

In Transit

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Michele Piso, *LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning* i

PART ONE

IDENTITY, CLASS, AND THE NATURE OF ACADEMIC WORK

School/Work: Bringing the Working Lives of Immigrant Students into the Composition Classroom

Sue Young, *English* 1

Class Acts: How a Blue-Collar Professor Teaches at LaGuardia

Reneé Somers, *English* 10

Class in the Classroom

Nancy Berke, *English* and Evelyn Burg, *Communication Skills* 19

“About Me”: The Working Class and ePortfolios

Heidi Johnsen, *English* 32

Straddling the High School/College Divide: The Work of College Now

Carolyn Henner Stanchina, *College Now* 37

PART TWO

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Academic Study and Vocation

Doreen Kolomechuk, *Cooperative Education* 47

Immigrants in the Workforce: The Transition from Worker to Professional

Tania Ramírez, *Center for Immigrant Education and Training*

Melinda Thomsen, *CUNY Language Immersion Program* 52

Clinical Affiliation: A Working and Learning Experience

Clarence Chan, *Natural and Applied Sciences* 63

Therapeutic Communication in the Clinical Setting Suzanne Rosenberg, <i>Natural and Applied Sciences</i>	72
Work-Based Learning in Nursing Education: The Value of Preceptorships Andrea Morgan-Eason, <i>Natural and Applied Sciences</i>	80
The Power of a Faculty Partnership Marie Sacino, <i>Cooperative Education</i> Angela Wu, <i>Business and Technology</i>	85
Teaching the Business of Diversity Milton Hollar-Gregory, <i>Business and Technology</i>	90

PART THREE

WORK, ART, AND THE AESTHETICS OF WORK

Work Ethic? Or Work Aesthetic? Seán Galvin, <i>Communication Skills</i>	101
The Class of Bukowski: Engaging LaGuardia Working-Class Students with the Novels of Charles Bukowski Carlos Hiraldo, <i>English</i>	109
Writing the Workplace: Approaching Labor in the Teaching of Composition and Creative Writing Chris Alexander and Kristen Gallagher, <i>English</i>	115
Contributors	125
About the Center for Teaching and Learning	130

INTRODUCTION

Michele Piso, *LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning*

Cast from Eden, Adam and Eve went to work, probably on the South Side of Pittsburgh, just down the street from my cousins, aunts, and uncles. Arriving in the early 1900s with the first great wave of Ukrainian immigrants, my father's people grew up along the rivers and railroads that carried iron, steel, and coal from Monongahela Valley mills and mines to the rest of the country. Above the rivers, in St. Clair Village, the housing projects where I was born and raised, work was breath, part of nature – you worked even if you didn't have a job, even if you were a kid. Like our parents and everyone around us, we were raised to work – we did not wait until we graduated high school or college to begin our working lives. At young ages, we minded our brothers and sisters and cleaned house; if the neighbor's children also needed minding, well, that was part of life, too. The trick, of course, was to balance housework with homework. From the projects we could see the spires of the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning. Some of us just didn't know how we would get there.

The inseparability of work from an identity rooted in family responsibility and community, and pressured by daily necessity is a reality familiar to the students welcomed into LaGuardia. Conflicting work and family obligations keep many of our students from class; falling behind or feeling out of place, some give up, as did three of my five brothers and sisters and too many of my St. Clair neighbors. Bright as anybody, they left high school or turned away from college.

Lest the reader think our life was only about *la miseria*, please: We were raised together, in each other's sight; we had language, music, style, and our own complex forms of information gathering and exchange, and we practiced civil rights before it became a movement. However imperfectly, in those days our public housing unified, held its children close. Yet as intensely as we desired to learn, public education alienated, kept us apart. In large groups, we took buses out of our noisy projects straight into the quiet mornings and leafy afternoons of a middle-class school district ill-prepared to receive us. There were no mentors to guide and advise us, and we needed more time in school to study, more occasions to internalize disciplined and systematic approaches to academic work, and less crowded space at home to do it in. Another,

related, part of our problem was cultural: few teachers expressed interest in what we already knew. But as great as the challenges may have been when I was being raised in the 1960s, the economic, social, cultural, and educational challenges and pressures facing our students now seem greater. Younger parents work longer hours for less money; more money is needed for more things – cell phones, cars, computers, and branded clothing – and rent is higher in communities that are less cohesive and more traumatized by violence and hunger.

The awareness of LaGuardia faculty and administration of the material conditions of our students' lives is evidenced by multiple college and student leadership initiatives. In a variety of classroom practices that extend across the disciplines, our faculty pursue and confront social reality in their selection of texts and assignments. The current issue of *In Transit* highlights some of these practices, providing a diverse set of examples that view work from a broad range of personal, professional, and pedagogical perspectives, represented here by over a dozen faculty.

Arranged in three sections, the essays explore the unspoken relations of class and identity; the vital links between the classroom and the workplace; and the creative tensions among work, aesthetics, and education. As a group, the writers ask a series of questions: When we talk about work as a concept or as an action, how do we engage students in the conversation? In what ways are we presenting to our students the life of the mind as work, as making thought? What is academic work? Clinical work? How are our identities as thinkers or poets shaped by a working-class past? And what of categories of class – how are these currently experienced and constructed? Several articles can be read as pairs, reinforcing and complementing each other; others stand apart, or in opposition, bringing into question a position encountered earlier. Not surprisingly, common to nearly all of the essays are accounts of fatigue and hard labor, sacrifice and aspiration. Themes of class, community, and social agency cut across several essays, become less dominant in others, and resurface elsewhere. Obstacles apparent in one group of learners do not exist for another: such is the reality of diversity and difference at LaGuardia.

In the opening article of Part One, "Identity, Class, and the Nature of Academic Work," Sue Young frames many of the challenges posed by LaGuardia's "unique student demographic" of immigrant working students. To better understand the stresses of her students' lives, she designs a semester of instruction that changes her own identity as a

teacher. Change is also at the heart of René Somers' deeply personal examination of the distancing effects of an "elite" education upon her working-class background. Uncertainty about class identity is presented by Nancy Berke and Evelyn Burg as the result, in part, of the erasure of class discourse from classroom practice, an exclusion that limits a student's capacity to imagine the historical experiences of others. Discussing the uses of the "About Me" section of ePortfolio in English 098, Heidi Johnsen considers the contradictions between the invisibility of working-class identity and the inevitability of work in the lives of our students. Like Berke and Burg, she attributes students' difficulty in talking about work to the absence of a critical discourse – "they had no apparatus, no terms to use to describe [class]." Not coincidentally, these accounts take us into classrooms where the work of the student is to write and read at levels that meet specific academic standards. In the closing essay, Carolyn Henner Stanchina offers a definition of the nature of academic work, and expresses concern that college-bound high school graduates may be losing the race to acquire skills and strategies beyond those assessed by standardized tests.

The essays in Part Two, "Experiential Learning," bring together recurring themes: the historic prominence of hands-on learning at LaGuardia; our commitment to providing our immigrant communities with educational and workforce opportunities; the importance of cross disciplinary faculty partnerships in mentoring student internships; and the urgency of recruiting and educating a diverse population to compete in a global economy. Several essays examine how experiential learning motivates intellectual and personal growth. As Doreen Kolomechuk writes in "Academic Study and Vocation," when the disciplines are directly connected to experience, we "enable students to find meaning and purpose in life." The promise of life transformed by education underlies Tania Ramírez and Melinda Thomsen's "Immigrants in the Workforce," an account of significant change in lives destabilized by immigration. In "Clinical Affiliation," Clarence Chan points to the transition between clinical training and professional work as "a crucial time for student learning when students must face unfamiliar, real-world work experiences outside the protective walls of their academic institution." From Suzanne Rosenberg, we learn of the personal sacrifices and special skills required of those called to nursing. Chan and Rosenberg describe the hands-on, face-to-face training of physical therapy and nursing students, giving the uninitiated reader a crash course in the realities of healthcare education. Andrea Morgan-Eason

offers the preceptorship as a model of nursing training, arguing that its student-centered emphasis on independent learning could easily be incorporated into LaGuardia's nursing curriculum. Exploring the rationale for internships at LaGuardia, Marie Sacino and Angela Wu present their faculty partnership as effective in linking our classrooms to New York City workplaces. In this section, Milton Hollar-Gregory has the final word: To prepare our students – whether financiers or hotel workers – to be truly competitive, educators must heed the imperative to recruit, educate, and retain a population of students whose commitment to diversity reflects the moral underpinnings of American democracy.

Part Three, “Work, Art, and the Aesthetics of Work,” returns us to the reading and writing classrooms. When reading Seán Galvin, Carlos Hiraldo, and Chris Alexander and Kristen Gallagher, one imagines their classrooms as restorative spaces where students might, after long hours at work, reclaim their fullness as human beings. In “Work Ethic? Or Work Aesthetic?” Galvin considers the labyrinth of obstacles confronting evening students – years of developmental classes, conflicting family obligations, low income, and language barriers – in their quest for the prized college degree. He relates one reason for their endurance to the benefits of learning in community; another reason is the promise of improved economic circumstances upon graduation. But Galvin points to the pleasures of learning for its own sake as equally important. In “The Class of Bukowski,” Hiraldo's students experience pleasure, and perhaps a bit of dizziness too, as the world of literature spins open to include the shock of Bukowski's working class characters and language. With Bukowski in the classroom, Hiraldo and his students can share common ground: everyone works; let's all talk about it, write about it, analyze its images.

As represented by the essays in this volume of *In Transit*, our labor is neither punishment nor shame. Brought out into the open and made visible in our classrooms, work is a source of knowledge, identity, and an inspiration for our creativity. This is Bukowski's lesson, one stressed in Alexander and Gallagher's “Writing the Workplace,” the journal's final essay. Drawing together themes set out in previous articles, Alexander and Gallagher explore the idea of “affective labor,” and the ways that some work can steal our energy. Nevertheless, writing about our work brings us into “intensified contact with reality;” by reflecting upon our actions, we regain our energies and self-image. As in Galvin's essay, the classroom revitalizes, restores, and replenishes; it, too, can be a kind of garden.

In our classrooms, the combination of work and creativity, discipline and innovation, method and freedom signifies the presence of student commitment to the demands and possibilities of an unsentimental but liberating education. Some students will fall away, of course. Yet, like the young man who works all night in the 7-11 across the street and sleeps there, too, others will find ways to stay with us. His response when I asked how he managed? “I just run across the street for morning class, and I am there! It’s easy, miss!”

Perhaps deep within, you carry, as I do, an idealized image of your birthplace. My Pittsburgh is like a Breughel painting: everyone is making something, or everything has been made – a fire, bread, tiny skates, the windows of narrow houses, the delicate spires of churches. We hope that the articles collected here capture images of LaGuardia as a community of makers, demonstrations of what we do and make as learners and teachers, whether as writers of poems or essays, nurses on clinical rounds, housekeepers at the Sheraton Hotel, or composition teachers assigned five courses a semester. Your labor is represented here, too. We hope you find the issue worthwhile, and welcome your comments.

PART ONE

IDENTITY, CLASS, AND
THE NATURE OF ACADEMIC WORK

SCHOOL/WORK: BRINGING THE WORKING LIVES OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS INTO THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

Sue Young, *English*

It's 10:45 a.m. on a Tuesday morning and my ENC101 composition class is revved up and in full swing. One of my students, Ramona,¹ wanders into the room, takes a seat, and tries not to make any noise. She's late for class. Again. I watch her pull out her notebook and carefully place an enormous bottle of water on her desk. She's pale, and under her eyes are blue shadows. Ramona summons a weak smile as I welcome her, but the exhaustion is obvious. "Double shift again?" I ask. She nods and says, "Yeah. I'm sorry, professor." "It's okay," I reply, "Maybe you can talk about it in your work therapy group," referring to one of our weekly classroom activities.

Not long ago my reaction might have been quite different from the empathy and understanding I feel today. On the frequent occasions when my students' lives as workers both intersect and conflict with their roles as college students, my response has sometimes been carefully concealed annoyance because my underlying assumption has always been that when students are in my classroom, academic work should take priority over all other external concerns. In fact, at LaGuardia, where the majority of students lead complicated lives, their time and attention divided among jobs, family responsibilities, and the challenges of cultural adjustment and language acquisition, I have often felt that my writing classes were in direct competition with the many other dimensions of my students' lives.

