapist and psychotherapist. He also holds certificates in mediation and alcohol/chemical dependency counseling. An accomplished actor, he has co-written and performed in two original plays. A music lover, his tastes range from classical and world music to blues and cabaret. Other passions include collecting art glass and tasting foods from around the world.



Suma Kurien is the Director of LaGuardia's Division of Adult and Continuing Education's Center for Immigrant Education and Training, an educational program that helps low-income immigrant adults from surrounding communities to advance economically and socially. Suma holds an MA in ESL and an Ed. D in Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University, and has developed a number of the Division's programs for English Language Learners. At LaGuardia for twenty years, Suma continues to find inspiration in the stories that our students tell, stories of courage, perseverance, and joy in the face of many adversities.



Gary Richmond teaches Speech Communication and Critical and Creative Thinking at LaGuardia Community College. Keenly interested in digital learning and Internet-enabled technologies such as ePortfolio, he has recently co-lead Building Information Literacy and is currently a co-facilitator of Focus on the Learning Community, both seminars offered through the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning. His research interests include philosophical pragmatism as it relates to inquiry and the development of a Pragmatic Web. He speaks at conferences and workshops on these topics, most recently at a joint session of the International Conference on Conceptual Structures and the International Conference on Organization Semiotics in Sheffield, England, 2007.



Max Rodriguez joined LaGuardia Community College during its founding year as an instructor in the former Division of Language and Culture. Over the years, Professor Rodriguez has held administrative positions such as Coordinator of Modern Languages and Literatures, chair of the Department of Humanities, and Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, but his love remains working with students in the classroom. His latest endeavor has been the development and implementation of the electronic student portfolio at LaGuardia. He currently serves as co-leader of the ePortfolio Leadership Colloquium.



Felicia Rose works as the Curriculum and Resources Coordinator in The English Language Center where she also teaches reading. She has been involved in various faculty development and Difficult Dialogues initiatives. Her article, “Addressing Social Values in Our Teaching” was recently published in *The Change Agent*.



Marie Cimino Spina joined the LaGuardia Library in 2000 after working in both public and private research and archival libraries of academia, business, and medicine. A graduate of Columbia University and Hunter College, her principle concern is that our students critically evaluate the enveloping flood of media, data, and technology, building information literacy skills that strengthen their abilities to make ethical and reliable decisions as informed citizens.



Christina Stern has been teaching Western Civilization and U.S. history classes at LaGuardia Community College for ten years. She holds an MA and a PhD in Medieval European History from New York University. She has participated in many faculty development seminars at LaGuardia, including Difficult Dialogues, First Year Academy, and Digital Storytelling. Christina’s articles on the topics of history and education have appeared in *Newsday*, *New York Family*, *Big Apple Parent*, and *History Magazine*.



David Styler is an English teacher who has taught at LaGuardia as an adjunct and more recently as a lecturer. He holds a master’s degree in electronic journalism from the New York Institute of Technology and is currently pursuing his doctorate at St. John’s University in the field of Renaissance Eco-criticism. “Our students deserve nothing less than to be treated with respect for their backgrounds and traditions, to be spoken to honestly, and to be constantly reminded that their future – and the future of the earth – is now.”



## The LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning

The LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) offers faculty-led programs designed to advance innovative teaching and enrich student learning. Founded in Fall 2001 as a center for professional collaboration, reflection, and exchange, the Center draws upon the expertise of the entire college to help better serve students. From issues of interdisciplinary literacy to strategies for addressing the rich and growing diversity of our student community, and to the questions raised by new educational technologies, the Center helps the college face exciting educational challenges and opportunities.

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For more information about the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning, including program and contact information, please visit us or explore our website at:

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# The LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning Professional Development Seminars 2007/8

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As learners, citizens, and consumers, our students are confronted with an unprecedented array of information sources. Building Information Literacy in the Disciplines offers LaGuardia faculty an opportunity to develop and test a range of strategies that build students' critical and ethical approach to print and Web 2.0 sources.

Professor Charles Keyes, *Library*

## **Carnegie Seminar on Scholarship, Teaching, and Integration**

In an interdisciplinary and collaborative professional community, LaGuardia faculty engage in systematic inquiry into their own practice, documenting their work for the purposes of research, reflection, and publication.