Indeed, my ambivalence about the fragmented attention of my students is rooted in ample research supporting the idea that "the more a student is employed the more employment interferes with his/her study time" (Kulm, and Cramer 933). Not surprisingly, most research on undergraduate students in community colleges who work more than fifteen hours per week reveals that there is a direct negative correlation between academic success, as measured by GPA, and number of weekly working hours (Kulm, and Cramer 930). This is true to an even greater degree for foreign students at ethnically diverse urban institutions like LaGuardia, where large numbers of immigrant students are faced

with various acculturative stressors, the most significant being English language acquisition. LaGuardia's unique student demographic means that the school/work interface poses equally unique challenges of the kind not generally encountered by colleges in more suburban or affluent communities, where students may indeed work while going to school, but the work is not as time-consuming – or as physically onerous – as that done by most of my students at LaGuardia.

In the case of my Fall 2007 composition class, over three-quarters of my students had at least one job – many had two or more – requiring far more than the fifteen hours per week referred to in Kulm and Cramer. In addition, 23 of the 24 were recent immigrants, and, with one exception, all were taking full-time course loads. Complicating the school/work interface was the fact that so many of them had jobs that required not only long hours, but hard physical labor, and the resulting fatigue often compromised their abilities to focus in class and to study outside of it.

Driven by my ambivalence about my students' dual identities as college freshmen and immigrant workers, I made two decisions that subsequently framed my pedagogical approach to this particular class. First, I decided to use Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, the college's common reading selection, for the Fall I 2007 semester. Second, and more consequential, the students' working lives became the focus of class inquiry, effectively dissolving the boundary between competing interests of class and work in the sense that work life became class work. Structured by a set of course activities, the students' lives as workers became legitimate sources of critical inquiry, reflection, and narrative.

With *Nickel and Dimed* as the core text of the course, I had an excellent opportunity to develop a writing pedagogy that would integrate the goals of the common reading initiative into the major objectives of ENC101. As described by Dean Paul Arcario, an early supporter of the common reading project, one of its goals is to “create a shared intellectual experience that would immediately establish an academic tone for our new students” and “foster a greater sense of community and connectedness to the college.” I knew that, set against the background of *Nickel and Dimed*, my students' shared experiences and expertise as working-class immigrant employees would provide them with a rich source of material for critical and reflective analysis. And indeed, they had a lot to say, as suggested in the examples provided below. In addition to becoming technically stronger, more confident

writers, students created just the kind of authentic “intellectual experience” that is an explicit goal of the common reading project.

Reflecting upon Ehrenreich’s social experiment in their journals and small-group discussions, many students in the class demonstrated that our discussions of the school/work trade-offs and sacrifices – and the ways these trade-offs colored their struggles and successes as college students – enriched and informed their lives as writers. During the semester, students were required to prepare critical analyses of Ehrenreich’s text, create class presentations on their working lives, and write extensively about the impact of work on their individual educational processes. Through this integration of the common reading, class work, and work life, students were able to find meaningful connections between their identities as workers and as students. It was both cathartic and empowering for them to find common ground between the worlds of academia and work, as examples presented below will demonstrate.

Four pedagogical components drove instructional design: journal-keeping, small “work therapy” discussion groups, reflective writings, and a final research paper. Each of the parts reinforced central themes, and led students toward making conceptual connections between their identities as workers and as students. In their journals, students recorded thoughts and feelings about aspects of their academic and work lives that intersected with issues raised by Ehrenreich. Journaling also provided a foundation for the “work therapy” discussions that comprised the first half-hour of each two-hour class. In these discussions, students used passages selected from their journals, as well as assigned quotations from *Nickel and Dimed*, to initiate small-group discussions about the interconnections among the central themes of the course. Finally, keeping a journal and assuming responsibility for group discussion ensured class preparation, while participating in the “work therapy” discussions solidified students’ sense of themselves as members within a community of worker-students.

Throughout the semester, the most passionate and resonant writing in reflective essays and research papers came from the students’ astonishing accounts of their struggles to inhabit two disparate realms: the world of academia on one hand, and, on the other, the “shadow-land” of the immigrant worker in America. As described by one student, the “shadow-land” is where they spend long hours performing punishing physical labor that often debases, but also sustains them as they move toward their own realizations of the American Dream. For instance, during a discussion in which students critiqued Ehrenreich’s

description of the physical discomforts she endured while engaged in long hours of manual labor, several students matter-of-factly pulled up pants legs or rolled up sleeves to reveal their own scars, burns, and bruises earned on the job. One observed that, unlike Ehrenreich, she had no health insurance or extra money to pay for medical treatment. But there was no self-pity as the students talked; rather, they saw these vestiges of hard physical labor as badges of honor earned on the way to a better life.

The centerpiece of the semester was a carefully structured, eight-page research paper that required students to critically assess a self-selected chapter from *Nickel and Dimed* and to evaluate it reflectively, from a personal – as opposed to empirical – perspective that drew upon the students' own experiences as both immigrants and worker-students. Here I wish to make two distinctions regarding the connection between student identity and the required elements of the research paper. As an instructor of worker-students, I thought that it was important to privilege their voices as members of an immigrant subgroup whose primary identification came from work-related experiences. Second, as a traditionalist in my approach to teaching college-level research, I have tended to see the research paper as an exercise in objective analytical writing. Nevertheless, it was crucial that my students incorporate the reflective component into their analyses in order to emphasize the dissolution of the boundaries between Ehrenreich's text, the world of academia into which they were newly inscribed as college students, and their experiences as workers. In requiring reflection, my goal was to create an intellectually empowering environment in which the students could think critically, discuss, and write about school/work. Most importantly, they were encouraged to do so by contextualizing their writing within the framework of their varied cultural backgrounds, with writing that was not only technically proficient, but also infused with a sense of each student's voice as a writer.

Their responses were fascinating and profound. For instance, when asked to identify significant excerpts from Ehrenreich – that is, significant from the standpoint of crystallizing Ehrenreich's larger intentions, and also for resonating with (or against) the students' experiences as workers – the class agreed nearly unanimously with her conclusion that

. . . if low-wage workers do not always behave in an economically rational way, that is, as free agents within a capitalist society, it is because they dwell in a place that is neither free nor in

any way democratic. When you enter the low-wage workplace . . . you check your civil liberties at the door, leave America and all it stands for behind, and learn to zip your lip for the duration of the shift. The consequences of this surrender go far beyond the issues of wages and poverty. (210)

Furthermore, most students reacted strongly on a personal level to Ehrenreich's observation that "[i]f you are constantly reminded of your lowly position in the social hierarchy, whether by individual managers or a plethora of impersonal rules, you begin to accept that unfortunate status" (210). Both excerpts provoked a torrent of heated responses. Yuri, a very bright and cynical Russian student, wrote that while Ehrenreich conducted her social experiment like a scientist, in fact she "doesn't know how it is to really be in a 'lowly position' since she also writes, 'I set some reassuring limits to whatever tribulations I might have to endure' (5), and in doing so maintained her true place in the American social hierarchy." He went on to note the unintentional irony in Ehrenreich's assertion that "[t]here seems to be a vicious cycle at work here, making ours not just an economy but a culture of extreme inequality" (212). In his written analysis, Yuri pointed out that the author was in no position to truly understand this inequality on either an economic or a cultural level, a judgment echoed by several students in their writing.

Adriana, a vivacious mother of two teenagers, shared details of her fifteen years as a house cleaner, one of the jobs Ehrenreich assumed during her year as a low-wage worker. While Adriana appreciated Ehrenreich's attempt to convey the brutal physicality, exhaustion, and often dehumanizing aspects of the job, she also pointed out that

Ehrenreich always knew that it was temporary, and that if she had to leave any time, she could. And there was a big check waiting for her back home if she did stay. For me and my family, this is not the case. We came here without any English, scared because for our first two years I was illegal, and I was responsible for feeding and housing my children. There was no way for me to leave except to go to another, maybe worse, job.

Yet another student described his experience working as a night janitor in a corporate building in Manhattan as "legalized slavery." An African immigrant, he wrote that although there is ample oppor-

tunity in America to define oneself and to practice whatever freedoms one chooses, there are, for the newly arrived immigrant, always additional acculturative stresses based on race, ethnicity, and, of course, language.

Several studies reveal that for the immigrant college student who is also a worker, the challenges of coping with a dual identity as both learner and earner are magnified by the social isolation experienced as a new American, particularly if the student is undocumented:

Undocumented students who may be highly motivated, as evidenced by their willingness to attend college despite their financial situation and uncertain immigration status, may be working long hours with little time for studying. Some may not have easy access to needed tools, such as computers and school supplies, and some may not be able to buy the texts that are required for their courses. (Dozier 50)

Several of the students in my class recorded their lack of documented status in their work-life journals. In fact, I was surprised to learn that, from the students' perspectives, the most effective learning tool of all the components and activities in this course was journaling about work, school, and life as new Americans. In their journals, they could think and write freely about the more profound aspects of their experiences as immigrant worker-students. Many wrote extensive and poignant entries detailing some truly harrowing situations in their lives. One student described running low on supplies needed to treat a serious medical condition and lacking resources to pay for the medication she needed because of her "ineligibility" for medical coverage. Another wrote vividly about being interviewed by Homeland Security without the presence and support of either a relative or a lawyer; he ended the entry by writing: "I was more scared than I ever was in my life, but I knew that I would do whatever I had to do to stay in the U.S. because going home means no more college." While students often wrote of crushing fatigue, lack of financial security, and the Herculean effort they frequently put into simply getting through work and school every day – usually while simultaneously trying to master a second language – none of them wrote about leaving college.

After a semester spent exploring the working lives of my students, I can point to several interesting outcomes for students and teacher alike, the results of pedagogically triangulating Ehrenreich's text, the class-

room environment, and the students' lives as workers. First, a Marxist ethos was established in our classroom grounded in shared struggles stemming from race, class and immigrant status. My students were able to explore their difficult, often heartrending, experiences as immigrant worker-students, and this opportunity resulted in richly textured and insightful writing. Engaging Ehrenreich's text provided students with a provocative flashpoint that allowed them to bring their expertise as workers to their work as learners, as they simultaneously discovered the authority of their own voices as writers. Deeply nuanced and complex depictions of their working lives emerged, documenting an astonishing diversity of experiences and work-life configurations that, nevertheless, revealed several shared aspects: poverty, social and financial vulnerability, acculturative stress, as well as courage, perseverance, and a strong determination to educate themselves beyond the new-immigrant underclass. Time and again, the students in my class expressed a deeply held belief in the ability of a college education to save them from becoming, in the words of one student, "low-wage slaves."

Finally, my participation in the exploration of my students' lives beyond the classroom was self-instructive, allowing me to step outside my role as teacher. In the process, I found myself redefined as a worker whose job is to teach. Through the insight gained into my students' working lives, and into the complex challenges they faced just to be in class every day, I was irrevocably altered in my understanding of the influence of work on the lives of my students. This class was a reminder of the inherent artificiality of the boundary between what I do in the classroom and what my students do outside of it. Moreover, I realized that it is important for us to identify with our students, and not to submerge our humanity in the process of meeting the pedagogical demands of our roles as teachers.

With this new awareness, I was able to enter into the class discussions in a meaningful way. I, too, have been an immigrant worker-student. I spent my childhood in Africa and the Bahamas, then moved to New York for graduate school, where, as a non-American, I experienced the grueling pressures of completing my academic work while scrambling for jobs that kept me within the boundaries of what my visa allowed, and dealing periodically with the complex, often intimidating, bureaucratic issues of compliance with Immigration and Naturalization Service regulations. It was meaningful to me and to my students that I could understand many of their struggles, having found the part of my identity that I share with them.

From a pedagogical point of view, the results of the school/work integration were increased trust from my students and a greater freedom to share stories and challenges. That freedom was expressed in the depth of their critical thinking, as well as in the tone and details of their reflective writing. Reading their deeply personal writings about their experiences as immigrants who were workers who were college students, I was challenged to redefine my students; in the process I, too, was redefined. If I had once perceived their working lives as incompatible with their lives as learners, I now saw, via a shift in perspective – a wider lens – that bringing their experiences as immigrant workers into the classroom created a unique learning environment. Here they were free to explore their identities not just as urban workers, but as a specialized subgroup: what one student termed “immigrant worker-students.” I was fortunate, too, that as in many classes at LaGuardia, the majority of my students that fall were full-time workers, so that there was a rich field of work-life information and experience to explore as they brought their stories, their own “texts,” to the writing process. The result of this interplay between their “texts” and Ehrenreich’s text about working was that the students’ lives outside the classroom were confirmed as legitimate sources of inquiry and study.

Perhaps the last word is best given to Ramona, the exhausted night clerk introduced at the beginning of this article. In the draft of her work-life research paper, she reflected on the challenges of being a full-time worker and college student: “It isn’t easy for me to come to class, and even harder to concentrate when I do. I’m tired all the time. But I don’t want to be in this job forever, and a college education is the only way out. There are better things in life and by coming to school every day I’m moving closer to my dream. It’s tough here in America, but at least I have a chance to succeed.”

NOTE

All student names have been changed to protect their privacy.

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CLASS ACTS: HOW A BLUE-COLLAR PROFESSOR TEACHES AT LAGUARDIA

Reneé Somers, *English*

I was the first person in my entire working-class family to go to college. My parents, cousins, uncles, aunts, grandparents, and even my brother never attended an institution of higher learning. My father was a machinist with a second job at a gas station, and my mother was a waitress who later worked at Walgreen's. They were proud of me, but when I called home after a week of college to learn the difference between a "bursar" and a "registrar," my parents quietly replied that they just did not know.

Eventually, I came to realize that although my blue-collar family could offer moral support, they could not help me find my way through the academy. And so I struggled with the college experience on my own. In short, I taught myself to be a college student. Later, as a graduate student, I tried hard to assimilate into a milieu that seemed to equate intellect with money. Later still, as a young professor in Rhode Island and then in New York, I worked just as hard – socially, professionally – to learn the codes of the academy. Now, in my fourteenth year of teaching at the college level, I am increasingly aware of the ways my demeanor in class and the dynamic of my classroom are nonetheless driven by blue-collar roots that, in many ways and for many years, have been at odds with my upper-class education.

Fortunately, over the past two decades, higher-education professionals from working class backgrounds have emerged to tell their stories about conflicting ways of knowing. In my own experience as a graduate student in literature, many of my classmates could name a favorite book or a trip to Italy as a way to knowledge; but reference to a relative's trailer home was risky. I have attempted to address these gaps, silences, and shifting allegiances of working-class experience in the first part of this essay, by reflecting upon my personal history and the ways it has influenced my classroom practice. The second part of this article offers observations, based on my teaching experiences in recent years, of the effects of the gradual relinquishing of working-class roots in favor of a middle-class paradigm. From my perspective, a significant way to inhibit the erasure of our students' backgrounds and the emotional isolation that ensues is by creating community in the classroom.

As this discussion of teaching will show, my pedagogy is firmly connected to a constellation of memories that begin with my experiences as a working-class undergraduate and conclude in the present with my life as an English professor at LaGuardia. In other words, my personal journey charts a course from blue-collar learner to white-collar professional; my desire to nurture, challenge, and support the particular needs of students who share my background is part of this journey and its pattern, too. Of course, not all LaGuardia students are from working-class backgrounds. But many are, and those students may have concerns, questions, and ambivalence about college life that their families are not prepared to address.

To set the stage for these issues, I will start with my days as a journalism student at Hofstra University, a private four-year institution with tuition and room and board currently approaching \$40,000. While not ranked with the “elite” colleges, Hofstra often advertises its ambitions to join the ranks of the Ivy League. In both my social and academic interactions, the reality of Hofstra’s predominantly upper-middle- to upper-class milieu hit me with sudden force. Before my first history of music class, for example, I had never heard an aria or a symphony. The conventions of opera and classical forms are basic to general education in music, but when I first encountered them, I felt dislocated, out of step with the class, my professor, and my peers. In my family, opera was reserved for “rich people.” In most of my liberal arts courses, I felt the same way: professors spoke about theater, classical literature, and museums – all foreign to me. My parents had never taken me to these worlds, not out of laziness or neglect, but simply because my mother and father did not belong there. My parents’ world was blue-collar; our people played bingo and joined bowling leagues.

At school, the more “high” culture and ideas opened my eyes, the more awkward I felt. Sometimes, with a mix of bravado and scorn, I resisted “snobs” and their “upper-class” tastes, identifying instead with *Caddyshack* and *Trading Places*, movies that portrayed smart, wealthy people as fools. At other times, I used self-deprecation to deflate “elitism” and the intellect. With my parents, I joked that our family life resembled the sitcom *Roseanne*; and I recounted funny college anecdotes that pictured me as the fish out of water.

The emerging awareness that my class was “lower” carried over into dormitory life. My roommates were well off, but the three of us bonded and became best friends, class differences seemingly overlooked. Yet, there were moments when the gap silently widened. They

had ATM cards and access to cash; my mom slipped a ten-dollar bill inside a card every so often. They shopped in Manhattan; I wore the same clothes as I had in high school. Most painful was the return of my best friends from a secretly planned spring break, corn-rowed and tanned. I confronted them: Why hadn't I been invited, too? Their piercing reply: "We didn't think you could afford it."

But while feeling excluded and disconnected from classes and friends, I was aware that something crucial was happening; I was evolving. I was young, yes, but I recognized the signs of a substantial and positive transformation. I began to embrace the culture my professors offered. I forgave my roommates their unintended slight; our friendship blossomed and remains intact. I heard the words of Theodore Roethke in my American poetry class, as if spoken directly to me: "This shaking keeps me steady" (line 16).

My entire universe had turned upside down; I was outgrowing my working-class family and my ties to my background were steadily loosening. At the same time, I was becoming a more open and intellectually curious young woman who no longer sneered at ideas and art as "upper-class." I finally understood that college offers growth, and to maximize this growth, I experienced transitions that were unsettling, even frightening. To gain the benefits of change, I had to lose some of the world that I knew best.

When I entered graduate school, some of my old demons came along, too. By then, I was aware that my working-class origins were at odds with almost everything and everyone around me. During seminars in literary theory, my peers talked about growing up in homes with libraries, raised by parents who were academics. They traveled to Europe and drove nice cars; they used patronizing terms like "disenfranchised," "underprivileged," and "marginalized" to describe the conditions of people that I recognized as my own family. The discomfort – and enlightenment – of this socio-economic fissure continued for years, through graduate school and the completion of my doctorate.

Degree and identity anxiety in hand, I entered the academic job market with little knowledge of its conventions, no money, and over \$100,000 in student loans (hats off to Barack Obama for paying off his loans; mine still stand). It was during this period that, forfeiting monthly bill payments and vintage clothes, I bought The Suit. An Ann Taylor number that I tried to "accessorize," it was the same suit I wore to all my interviews, my very own working-class albatross. My fear was that, somehow, the faculty members interviewing me would see

through my appearance to my working-class reality, and that I would be discovered as a *poseur*. However irrational, my fear was born of the conflict between class identities: daughter of a machinist and waitress *and* earner of advanced degrees, the earlier identity less acknowledged, less public than the newer one.

Over the years, it would be up to me to balance these divided parts of myself. In the end, the introspection and determination to understand and reconcile these internal stand-offs made me stronger, more self-assured, and, I hope, more sympathetic toward my students. My point is simply that my transformation from working-class student to an academic at home in the classroom did not happen easily. As a teacher, how can I expect my LaGuardia students to be different, to transform suddenly before my eyes?

Each time I step into my classroom, I am reminded that my students are experiencing the same kinds of transitions that rattled me twenty years ago. The educational challenges I put to them are enormous: not only to alter their perceptions of reading and writing, but also to rethink the world around them, perhaps to relinquish cultural and socio-economic roots, and to take on new ways of being and seeing. Like many of my colleagues, I am conscious of nudging students, whether native-born or immigrant, out of their comfort zones, convinced that Roethke's "shaking" is for their own good.

But while I am challenging and nudging and convincing, I am also keenly aware of presenting myself in a particular light, as representing their story. Although there are exceptions, I assume that most of my students are where I once was, and I hope that, someday, my students might be where I am now. As a first-generation college student from a working-class family, I remember feeling clueless and lost. Fortunately, the New Student Seminar (NSS) provides an invaluable service in orienting students; and I know that many faculty are also aware of the need to expand upon the orientation that the Seminar offers.

Leaving nothing to chance, one of my first teaching actions is to reinforce or review academic policies and practices from office hours to classroom conduct to how to read a syllabus, basic information that I see as necessary to ensuring the full inclusion of all students in the classroom. Indeed, for those who have not attended the NSS, such information is foundational. On the whole, some of my students are confused by the same collegiate experiences and expectations that confused me in my day. *Do I have to ask permission to use the bathroom or do I just leave the classroom? Can I use highlighter pen to mark my*

texts? Where is the financial aid office? Rather than being frustrated by their confusion, I find that it is easy to be patient when I remember that, in their situation, I, too, longed for a mentor who could guide me. Consequently, I am a mentor as much as a teacher; my assuming both roles improves my students' chances of success not only in my classroom but throughout their academic careers.

But perhaps my most important contribution as a teacher is my commitment to creating a sense of community in my classroom. I lay the groundwork by engaging students in familiar interactive assignments: on the first day, students interview and introduce each other, and throughout the semester, group work, class discussions, and group presentations provide structure. But beyond these basic methods, I have additional techniques. For instance, on the first day of class, I ask students to write letters of introduction to me. These are not assigned or evaluated as diagnostic essays; rather, they are informal compositions that permit students to write about themselves as individuals, divulging as many intimate details as they wish. In this way, before reading their first formal writing assignment or hearing them speak in class, I have a clear sense, based on their letters, of who they are. When I create group or paired activities, I purposely place students alongside those with whom they have something in common. Not limited to driving student writing or creating a pleasant camaraderie, this atmosphere of community teaches my students how to be "whole learners," how to be part of something larger. In my view, classroom community constructed in this way is especially important in creating the support necessary for students who are forging a new path on their own. Breaking down isolation, working together can inspire students to accomplish the tasks at hand not only in my writing class but in all their classes.

Finally, I present myself both as a member of a shared community and as a role model to my students, often referring to my own blue-collar background and joking about some of my frugal habits. I tell my students that I am the first person in my working-class family to attend college and I share with them some of my undergraduate fumbles. My openness seems to put the students at ease and creates solidarity between us. The atmosphere in my classroom is one in which students have no need to fear disrespect or mockery from me or their peers. They know that they can tell it like it is without being judged; their openness carries over into their writing. My students feel that they can truly express themselves without repercussion; consequently, many compose

essays that contain intimate details about their lives that they might have otherwise withheld.

I present myself to my students as a blue-collar comrade not to win my students' approval or admiration, but to let them know that I have taken the path they are now exploring. According to Janet Casey, my method is rare; she points out that faculty members – “the single most likely avenue of support for working-class students” – are “subject to the class-based pressures of the academy . . . that inhibit public acknowledgement of their roots.” Casey continues, “Add to that notion that what college teachers are supposed to model is intellectual engagement – not the journey, but rather the point to which students should aspire” (36). As described, my methodology is quite the opposite: Far from presenting myself as a “final product” of success, I place myself as a kindred spirit who once embarked on a similarly tumultuous journey, honest about the obstacles and challenges that I encountered on the way. Thus far, my students have responded positively to this approach, telling me privately in my office and publicly in my classroom that it is pleasing to relate to each other in this manner.

One of the most unnerving processes that occurs at many institutions of higher learning is the erasure of the blue-collar experience. As institutions of higher learning set students up for white-collar jobs, and working-class culture and ideology are gradually erased, the ways of life that many students know disintegrate before their eyes, and the ways of knowing taught by their parents are replaced by what the experts teach them. Supplanting the values learned from their blue-collar community are the academy's valuation of achievement, prestige, and success. Suddenly, the familiar world inhabited for most of one's life is no longer “good enough.” Becoming a truck driver or a janitor is now too low an ambition – even if truck drivers and janitors were – and perhaps still are – friends and neighbors. Instead the push is to aspire to be “better,” to aim higher. As Geraldine Van Bueren observes, “Universities, which by definition focus on prestige and mobility, cast working-class students' experiences as irrelevant.” This casting away of my background happened to me when I was in college; I assume it is happening to many of my students.

To maintain the relevance of their backgrounds, I encourage my students to share their life experiences through writing and discussions. For example, the first assignment of ENG099 asks that students compose a personal narrative about a mental or physical illness endured, while a first essay in ENG101 centers on race, identity, and culture. I

share with my colleagues a belief that students who appear to have a difficult time adjusting to college life, as evidenced in their classroom conduct or academic performance, might be in the throes of a crisis in identity brought on by their sense of “irrelevance.” Sometimes it is easier to misinterpret a student’s behavior as uncooperative or immature when the core of his or her problem is actually tied to the feeling that everything familiar is vanishing.