Professors Evelyn Burg, *Communication Skills* and Ting Man Tsao, *English*

## **Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum (Affiliated Program)**

Participating faculty explore the cognitive process and create new classroom activities and assignments that help students develop higher order thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning abilities.

Professor John Chaffee, *Humanities*

## **Designed for Learning**

Through hands-on workshops, exploratory dialogue, classroom experimentation, and sustained reflection on their practice, faculty explore the intersection of interactive pedagogy and technology.

Professors Marian Arkin, *English* and D. Priyantha Wijesinghe, *Natural and Applied Sciences*

## **ePortfolio in the Professions**

Joining colleagues nationwide, faculty develop strategies and classroom activities designed to help students use ePortfolio for employment, transfer, professional learning, and career advancement.

Professors Phillip Gimber, *Natural and Applied Sciences* and Jim Giordano, *Accounting and Managerial Studies*

## **ePortfolio Scholars**

As ePortfolio Scholars, experienced ePortfolio faculty advance their understanding and contribute to the growing national field of ePortfolio pedagogy by preparing scholarly articles and presentations.

Professors Nancy Gross, *LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning* and Max Rodriguez, *Education and Language Acquisition*

## **Focus on the Learning Community**

Faculty who are teaching in a range of learning community structures (First Year Academies, ESL Pairs, Liberal Arts Clusters) meet together with partners, learn new approaches to interdisciplinary teaching, and plan their shared courses.

Professors J. Elizabeth Clark, *English*, Will Koolsbergen, *Humanities*, Gary Richmond, *Humanities*, and Phyllis van Slyck, *English*

### **Grants Development Seminar**

This seminar presents a step-by-step approach to grants writing. Seminar participants will be introduced to all the ingredients: finding funding, analyzing the RFP (Request for Proposals), documenting need, and writing key sections (the goals and objectives, the activities and methods, the evaluation plan, and the budget).

Dr. Bob Kahn, *Grants Office*

### **Making Connections: Building ePortfolio Pedagogy at CUNY**

A CUNY-wide faculty development seminar linking CUNY faculty and campuses currently experimenting with the use of ePortfolio to deepen student engagement in learning, support more holistic forms of assessment, and facilitate transfer at City University of New York.

### **New Faculty Colloquium**

A year-long orientation to teaching and learning at LaGuardia, helping new full-time faculty adjust to a new educational setting. Learning from each other and from senior colleagues about LaGuardia students and the kinds of pedagogy found to be effective at LaGuardia, new faculty consider some of their options for future pedagogical growth and development.

Professor Ana-María Hernández, *Education and Language Acquisition*

### **Oral Communication Across the Curriculum**

Faculty design and integrate effective strategies to support students' acquisition of speaking and listening skills in a range of disciplinary settings.

Professor Louis Lucca, *Humanities*

### **Project Quantum Leap**

Faculty across the disciplines join together to adapt the nationally recognized Project SENCER approach of teaching science and higher-level mathematics in "compelling contexts" to a community college setting and the revitalization of basic skills education in mathematics.

Professors Prabha Betne, *Mathematics*, Gordon Crandall, *Mathematics*, and Frank Wang, *Mathematics*

### **Rethinking the Internship Seminar Experience**

Discipline faculty and Co-op faculty focus on the design and objectives of Co-op internship seminars, using an integrative learning model to align disciplinary program learning goals and Co-op seminar/internship experiences.

Professor Diane Ducat, *Cooperative Education*

### **Student Technology Mentors**

Working in unique student-faculty partnerships that help faculty to design and use interactive technologies, STMs benefit from intensive training and support that prepare them for success in education and career.

Josephine Corso, *LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning*

### **Writing in the Disciplines (Affiliated Program)**

Part of a nation-wide interdisciplinary effort, the year long Writing in the Disciplines seminar supports full time and adjunct faculty as they develop and test writing-intensive assignments for integration into their courses. Seminars are facilitated by interdisciplinary teams of LaGuardia faculty and Writing Fellows.

Professors Marian Arkin, *English* and James Wilson, *English*