As my own story illustrates, once admitted to college, I began to let go of my blue collar in favor of a white one, taught by my peers and my professors that I needed to embrace the constructs of a middle-class world – its language patterns, culture, histories, and values – if I wanted to succeed. I embraced this paradigm but not without struggle, torn between a fierce loyalty to my family and a fervent desire to “make it” in the world. I was proud of my social class, but, like Dr. Janet Casey, an English professor at Skidmore College who grew up in a working-class neighborhood of Boston, I had sometimes to hide and even eliminate those feelings because I could not “afford to be disdainful of the middle-class culture [I was] joining (“Class,” 21). Dr. Casey articulates the dilemma further this way:

[T]o celebrate working-class roots is problematic for students. I was one of those kids myself. I would have sooner died than admit my parents didn’t go to college . . . [the process] involves losing part of that blue-collar background or distancing yourself from it in a way that’s very painful. (“Class,” 21)

I see this painful “distancing” quite often among my writing students at LaGuardia, many of whom, in my experience, are also caught between letting go of their working-class lives and accepting the middle-class expectations of the college community. I vividly recall a young woman from Bangladesh who wrote that she had an uneasy relationship with her parents because they were illiterate. On one hand, she loved and cherished her parents; on the other, the secret shame she felt was in part a catalyst for wanting to surpass them in both education and opportunity.

As this example suggests, it is the psychological effect of giving up one’s past that is most devastating. Unlike other forms of diversity studies, such as race, queer studies, or gender studies, the study of class is still a somewhat taboo subject in American culture. Perhaps as a consequence, its signs are not always identifiable, especially in the classroom,

where class lines and divisions are mostly invisible. This invisibility can be desirable to the extent that blue-collar students do not stand apart from their peers. But the same invisible cloak that sometimes shields them can also cause isolation among working-class students who can feel lonely even when they are among others of the same social class.

A number of factors contribute to this “fish-out-of-water” complex, but one stands out for me. Blue-collar students often receive mixed messages from those closest to them. When I started to achieve academic success, my family was happy for me, applauding my achievements and boasting about me to other family members and friends. But during graduate school, the dynamic changed. As I received accolades and earned high grades, my success was mocked, in jest of course, but with an insistence that was hard to ignore. Although I never spoke with an advanced vocabulary or in a patronizing tone, my family perceived me as “high-class,” a snob. For my family, reading books and preparing for exams, activities that consumed my days, were not considered “work.” If I had been a super-star one day, the next I was a traitor. Looking out over my students, I wonder for how many this rupture exists; for this reason, I believe, my classroom must be a community – one that reconciles these divisions between academy and family, past and future, invisibility and visibility.

Going to college is hailed as the way for the working class to move into the middle class. But “[w]orking-class students may become alienated from their families and friends in direct proportion to their attachment to their new life, and they are often unprepared for the personal chasms which may open up, permanent or temporary” (Van Bueren). When my students at LaGuardia tell me that they are caught in this struggle, I tell them to keep pushing forward, and not let the mixed messages pull them down. As Casey says, working-class students “can’t go back to where they were” (“Class,” 21). To do so would defeat the purpose of working for an education. Students and teachers of similar origins at LaGuardia must know that if the contradictions of working-class backgrounds sometimes weigh upon us in institutions of higher learning, our histories, when brought out into the open, will inspire others to teach and learn.

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CLASS IN THE CLASSROOM

Nancy Berke, *English* and Evelyn Burg, *Communication Skills*

In the office of an urban two-year college, part of the nation's largest public university, a student and his professor discuss the improvements he is making in his Basic Writing course. The professor praises the writer's personal voice but notes that this strength is overshadowed by a weak and informal vocabulary. Pleased by recognition of a writerly style, the student offers to write a ten-page essay in urban slang. The suggestion has appeal, admits the professor; however, she points out, college students need to master the conventions of standard prose. Eager to learn, the student asks for advice; the professor's solution, a simple one, she believes, comes easily: "You could read the New York Times every day." "But I don't read the New York Times," he responds, with a bit of irony. "It's too high class for me."

This student's response seems significant to our position as educators at an institution with a population of students working for low wages and hoping for increased opportunity and wealth. These students want the education of the middle class, but its signs and symbols are sometimes contained in media that appear intimidating. Thus, they may perceive the language of the class that they would like to enter – or with which they already identify – as a language not their own.

Assumptions about class and the challenges these pose to teaching and learning have led to the cowriting of this article. Instructors of reading and writing, we have often thought about ways to address with our students the concept of class, and its themes and significance. Fortunately, in 2006, several intersecting events provided us the momentum needed to bring class into the classroom. Selected as LaGuardia's 2006–07 common reading, Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* helped to frame discipline-based and campus-wide activities and discussions about various conceptions of working-class labor. During that fall's Opening Sessions panel discussion, "Talking about Class in the Classroom," we discovered that similar interests in the history of class and labor had taken us to different industrial cities earlier that summer: Nancy Berke (English) to Youngstown, Ohio, and Evelyn Burg

(Communication Skills) to Detroit, Michigan. In both cities, shifts from local, industrial economies to global competition had left once-thriving communities in ruin.

In fact, while Evelyn's study group at Detroit's Henry Ford Community College was in session, General Motors, in a single action, laid off over 52,000 workers. For the workshop facilitators, the historical urgency of the threat posed to the American worker by the decline in manufacturing and the unemployment crisis required immediate classroom analysis. At the same time, at Youngstown State University's Center for Working-Class Studies Summer Institute, participating educators posed a number of questions, two of which concern us here: How can the concept of class be taught? What do we want students to learn from reading and writing about class and labor?

Our summer seminars inspired us to return to LaGuardia Community College ready to examine attitudes towards labor and its history in America. Our classes would be constructed around lessons that included discussion of, in particular, the terms "class," "middle class," and "working class," terms that are inherently slippery, their usefulness more or less context-dependent. "Working class" may refer to strict definitions developed in Marxist theory – i.e., that group of individuals who must sell their labor in order to meet their everyday needs. Or its definition may reflect post-Marxist, late-capitalist, high-consumer culture in which the definition of "everyday needs" has certainly changed and expanded.

But the current meaning of "working class," at least as understood by our students, may be more provisional still. Students have middle-class aspirations for the future and may have had middle-class experiences in the past in their native countries. However, a majority of LaGuardia students are workers, but, like many of us, they may not see themselves as such even if they labor in ways that the average white-collar professional would not associate with middle-class employment. Our students may be stockers at Walgreen's, cashiers at check-cashing establishments, waiters in restaurants; sometimes they fold clothes at the Gap, or change diapers and bedpans in nursing homes. At the same time, these stockers, cashiers, and waiters, some of whom are single parents in their thirties and forties, are also college students with the desires and aspirations of the middle class, laying claim to an identity displayed in advertising, promised in the classroom, and reflected in personal values. This mix of work, attitude, aspiration, and possession creates an identity more flexible than fixed. Given a fluidity of identity,

we ask the following question: Is the middle-class ideal – the American Dream and its conceptual architecture – so ubiquitous that thinking in terms of class difference and class categories has lost relevance?

Our summer workshops in Detroit and Youngstown reinforced the real social and personal consequences of taking the concept of “class” out of use. At LaGuardia, in our teaching of reading and writing, we found that, for students, concepts of class are unfamiliar or perplexing. The same discomfort is reflected in the absence of notions of class from the stories of workers recounted in Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed*. As she describes her own low-wage employment, Ehrenreich observes her coworkers’ disinclination to construct even a provisional working-class perspective as a form of either solidarity or critique. Hence, in the following discussions of two different classrooms, our concern is not about the ways the concept of class is currently configured, nor about how economic structures of American society affect learning outcomes. Our aim is more basic: we offer ways to introduce concepts of class as demonstrations of how reading and writing students might learn to see through a class lens – their own, a character’s, or even their professor’s.

Reading the Other

Robert Scholes has characterized the willingness to develop alternate lenses as “imagining the other” (167), an essential critical reading skill that he has observed lacking in beginning college students (165). In Scholes’ context, to omit another’s point of view raises larger questions about the difficulties facing students making the transition to college. The inability to read closely, to subordinate one’s personal opinions so as to better hear the writer, is a “problem of massive proportions” (167), and Scholes undertakes to trace some of its causes as well as some of its solutions. He cites a letter from his colleague at Brown University, Tamar Katz, who sees part of the problem rooted in a tendency among new high school graduates “to read every text as saying something extremely familiar that they might agree with” (qtd. in Scholes 165).

In other words, developing college students are often more comfortable when textual meaning conforms to a finite set of possibilities, a version of reliable cultural truisms in which they have been coached, such as the need for tolerance or respect for others, the existence of equal opportunity, or the invariable rewards of hard work. However valid, these values are not necessarily those expressed on the page; and inexperienced readers might, as Katz writes, “substitute what they

generally think a text should be saying for what it actually says” (qtd. in Scholes 165).

Eventually, Scholes writes, with training and discipline, developing readers will learn that texts “say things that many students will not, in fact, agree with and that we may not agree with either” (168). Managing the relationships among potentially incompatible ideas is a skill that students should possess as they leave college, along with mastering an author’s position and making critical judgments based upon textual evidence. For the writers of this article, one way for our students to “imagine the other” is to understand the concept of class and its various representations in our society – in a work of literature, an op-ed piece, a film, or their daily lives.

Experience has shown us that the larger conversation about who does minimum wage work and why workers sometimes have so little control over the conditions of their labor may be a delicate one; individual students may personalize and be offended by the critical content of the discussion. Additionally, because we no longer live in a time of union dominance and have long passed the heady days of the civil rights movement, students often see topics related to class and labor as irrelevant to their own experience. Still, we believe that a thoughtful discussion of class in class can serve higher-level literacy. The descriptions below show how we have emphasized attentiveness to “the voice of the other” in our exploration of the concept of class. Sample lessons used in our reading and writing classes appear as appendices.

Reading Class: *Evelyn Burg*

The following is a brief overview of the visual images and readings used to frame the concept and discussion of class in *Essentials of Reading* (CSE099) in spring 2006, and *Literature and Propaganda* (CSE110) in fall 2007. As described in the introduction, my emphasis is upon teaching activities originally motivated by the Ehrenreich common reading and my professional development study opportunity in Detroit in summer 2006.

In spring 2007, in conjunction with college-wide common reading events, I hung “From Nickels and Dimes to Dollars,” an exhibition of classic labor photographs curated from the Walter P. Reuther Library’s Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University in Detroit. My goal was to present these images for interdisciplinary classroom instruction, and, of course, to integrate them into my course work. The exhibition remained up until October 2007 so that I was

able to use it for two semesters.¹ I reprinted the black-and-white images in large scale, 17 by 22 inches, and added captions and a historical introduction. Among the thirteen photographs, several were famous. For example, “The Battle of the Overpass” shows Walter Reuther and other United Auto Workers (UAW) union organizers set upon and brutally beaten by Henry Ford’s “servicemen.” Another image depicts injuries sustained by Richard Frankensteen, a UAW organizer. Other photographs were of women factory workers, others still of children picketing on behalf of their fathers. In a photograph of the famous Memphis sanitation strike of 1968, a worker holds a sign bearing the message “I Am a Man.”² As students viewed the exhibit, they considered critical questions about the perspectives of the subjects, the photographers, and the curator (See Appendix 1).

In a unit of Literacy and Propaganda that focused on racial stereotyping, my objective was to relate and dissociate the two concepts of race and class. Previously we had explored how embedded cultural assumptions can be easily exploited by propaganda to produce a range of emotions. Students had read “‘Nigger’: The Meaning of a Word,” Gloria Naylor’s essay on the use of that significant term. To introduce the class issue, I assigned a *New York Times* opinion article by the cultural critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in which he considered a Pew Research Center finding that class divisions had not merely sharpened in the black community but had overtly begun supplanting race as a personal identifier.

To stimulate a discussion that required drawing relationships and distinctions between concepts, we began by breaking down my provocative – if leading – question: “Is ‘class’ a dirty word in America?” As usual, we started with an analysis summary of Gates’s view – that forms of solidarity once considered reliable might be dissolved in the mixture of attitudes, education, and material situations that we call “class.”³ Bracketing their own views, and following Gates, the students traced the origins of a troubling class difference emerging among blacks. In the end, two of the sharpest students argued that class was an unmentionable in American society, one student tracing the reluctance to speak openly about class identity to feelings of personal failure and of blame and shame within a culture of equal opportunity. Grasping the argument when presented by their peers, other students agreed.

After analyzing the Naylor and Gates readings, students took the “Class and Poverty Awareness Quiz,” designed by Paul Gorski for the education website *EdChange.org* and the *Multicultural Pavilion*.

Encouraging connections among concepts of poverty, class, and education, the quiz asks questions such as: Which variable most closely predicts SAT score – race, region, income, or parental education level? How many children die each year from causes related to hunger? Engaged by the topic of poverty, students quickly saw direct connections between the realities of economic differences and the various ways in which class is represented, institutionalized, and transmitted. After taking the quiz, students were required to question the quality of Gorski’s statistical sources, as well as the aura of validity and precision communicated by any multiple-choice format.

Several responses to the above classroom activities suggest that students are ready to grapple with questions of class. One woman approached me in surprise at the violent history of American organized labor, comparing it to the labor violence that she knew in Latin America. Another student was amazed that labor had a “history.” In fall 2006, during a common reading Speaker Series lecture on the future of labor in a global economy given to a broader group of LaGuardia students, many of whom were familiar with low-wage labor and illegal labor practices, a student in the audience was startled to learn that statistics were available on so many aspects of what he had thought were the forgotten sorrows of the poor. These students had begun to respond authentically to ideas and texts, finally hearing the “other.”

Writing Class: Nancy Berke

My illustration of how class is overlooked by students comes from a College Composition I class (ENG101) taught in spring 2007. I teach the *New York Times*, and sometimes find myself agreeing with the student whose sentiments open this article: on occasion, the pages of the *New York Times* are too “high class” for me as well. But the writing is excellent, and I want my students to learn to write well. That semester, my students read and wrote about essays that expressed different views of contemporary immigrant life in New York City. Edwidge Danticat and Junot Diaz, for example, underscored the difficulties immigrants in New York face, largely owing to the immigrants’ own desire for social mobility. I asked students to critique these essays by comparing their own feelings about New York City with those expressed by the authors.

Students were not directed towards a class analysis of each essay, so I was not surprised, though still intrigued, by their lack of attention to the class differences inherent in the authors’ narratives. Instead, students identified only the more familiar struggles the writers faced as

New Yorkers. Some shared Danticat's optimistic view that class differences could be erased in a place like New York with its "penny-gilded streets." Her parents came with nothing, worked hard, and eventually were able to purchase a home that they struggled day and night to keep. By way of a Puritan metaphor, Danticat describes New York as her "city on the hill." Many of the students' written responses to Danticat's story deemed its result axiomatic: if you work hard, you can purchase the rewards of the American Dream – career choice and home ownership. Our in-class conversations further highlighted students' connections to Danticat's and Diaz's stories of upward mobility; a few students admitted that the first years in New York "can be tough" – but they quickly returned to more generic and less painful concepts.

In the final paragraphs of their essays, students were to compare their personal experiences with those of Danticat and Diaz. Yet, most of their concluding paragraphs made little reference to the specific issues important to the authors and, most troublingly, their own authentic voices disappeared as they reverted to clichés or vague responses: "New York is my 'city on the hill' because of the diversity," "because I have always lived here," "because you can get anything you want here," or "I enjoy the opportunity here." Their responses made me wonder: Might an analysis of class, begun as a classroom dialogue, help students to locate the voice of the other, to recognize class inequality as a subject worthy for their essays, and to regain the authenticity of their own voices? Was there a connection between the voice of the other and learning to write authentically?

Reflecting on my class and on the distance between the conceptual knowledge that beginning college students have at hand and the levels they must reach to be truly literate, I am reminded of Katz's observation that students tend to address what an author "ought" to say rather than what he or she actually does say (qtd. in Scholes, 165). Because my composition students made no mention of "working class," almost no mention of work at all, and expressed no particular sense of class position, I had to acknowledge their difficulty: they did not recognize class differences or apply them to their own lives. Although the word "struggle" and the phrase "struggling to achieve one's goals" appeared frequently in the students' writing, there was no coordinating articulation of where the struggle was located, or who struggled, or why.

Without a discussion of what "class" means to students, the Danticat and Diaz texts merely reinforced the familiar image that immigrants struggle, suffer, and maybe triumph. To help their authentic voices to

emerge, developing students need more time to discuss new concepts – social mobility, for example, a key trope in these essays. In order to respond more fully to essays about immigrant life in New York City, they must first “imagine” the factory jobs of Danticat’s parents, or the Section 8 housing in which Diaz lived as a boy.

To reach the goal of moving students past assumptions and pre-conceived ideas, past clichés and toward unfamiliar concepts, in this case toward concepts of class and its effects on immigrants, educators must give students both the opportunities and skills to analyze why and how these conditions arise in the first place. For an extended lesson in the analysis of images of class in poetry and photography, see Appendix 2.

Conclusion

Like beginning students everywhere, students at LaGuardia need clearly directed and well-scaffolded discussion about unfamiliar concepts. In the case of class analysis, a review of the vocabulary, discussion of concepts, and analysis of historical background are all essential to understanding new constructs. They may give students those important initial jolts that can lead to greater engagement and/or identification with the authors they read and write about. In our classes, we found that introductions to class, combined with conversations about students’ own social aspirations and obstacles, could help students to discern the voices of others – Ehrenreich’s workers, Gloria Naylor, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Edwidge Danticat, and Junot Diaz – as both distinct from, and related to, their own.

Our previous teaching experiences and personal interests sent us to Youngstown, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan. We returned from those cities to our own urban community college with a new conviction that class remains a vital concept for classroom instruction and analysis, and relevant to numerous fields of discourse. Economists certainly continue to use the term, and the disciplines of history, business, communications, law, forensics, sociology, and education, for example, all require an understanding of social structures and analysis of class formation. In this age of race, gender, and sexuality discourse, for a student to be unfamiliar with class constructs is to function at a conceptual disadvantage, especially if his or her intention is to move on to baccalaureate institutions.

To understand the various ways the concept of class functions in society is to open one more pathway toward a larger critical perspec-

tive and a higher level of literacy. Bringing class into the classroom is only one of many different ways to engage students, but one we feel is particularly relevant to their education. Learning to hear the voices of others – and in this particular case, the class of others – helps develop a habit of mind that moves beyond the personal and takes its place in the wider world of civic awareness and responsibility.

Appendix 1: From Nickels and Dimes to Dollars: Images from the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs

Exhibit Questions: *Evelyn Burg*

Look carefully at the images, read the accompanying text at the beginning and under each photograph, and answer the following questions:

1. How does this exhibit relate to the Common Reading – Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed*?
2. Read the brief history that precedes the exhibit and answer the following questions:
 - What are some of the social changes that occurred at the end of the 19th century that helped to give rise to the labor movement in America?
 - Why do you think the Great Depression of the 1930s served as a spur to the American labor movement in the automotive industry?
3. Why might people involved in the American labor movement of the 1930s connect with the civil rights movement of the 1960s?
4. Research the term “Rosie the Riveter” mentioned in one of the captions. What period in history does this refer to and what is the social change involved?
5. Look at the photograph of Genora Jarvis and her son and the other photo of the children picketing. How do these photographs affect you? What is the significance of the figures in the background? Why are they left in shadow?
6. The photographer of “The Battle of the Overpass,” as it came to be called, became an important activist in the development of the UAW’s influence at the Ford Motor plant and in Detroit. What is

his name? How might history have been changed if his photos had been confiscated successfully? Was the attempt to confiscate the photographs the reason that he became an activist?

7. In the photograph of the spontaneous Memphis sanitation strike of 1968, the marchers all had the same slogan on their pickets. Do you think this slogan is effective in making their point? Why or why not? What tragic historical event happened during this strike? Why do you think the curator ended the exhibit with this image? Does it indicate anything about her perspective?
8. Online task: Go to Lexis-Nexis, Google, Ask.com, etc., and find two recent articles about the United Auto Workers and the large automotive companies (GM, Chrysler, or Ford). What do these articles tell you about the condition of the industry today? What are some challenges the companies and the union face? Do you see any opportunities for these industries?
9. What else struck you about this exhibit and why?

Appendix 2: Reading and Writing about Poetry and Images

Staged Assignment: *Nancy Berke*

As a participant in the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning's Designed for Learning seminar, which focuses on the effective integration of technology and student-centered pedagogies, I took the seed planted in Youngstown and designed a four-part series of staged activities to develop students' sensitivity to issues of class and to provide the necessary historical background to reveal how class matters. Utilizing poetry, images, and a legal document, engaging students' critical reading, writing, thinking, and visual interpretation skills, this assignment could be used in a variety of disciplines including literature, history, social science, and the visual arts.

Part 1: Poetry

Read the poem “Golf Links” by Sarah Cleghorn. You will need to consider the poem’s theme and its structure. Use a dictionary to look up words that are unfamiliar to you and write down their definitions in your class notebook.

The Golf Links

The golf links lie so near the mill
That almost every day
The laboring children can look out
And see the men at play

<http://womenshistory.about.com/od/writers20th/p/sarah_cleghorn.htm>.

1. Answer the following questions:
 - What is the poem’s subject?
 - How is the poem put together? Does it rhyme?
 - Look up the word “juxtaposition” in the dictionary and take note of its meaning. How does the author use juxtaposition in this poem?
2. Write a paragraph in which you describe your reaction to “The Golf Links.” Do not write a summary; I want to know what you think about the poem.
3. Post your answers to the questions and your paragraph on the Blackboard Discussion Board.

Part II: Photographs

Look carefully at Image A: <<http://www.historyplace.com/united-states/childlabor/glimpse.jpg>> and Image B: <<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor/empty.jpg>>, both taken at textile mills by American photographer Lewis Hine in the early 1900s.

1. What stands out most to you about these photographs?
2. Do they look staged?
3. What purpose do you suppose these photos served?
4. Based on your reading of the poem “The Golf Links” and on what you see in the photographs, give each of these photos a title.
5. Post your responses to the questions above and your titles for the photographs on the Blackboard Discussion Board.

Part III: Legal Documents

1. Read the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act of 1916 <[http://www.ourdocuments.gov/print_friendly.php?page=&doc=59&title=Keating-Owen+Child+Labor+Act+of+1916+\(1916\)>](http://www.ourdocuments.gov/print_friendly.php?page=&doc=59&title=Keating-Owen+Child+Labor+Act+of+1916+(1916)>).
2. Write a paragraph in response to this question: Why was the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act created? How does this act reflect what the U.S. government – and U.S. business interests – thought about child labor at that time in history?
3. Post your response on the Blackboard Discussion Board.

Part IV: Writing Assignment

1. Travel back in time to the year 1916. Imagine that you are a member of the National Child Labor Committee and are concerned about the welfare of young children. Using Sarah Cleghorn’s poem “The Golf Links” and Lewis Hine’s photographs of child mill workers as support materials, write a 600-word letter to President Woodrow Wilson encouraging him to sign into law the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act. Wilson (the 28th president of the United States) was a learned man, an intellectual, and a scholar. Show him the power of Cleghorn’s poem and of Hine’s photographs and how they depict the way citizens like you feel about labor practices that exploit children.
2. Post your letter on the Blackboard Discussion Board.

NOTES

1. As with any exhibition, this one was a collaborative effort. Tom Featherstone of the Walter Reuther Library was extremely generous with his time in sending me the images, Bruce Brooks and Scott Sternbach organized the use of LaGuardia’s printing facilities and provided materials, Hugo Fernandez patiently assisted in the printing project, and Michael Johnson facilitated. Finally, Cris Cristofaro and his art interns organized the display and hung the pictures in the lobby.
2. For a sampling of these photos and the accompanying historical introduction and study questions, see Burg.
3. As suggested by Michele Piso, faculty could supplement the discussion with a portion of “Everybody Hates Food Stamps,” an episode of the sitcom *Everybody Hates Chris*, in which Chris’s mother rashly spends the family’s money at the supermarket rather than pay with food stamps for her high-priced items in front of a snobbish neighbor.

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“ABOUT ME”: THE WORKING CLASS AND ePORTFOLIOS

Heidi Johnsen, *English*

“Working to me means responsibility, independence and effort,” wrote a student in an essay describing her view of work, her response to an assignment which encouraged Basic Writing students to analyze the “worker” part of their identities. I created this assignment when LaGuardia’s Common Reading Committee chose Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* as the 2006–07 common reading. The selection of *Nickel and Dimed* suggested that I might guide students in exploring a very important part of their lives: work. Still, I was not sure what form an analysis of identity with a focus on work might take, or how I might encourage students to talk about themselves in a very particular way, especially when that way would involve exploring class issues, something that Americans are not comfortable talking about. Fortunately, ePortfolio became a way shape the exploration.

In LaGuardia’s ePortfolio, I have found a tool that mirrors my own approach to guiding students to develop their writing and critical thinking skills. According to LaGuardia’s ePortfolio website, “The ePortfolio provides LaGuardia students with a tool for collecting their academic work and their reflections on their learning, and for sharing their portfolios on the World Wide Web” (“History”). The ePortfolio provides a larger audience with whom students might share their lives and offers students an important way to be seen and heard. I would argue that, because the ePortfolio provides a wider audience for students, it becomes a way to authenticate what students have accomplished and who they are.

Just as the ePortfolio can be used by students for many purposes, the “About Me” section allows students remarkable freedom in deciding how they want to represent themselves to an audience of their choosing. And I have found that “About Me” becomes a means for Basic Writing students to begin or continue exploring their identities as well as a way they can learn to construct a well-developed argument with the necessary evidence – themselves and their life experiences.

I regularly teach ENG098, the course into which students with the lowest ACT writing scores place. ENG098 is a pre-Basic Writing

course that allows students to practice the process of writing for an entire semester before facing the pressure of again trying to pass the ACT writing exam – a high-stakes test that determines whether or not a student can take credit-bearing Composition I (ENG101) – at the end of Basic Writing I (ENG099). The key difference between essays in an ENG098 class and those in ENG099 is development. Students in ENG098 have a harder time summoning ideas and reasons for their arguments and struggle to support their points with sufficient examples and explanations. I have found ePortfolio, and in particular, “About Me,” to be a useful way to frame writing assignments because they move students beyond the personal essay. A personal essay without a means for critical reflection can often feel like a personal journal entry. Using “About Me” in a specific way can narrow student focus until students can look analytically at their lives.

For example, for the first writing assignment in ENG098, I ask students to tell about themselves as writers in an essay I call “About Me: The Writer.” Since, in the past, most students who place into Basic Writing classes have not been successful with writing, they often do not like writing, and they certainly do not think of themselves as “writers.” The purpose of the assignment, therefore, is to challenge students to begin reassessing their own ideas of what a writer is and does, and, I hope, to see writing as a process they can work at and, therefore, get better at. The confluence of the personal and persuasive develops greater critical thinking skills for students as they try to assess their own identities.

For the second essay, I follow the same pattern: I look for other ways students might examine their own identities and use their life experiences as evidence in an “About Me”-type essay. Most LaGuardia students have worked and most continue to work while attending classes. I found this to be true of the more than 70 students I taught in three sections of ENG098 over the 2007–08 academic year; only three said they had never worked outside of their homes (and one of the three got a job during the semester he wrote his essay). With an assignment that asks students to articulate who they are as workers, I encourage students to honor their life experiences by surfacing the meaning of class as it relates to Ehrenreich’s text.

In the “About Me: The Worker” assignment, I first ask students to think about what work is: how they would describe the kind of work they had done so far in their lives. Next, I ask questions to make it easier for students to think about their own identities as workers: Why do you work? What kind of worker are you? I also suggest that students

compare their experiences with those of Ehrenreich. In the 2007–08 student essays, several themes developed: work is a necessity and can give a person greater independence and responsibility; work teaches a lot of hard lessons; and work is a means to an end. For many of the students I have taught in ENG098, the end is a better job.

Each of these three themes reflects the underlying, yet unspoken, issue of class – a significant part of any identity but one that we, as members of our American society, resist discussing. As Sherry Lee Linkon writes in her introduction to *Teaching Working Class*, “Defining [working class] has always been difficult in the United States, where our cultural faith in upward mobility and an idealized version of equality have led us to insist that class does not really matter here” (3).

Working during college does not necessarily mean a person is a member of the working class, but more than half of my students wrote that work is not just for “extra” money. For example, one student wrote, “Work to me is not an option, it is a necessity. In order for me to continue school and not struggle with acquiring necessities like clothes and books, I have to work. I am 18 years old I need to start supporting myself.” Another said, “The reason I work is because I have a lot of financial responsibilities. I am a single parent of a seven-year-old son. I have also been supporting my parents in Trinidad for several years. I have to work twice as hard in order to meet my expenses. Working is very essential to me because a lot depends on my income.” These are students for whom working means the difference between surviving on a daily basis or not, a situation which is a characteristic of the working class.

In their essays, students did not use the term “class” or address labor politics when referring to their experiences. Perhaps students hesitated to discuss class overtly because they had no apparatus, no terms to use to describe it, or perhaps they were reluctant to identify with the “working class” because of the negative stereotypes associated with the term. Still, they wrote about work and their experiences related to work, surfacing an important part of their lives that often remains buried. In the United States, everyone wants to believe that, if we just work hard enough, we can be rich and not subject to class restrictions.

The essays written by students in my ENG098 classes indicate that students hold this concept to be true. Students explained that they were in college because they believed a college education would give them better jobs and, therefore, better lives than their parents had. Students wrote about their current jobs as a way to earn money immediately, not

as a permanent part of their future. Few wanted to discuss their current lives in terms of the “working class.” It seemed that the working class was a status they wanted to leave behind.

By encouraging students to write about who they are as workers, I ask them to recognize the roadblocks class puts before them, so they may be better equipped to get past those obstacles. In *Nickel and Dimed*, Ehrenreich focuses on life for working class women specifically, and the difficulty of getting ahead in low-wage jobs. Students understood very well the difficulty of “moving up.” As one student expressed it, “By working for four years, I have gotten a taste of what the real world is like and I have realized that it is tough to get a high paying job without a degree.” This student demonstrated an understanding of the importance of education in escaping a limiting, low-wage job. Another said, “[E]mployment is what I seek to better my life and social status for upward mobility in order to reach that pinnacle of being gainfully employed, however sometimes I endured all types of set backs in the workplace.” This student wrote about a job as a way to achieve “social status” and “upward mobility,” portraying employment as part of an upward process, but with painful elements.

While Ehrenreich suggests that the working class is not escaped simply by working harder, in their essays, my students supported the belief that they could escape the working class by working harder. College students like the ones in my ENG098 classes may feel differently from Ehrenreich because they are generally young and hopeful about their futures and because the classes they are taking make them confident in their ability to make change. In their first semester of college, students in ENG098 who wrote about themselves as workers were much more optimistic than Ehrenreich about moving out of the working class. I appreciated and continue to appreciate that optimism. I want to encourage students to find practical ways to channel hope and confidence.

The “About Me: The Worker” writing assignment is also designed to encourage students to find meaning in their work for their lives outside the college classroom. Asking students to compare their experiences with those Ehrenreich describes in *Nickel and Dimed* allows them to find greater meaning in their work; as a result, they can write about their work more powerfully. In asking students to write about their working lives, I hope to create a place that might “include working-class students in college life” (Linkon 7). Linkon explains how this can be accomplished: “One central way ... is by teaching about social class,

especially about working-class culture. The easiest way to teach about social class is to include students' experiences in the classroom" (7).

In writing about their lives as workers, students begin to see the role class plays in their lives and how class affects them. Using "About Me" as a frame through which students examine different aspects of their identity allows them to think critically about who they are and who they want to be. Moreover, as they publish their writing in their ePortfolios, they make public the choices they have made and the identities they have created. With these important steps, students develop identities through writing and capture key moments in their academic and personal lives.

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STRADDLING THE HIGH SCHOOL/COLLEGE DIVIDE: THE WORK OF COLLEGE NOW

Carolyn Henner Stanchina, *College Now*

Because high school courses are viewed by students as being concerned with mastery of content knowledge alone, they may enter college assuming that, having received good grades in high school, they have a grasp of necessary foundational knowledge of the disciplines needed to do well in college courses. They are often under-prepared for the more conceptually oriented curriculum they encounter. This mismatch in worldviews, in ways of thinking about a discipline, leads to jarring disconnects and frustrations for students and instructors alike. (Conley, College 75)

When I came to College Now at LaGuardia in 2002, it was with great enthusiasm and little experience with high school teaching. Prior to taking this position, I had taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a French university for five years; and, English as a Second Language (ESL), English for Special Purposes (ESP), reading, writing across the curriculum, and research writing at various branches of CUNY for twenty-five years. I had been involved in teacher-training projects throughout these years. Clearly, I had had time to reflect on issues in second-language acquisition, on my teaching, and on how it impacted my students' learning. I was able to articulate a philosophy of teaching and learning; I had an understanding of the nature of academic work.

I knew of College Now as a CUNY-wide initiative designed to offer college-like experiences to high school students who might otherwise be less likely to enter college or to achieve college success. I came initially to coordinate and teach in the Bridge Connection, a new program conceived to support English language learners at Newcomers High School in their learning of academic subjects: social studies in particular. This precollege program was to serve as a bridge to regular credit-bearing College Now courses, and as such, a bridge to college. I felt confident that my background would enable me to meet the challenge of preparing high school students for college.

I had honed my concept of academic work at the CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues, Université de Nancy II), an institute dedicated to the principle of learner-centeredness and the promotion of learner autonomy. In its simplest definition, learner autonomy is the ultimate goal of an approach in which teachers and students share responsibility for learning to learn. In practice, promoting learner autonomy means engaging learners' preconceptions about language and learning, eliciting and sharing the cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies that enable them to compensate for what they do not understand or cannot express, in order to surpass their actual level of communicative competence as they continue to learn. The intended result of such a paradigm shift (described in Henner Stanchina, and in Henner Stanchina and Holec) is the students' simultaneous acquisition of both language and learning competence; students define their communicative needs and progressively take control of their own learning. Since the learning strategies they develop in this process are transferable to new contexts, students gain the potential to become lifelong learners. A learner-centered approach, then, is one in which learning to learn is central; knowing how people develop and learn indispensable. This simple, self-evident principle that teachers need knowledge of the learning process, need to apply this knowledge in structuring learning experiences for their students, and need to explicitly teach students how to learn has profound effects on teaching and learning when it is implemented. It conditions the way we view academic work, no matter what content we teach. And, because it is grounded in cognitive research, it endures.

Cognitive research provided me with theories about the nature of knowledge. "The most cited distinction is between knowing that and knowing how. Knowledge in general is seen as both a product or integrated collection of factual information and a process or set of procedures for knowing" (Hagen, Barclay, and Newman 19–20). Knowledge, then, is an interaction "between what is known and what is done" (21). Studies in cognition and metacognition related to reading comprehension propose training children with reading comprehension problems to become more strategic, "more active in their comprehension-fostering activities" (Brown, and Palincsar 10). Applications of cognitive research to the teaching of language-minority children use an instructional model that "integrates academic language development with content area instruction and learning strategies" (Chamot and O'Malley v). Chamot and O'Malley's model derives from the same theory that schema or

declarative knowledge is actively constructed through the interaction between what we already know and the new ideas and experiences we encounter; that *procedural* knowledge, or what we know how to do, develops as we gain mastery over a sequence of actions through practice with feedback, until we achieve automaticity or expert performance (12–18). This concept of expertise underlies cognitive apprenticeship teaching methods which are “designed to bring . . . tacit [cognitive and metacognitive] processes into the open, where students can observe, enact and practice them with help from the teacher and from other students” (Collins, Brown, and Newman 458).

It was this view of learning that had structured my teaching as I trained students to use strategies; to apply their background knowledge to various tasks; to formulate meaningful questions and read/listen with a purpose, generating, confirming, and revising their hypotheses; to make inferences; to predict, paraphrase, and summarize; and to monitor their comprehension and language production. It was this view of learning that had sustained my interest as I sought ways to externalize the internal process of learning so that students could gain insight into what they were doing and feedback on how to do it differently. By reflecting on their own learning process and not just displaying the product of their learning, my students came to change their schema for reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English, and I came to confirm that working from a “core set of learning principles ” (Bransford et al. 23), regardless of the content of one’s teaching, is the way to do exemplary academic work.

This view was again reinforced in studies on learning disciplinary ways of thinking, which suggest that “disciplines need to be more involved in the research on how people think and how students learn” a given content (Middendorf, and Pace 2). Middendorf and Pace describe a metacognitive process in which instructors in various disciplines are asked to distance themselves from their own automatized ways of thinking and solving problems in their fields so that they can “reconstruct the steps that they themselves do” when solving problems similar to those they assign to students (5). The goal is to explain and model in detail how an expert would go about solving a problem in a particular discipline, to provide students the opportunity to practice the task with feedback, and to evaluate their performance.

Once a particular set of skills has been mastered by most of the class, the instructor can begin to generate more complex exer-

cises that provide the occasion for synthesis and application. And throughout this process, the instructor can make strategic decisions about the subject matter used in these exercises to be sure that the time spent on these skills reinforces the most essential topics in the course. (Middendorf, and Pace 8)

In other words, the pared-down course content serves to support the disciplinary ways of thinking and solving problems, just as the content of my teaching provided the vehicle for the acquisition of learning strategies. I took comfort in the concordance of all these views.

And then, through my work in College Now, I went back to high school.

The transition was disorienting and disheartening; the practices I observed so dissonant. The very structure and focus of the high school day – the chaos, the decibel level, the 40-or-so-minute periods that organize each day and fragment learning as students are herded from one self-contained subject area to another, the obsession with standardized test results that leads teachers to rush through their curricula in a mad attempt to “cover” inconceivable amounts of factual information in chronological order, without allowing themselves to provide time for students to process or to see connections within or across disciplines, or to engage students in extensive in-depth reading, thinking, talking, writing or questioning – are impediments to the accomplishment of good academic work. Despite the increasing numbers of students whose native language is not English, there is often little communication between ESL and other academic departments, and little shared responsibility across the disciplines for the explicit teaching of academic, informational reading and expository writing, which are so critical to students’ success in college. Instead, both the level of challenge in high school classes and teacher expectations for sustained intellectual effort and performance may be lowered.

The many extraordinary teachers and administrators I know in our College Now partner high schools understand this and seek their own individual solutions for change. But as the education system bears down, many devoted, skilled, talented teachers may eventually acquiesce in the myth that “covering” the curriculum in a linear race against time will help students pass their exams and graduate from high school. Thus does the transmission model of teaching persist, though it fails not only to guarantee student success on standardized tests, but also to prepare students for the rigors of college-level work.

My own difficult transition from college to high school, the acute case of disconnect I experienced, the “mismatch in worldviews” cited above, is largely rooted in these differing concepts of academic work. In elaborating this difference, Conley reports that

the college instructor is more likely to emphasize a series of key thinking skills that students, for the most part, do not develop extensively in high school. They expect students to make inferences, interpret results, analyze conflicting explanations of phenomena, support arguments with evidence, solve complex problems that have no obvious answer, reach conclusions, offer explanations, conduct research, engage in the give-and-take of ideas, and generally think deeply about what they are being taught. (National Research Council qtd. in Conley, *Toward* 6)

Further, Conley affirms that these habits of mind, or “‘key cognitive strategies,’ have been consistently and emphatically identified by those who teach entry-level college courses as being as important or more important than any specific content knowledge taught in high school” (Conley, *Toward* 5).

Intervening at the juncture of high school and college, College Now is uniquely positioned to see the disconnect from a broader perspective. LaGuardia’s College Now program currently serves about 1,500 students per semester in 20 high schools in Queens. Most of the students take courses taught by high school faculty at their high schools. Some of these courses are enhanced by the participation of LaGuardia faculty. To serve smaller, neighboring high schools, we have developed an array of “campus cohort” courses taught only for high school students on the LaGuardia campus. All courses are sequenced to allow students to enter at varying grade and ability levels. Thus, we offer electives to tenth graders, including English language learners struggling with academic English while learning content. “Gateway” courses, with slightly lower entry-level criteria, serve as a pathway for students who might not initially qualify for regular College Now courses. Once students have demonstrated their ability to succeed in cohort college-level classes, they can enroll in LaGuardia’s “College Connection” program in which they take regular classes at LaGuardia, measuring their own performance against that of college students. Throughout the different configurations of our course offerings, the challenge remains constant: to understand and ease the transition from high school to

college, despite the lack of intentional alignment between the two. This work already happens through classroom teaching and through cross-institutional conversations in professional development meetings with faculty.

However, an attempt to reconcile the discrepant views of academic work and meet the challenges of readying high school students for college requires that more work be done. For example, while our College Now courses are sequenced in terms of entry-level criteria, this sequencing does not ensure that each individual course identifies the key content, the “big ideas” of a discipline, or systematically develops in students the strategies or habits of mind – analysis, interpretation, problem solving, and reasoning – they need to participate in disciplinary ways of thinking (Conley, *Toward 5*). Nor does it ensure that common, measurable exit standards are applied across the board. To achieve these objectives, we need to collaborate with faculty to define the essential concepts of a discipline and, focusing on the learning process, to find ways to make the invisible process of learning visible. We need to enable teachers to observe and monitor student learning, provide effective and timely feedback, and externalize their own expert meaning-making strategies, modeling for their students what they know and how they come to know it.

Working with teachers in the Bridge Connection program at Newcomers High School on the premise that less content is more, that thinking historically and reading and writing competently presuppose the requisite cognitive and metacognitive processes, and that “writing may be by far the single academic skill most closely associated with college success” (Conley, *Toward 5*), we are currently looking at student writing as a window into student thinking and as a reflection of the design and scaffolding of writing tasks as well as the role of feedback. So far, the simple juxtaposition of teacher tasks and student responses has been rich and revealing. In one case, we examined a prewriting brainstorming activity and the resulting essays. The evidence led us to conclude that the prewriting activity needed to be redesigned if it were to elicit the kind of in-depth, supported, well-organized writing required in college. This activity pointed out the need for teacher intervention to scaffold the process, to embed the critical habits of mind when students are still thinking through the question; the need for building task knowledge so that students understand the expectations underlying good academic writing; and the need to weave in diagnostic and formative assessments throughout the course. In another discussion, we focused on finished

essays that competently presented, in three neat paragraphs, Darwin, Galileo, and Martin Luther as revolutionary thinkers, yet failed to connect them within the context of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. How much further would the students have to go in order to achieve a higher standard of writing, and how do we encourage them to persist in this drafting process? These and many other questions about how we support students' reading, writing, and learning across the disciplines need to be addressed. One of our goals is to design a rubric that identifies not only the key content knowledge but the complex skills and strategies, the habits of mind we want students to demonstrate as they move from one level to the next within the precollege Bridge program to College Now, and then, to college.

Using Newcomers High School as an incubator for a new pedagogical approach, we hope to enlist the support and collaboration of our College Now faculty at LaGuardia. Such a collaborative effort would make particular sense in light of the affiliated status recently conferred on Newcomers High School which sends approximately half of its graduating class to LaGuardia. Our populations are strikingly similar. A sustained conversation – high school and college instructional faculty sitting down with each other as equals – would help us all to clarify our expectations regarding what students should know and be able to do at various points on the continuum from high school to college, and to develop a coherent plan. Within College Now, a definition of the necessary knowledge and know-how would strengthen the sequence of courses we offer and ensure that in offering students their first opportunity to take a college course, we truly offer them a college course. A common purpose would also allow high school and college faculty to reflect on their assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning and determine whether these beliefs are enacted in their classrooms. Given LaGuardia's record on learning communities and the combined knowledge and expertise of faculty from both institutions, this goal seems attainable. According to Conley, it is also promising: "Ongoing communication across institutional boundaries using the language of student learning as a common point of reference can facilitate more student movement across those boundaries" (*College* 77).

We, and our students in College Now, are straddling two worlds. The challenge – and the opportunity – to discuss and define exemplary academic work that will begin to bridge the gap between high school and college awaits.

I invite you to the table.

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PART TWO

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

ACADEMIC STUDY AND VOCATION

Doreen Kolomechuk, *Cooperative Education*

Whether students study the arts, languages, science, or philosophy, an academic education should enable them to find meaning and purpose in life, to find a calling – to pursue a vocation. Progressive academia incorporates an experiential learning model, encouraging professional aspirations that build on and provide additional motivation for classroom learning. One form of experiential learning that is prominent nationally and that has always existed at LaGuardia Community College is the Cooperative Education Internship Program (Co-op). Co-op's mission is to:

- Engage students in a process of active learning that links classroom activities and work experiences with opportunities for critical analyses and reflection;
- Enable students to achieve their educational, personal, and career goals; and
- Empower students to contribute to the community as responsible citizens of a rapidly changing multicultural and global society. (LaGuardia)

While many scholars view favorably the notions of experiential education and learning through work, others remain skeptical about their place in academia. Richard Freeland, past President of Northeastern University, has written numerous articles espousing the importance of experiential learning and work while highlighting the tensions that surround experiential learning pedagogy and practice. According to Freeland,

[a]t a time when 60 percent of young Americans attend college, we should recognize that curricular models created when higher education was reserved for social and economic elites need to be re-thought. We should move beyond the shopworn opposition of liberal and professional education and seek ways to nurture in our students both the impulse to grow intellectually and the desire to prepare for the practical and material challenges of adulthood. It is time for academe to recognize that occupations

apart from primarily intellectual pursuits can be, and are for many people, a rich source of meaning in their lives.

The debate surrounding the role of work and experiential learning in the curriculum is not new. This debate has accompanied cooperative education programs since 1906, when Dr. Herman Schneider of the University of Cincinnati started a cooperative education program for engineering students. Schneider thought it was essential for engineering students to put theory into practice by working in the field while attending classes (Wilson 4). At that time, there was some criticism and a lack of support for this learning model, but despite the criticism and over one hundred years later, cooperative education flourishes. At LaGuardia, Cooperative Education offers internships in over 350 major corporations, government agencies, and not-for-profit organizations to students in a wide variety of majors, from those geared toward specific professions to programs in the liberal arts.

With an eye toward continuing innovation in the field of experiential education, in 2002 LaGuardia undertook a college-wide study of its Cooperative Education program. Under the leadership of President Gail O. Mellow, a “Task Force on Redesigning Cooperative Education” was charged to review and make recommendations about the Co-op internship program at the college. The Task Force reviewed best practices and conducted a literature review in the field of cooperative education, analyzed trends in experiential learning practices, examined data and issues related to Co-op at LaGuardia, and engaged with many others in the college community to obtain feedback from diverse constituencies. The final consensus of the Task Force was that cooperative education internship experiences are valuable and should be required across the curriculum. According to the 2002 Task Force report,

Co-op at LaGuardia is more than just participation in internships. It is a central component of education at its best, based on an educational philosophy that embraces individual needs and draws upon student strengths and experiences. Through a collaborative and active learning process, Cooperative Education addresses and promotes psychosocial, cognitive, and interdisciplinary skill development. It provides a context for self-assessment and self-directed learning where the learner connects, constructs, and reinforces knowledge through direct experience, reflection, analysis, and synthesis. (Kopp, and Kolomechuk 1)

The benefits of internships for students are well-documented within and beyond the LaGuardia report. In *Changing Lives: LaGuardia Stories*, compiled by Professor Emeritus Catherine Farrell, who taught for many years in Cooperative Education at LaGuardia and served as a Dean in the Division, students recount and reflect on their educational experiences at LaGuardia and elsewhere. An underlying theme for most students reflecting on their education is the value of their work and cooperative education experiences in enabling them to make connections between classroom learning and what they want to accomplish in their lives. Students found that reflecting on the connections between study and work was intellectually engaging and purposeful. According to Keen and Howard, “[p]sychological or personal outcomes positively related to co-op experience include greater attachment to their university, firmer commitment to educational goals, short-term gains in social adjustment . . . , increased autonomy, and improved quality of interpersonal relationships . . .” (132).

Cooperative Education at LaGuardia serves students on paths toward degrees in the majors they selected upon entering LaGuardia as well as those who are changing majors. For LaGuardia students who must change majors because they do not earn the grades required by selected programs, Cooperative Education can be particularly important. Making alternative educational and career plans is crucial for students such as those who choose to pursue, say, Nursing but do not get into the Nursing program. Internships complemented by Cooperative Education seminars can help those students become aware of alternative careers in health care or other fields.

Participation in regularly scheduled Cooperative Education seminars is required of students enrolled in internships. Currently, the Cooperative Education department offers a variety of internship seminars including: Critical Reflection and Learning at Work (CPA041), Fundamentals of Career Advancement (CPB041), The Future of Work (CPC041), and Reflective Practice in the Teaching Profession I & II (CPA011 and CPB011). The seminars provide a framework for students to analyze and reflect on their internship experiences in relation to course content. The seminars also support decision-making related to careers and enhance the development of the college’s core competencies. Additionally, the seminars explicitly reinforce the importance of individual and collective civic responsibility with a special emphasis on recognizing the importance of an equitable multicultural environment in the workplace and in the community.

I believe it is critical that experiential learning be reinforced throughout the curriculum. The college's Center for Teaching and Learning and the Cooperative Education department, in conjunction with several other academic departments, have taken steps to achieve this goal by facilitating year-long professional development seminars for faculty such as the "Experiential Education in the Disciplines Curriculum Review and Integration Project" which took place in 2003–04. During 2006–07, the Center's professional development seminar series brought together faculty from the Humanities department and the Cooperative Education department to promote the development of oral communication skills in the Co-op internships and corresponding seminars. During 2007–08, the Center brought together faculty from across the college to further align the Cooperative Education seminars with program-related competencies in Accounting, Paralegal Studies, Travel and Tourism, Business Administration, Business Management and the Humanities.

As a college, we have made great strides in recognizing the importance of learning through experience and work and in connecting experiential learning to the disciplines. As we move forward, I hope that we will continue to use what we have learned to enable students to find meaning and purpose in their lives.

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IMMIGRANTS IN THE WORKFORCE: THE TRANSITION FROM WORKER TO PROFESSIONAL

Tania Ramírez, *Center for Immigrant Education and Training*
Melinda Thomsen, *CUNY Language Immersion Program*

Introduction

The “English for Workers” program of the Center for Immigrant Education and Training (CIET) of LaGuardia’s Division of Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) has recently been renamed “English for Careers.” This seemingly insignificant change represents an important shift in our approach to workplace ESOL. Unlike the long-term academic goals of ESOL students planning to enter LaGuardia’s credit programs, the objectives of CIET students are immediate: our students must learn basic English to work and they must work to survive. If their English does not improve beyond the basic level, their economic opportunities will not improve either.

In search of increased economic opportunities and freedoms, many CIET students arrive in New York with little or no English, obliged to start life over again in a culture that is unfamiliar and, at times, perhaps, unwelcoming. Those who find their way to our program are from opposite ends of the educational spectrum. At one end are those with professional licensure or multiple degrees earned in their native countries: social workers, architects, or managers. At the other end are migrant workers; some may never have worked at all.

Cutting across all groups is the single characteristic of limited English proficiency (LEP). Stuck on the wrong side of the language barrier, his or her sense of identity and confidence diminished by the trials of immigration, a person of limited English proficiency usually accepts almost any work at all. Without English, the nurse or lawyer who sacrificed a prestigious position and social status at home and the factory worker with less than a fifth-grade education both end up trapped in a relentless cycle of low-paying jobs. Regardless of class and education, whether from Egypt or Ecuador, China or Colombia, CIET students are aware that limited English proficiency affects the kinds of employment, level of earnings, and amount of benefits available to them.

Since its inception, CIET's mission has been to improve the economic status of students, supporting the efforts of low-income immigrant adults to become independent, contributing citizens of New York City by providing them with free courses in basic English, career counseling, and case management services (LaGuardia). In addition, the Center customizes programs for special purposes, such as family literacy, civics education, and workforce development. Driven in part by a shift from a need for manual workers to a demand for those adept at customer service, CIET's programs have evolved to meet workforce demands. In 2002, one of the first specialized projects that CIET took on was the provision of English classes to displaced factory workers in Long Island City.

In July 2005, CIET was awarded a \$500,000 demonstration grant by the United States Department of Labor to create and implement a curriculum to advance back-of-the-house LEP workers in the hospitality industry (housekeepers, laundry workers, and food service staff) to more customer-service-oriented positions ("President's"). Our partner in this project was the Sheraton Hotel whose primary objective was to prepare these workers to assume higher-level, front-of-the-house positions, such as front-desk agents, concierges, information desk employees, and wait-staff, all of which would require greater customer interaction. To earn promotions, workers needed to learn to project Sheraton's corporate philosophy of "a thriving and dynamic service culture that is both inclusive and respectful" ("Sheraton"). Clearly, for those who wanted to move up from their invisible positions in the back of the hotel to the more challenging and interactive positions out front, representing that message meant achieving improved performance in English language communication as well as mastering other skills related to customer service. The collaboration between CIET and the Sheraton resulted in the Hotel TEACH curriculum (Teaching English and Careers in Hospitality), a teaching model that integrates English, career counseling, and technology.

The Hotel TEACH curriculum was written by a team of teachers and administrators, including the authors, an ESOL instructor and a career counselor. At CIET, we recognized the real economic and social problems facing our LEP working students. We resolved to create a comprehensive course in contextualized English that aimed to raise levels of English acquisition and redirect career choices. Our ultimate challenge, however, was to prepare our students to envision entry-level positions not as end points, but as openings to professional futures.

To meet these goals, we designed Hotel TEACH around three primary competencies and created individual lessons that stressed practice in communication skills, emotional intelligence, and technological proficiency, the key performance areas in which today's professional must remain competitive. Structured this way, we believed, Hotel TEACH would help facilitate the transition from worker to professional. The following is a brief examination of the course, our students, and their progress.

The Course

In response to the requirements of the Department of Labor grant, CIET designed the Hotel TEACH integrated curriculum, using a strategy motivated by research that concluded that “the most effective programs for moving low-income individuals into work . . . provide a mix of services, including job search, education, and job training” (Wrigley et al. 1). The course was designed to integrate the diverse needs of the students and the specific goals of the employer by combining improvement in English language skills with the acquisition of soft skills needed for front-of-the-house hotel jobs.

The course met for 10 hours per week, from Monday to Thursday, for 16 weeks during the Spring 2006 semester. On three nights, after their work shift, 22 Sheraton workers traveled from the hotel to LaGuardia for computer lessons and English classes. On the fourth evening, class consisted of two parts, a career counseling session and an English class, each given by a different instructor. These two parts were held at the Sheraton on 50th Street and Seventh Avenue in Manhattan, in an executive conference room complete with water, mints, and Sheraton stationery provided by the supportive management. At both LaGuardia and the Sheraton, classes were supplemented by Internet and Blackboard resources, and MP3 players received as part of the grant. The technological resources allowed students to download lessons or practice independently.

The Hotel TEACH students had worked in the hospitality industry for an average of 10 years or more. Some of them, like Maritzabel and Sylvia, wanted to move to upper-level positions. Others, like Steven, an immigrant from China, worked in the laundry room and did not care to be promoted. His goal was to learn about computers and communicate with his non-Chinese coworkers, thereby meeting a secondary Sheraton objective to create more cohesive and collaborative work teams. An unplanned outcome was that self-sufficient students working toward

accomplishing their own life goals would also become happier, more productive, and more enthusiastic Sheraton employees.

The three components of the Hotel TEACH curriculum (English, career counseling, and technology) complemented one another in a variety of ways. As the course instructors, we knew that in addition to improving their English, our students would have to think critically about career choices and learn the professional skills necessary to advance in the hospitality industry.

Career Counseling

Unlike traditional models of career counseling that focus solely on resume creation and interview preparation, our Hotel TEACH course used career counseling sessions to help students increase language proficiency and confidence by using English in multiple interpersonal exchanges. The weekly career counseling session reinforced English-language learning through lessons that addressed active listening, conflict resolution, and teamwork, as well as skill in managing stress, and building self-awareness and self-esteem.

As described by Daniel Goleman, these interpersonal skills, widely known as “soft skills,” are some of the key features of emotional intelligence. These competencies are increasingly ranked by employers as most important for professional growth and success (5), and employees who lack these competencies often remain at the bottom of the ladder. Sylvia, for example, had worked in the housekeeping department for many years, but her ambition was to become a manager of that department. Adept at the “hard skills” needed to do her job, Sylvia performed her duties efficiently and thoroughly. However, her short temper and self-described anger problem kept her from advancing. She was quick to get into conflicts with her coworkers, driven perhaps by the difficult nature of her work and a perceived lack of appreciation from hotel guests and management. She held on to resentment that, at times, revealed itself in nonprofessional ways. Once, when a hotel guest addressed her as “Maid,” Sylvia’s response was immediate and defensive: “Excuse me; I am not your maid!”

In class, Sylvia’s frustration with the guests was shared among her fellow students, many of whom felt the same way as she. Sylvia’s experience became material for instruction. The class established ground rules for discussion and confidentiality, allowing important tensions to be worked on safely. In small groups, using Sylvia’s experience as an example, students brainstormed ways to respond positively and

negatively to confrontational situations, identifying outcomes for each response. Our conversations permitted students to talk openly about their own struggles with communication in English with the perception that they were intellectually inferior. To illustrate this perception, we discussed the use of the word “maid” as an insult. To the students in our class, the label “maid,” unlike the word “Miss” or “Mister,” connoted subservience and reinforced a common stereotype of immigrant workers. “We are with the housekeeping department,” they said. “We are not maids.” Sylvia’s anger and frustration were invaluable to teaching both the central concept of self-awareness and the dangers of taking personally remarks made by hotel guests.

In a follow-up class, we assigned role-plays in which students acted out customer-service conflicts and used a student-generated rubric to score key customer-service coping skills, such as maintaining eye contact, expressing verbal and nonverbal cues that indicate attentiveness to the guest, paraphrasing what was said to ensure that the message was received, and, of course, taking a deep breath if negative feelings arise. In additional lessons focused on empathic listening and maintaining a professional demeanor, we discussed the cultural expectations of American professionalism.

As foreigners in this country and outsiders in the professional sector, the students had not previously been oriented to these workplace norms. They knew how to keep their jobs; they understood that part of any job sometimes is to be on the receiving end of a rude guest or a stressed-out manager. What our students wanted to learn was how to move past the rudeness and the stress, both figuratively and literally.

In the end, the essential lesson of career counseling was that in addition to limited language proficiency, the true barrier to professional advancement for our students was their limiting beliefs about their own abilities. Career counseling helped students to address these barriers and to explore personal strengths, encouraging them to identify and deal with negative assumptions that reduced their potential for promotion and for “making it” in an English-only environment. To challenge limiting thoughts, students created counter-statements, an effective technique of cognitive restructuring. For example, “Learning English is difficult” became “I am learning more English every day;” “I am too old to change my job” became “I am able to change my job.” Students learned that “you are what you think you are”: If they wanted to be professionals, the students first had to envision themselves in that role.

Integrating English into Hospitality Work

Incorporating the soft skills learned in the career counseling sessions, the English class focused on listening, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary within hotel situations. We also adapted the S T A R T curriculum created by the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute for its Lodging Management Program (American; Redman, and Richards 31–64), shaping the course to address the Sheraton’s specific needs. Students completed surveys about their work and communication goals; in turn, we used this information to identify topics and create lessons. For example, in response to a student request to learn how to interrupt supervisors, we designed a lesson that identified the grammatical structures, functions, and vocabulary appropriate to the situation.

The course opened with the basics of greeting guests, and concluded with lessons that targeted communicating with guests who expressed anger on the phone or in person (“Hotel T.E.A.C.H. Project Curriculum”). We addressed the register of speaking, guiding students to note the difference between informal and formal or professional speech. For example, our students needed to practice using more polite expressions such as “What would you like?” rather than the more abrupt “What do you want?” In addition, Sheraton management wanted employees to learn the art of chatting, the ability to make small talk with a guest or supervisor while, say, waiting for an elevator. An interesting, secondary outcome was that students found that the approach to coping with workplace issues influenced the way they dealt with family issues. For example, the “Apologize, Sympathize, Accept Responsibility, and Prepare to Help (ASAP)” method, a strategy used to calm angry guests (“How to Handle”), was useful at home, too. For Maritzabel, the techniques that now made her a more active listener at the Sheraton were improving her relationship with her teenage son.

The integration of English into workforce training was often accomplished through projects and inquiry-based learning that required basic levels of critical thinking skills. For example, e-mailed assignments required attentiveness and independence: students had to open the e-mail, read the instructions, and then follow the steps to complete the activity. In this way, they learned how to write “Thank You” e-mails, too. Task complete, students reviewed the e-mail’s required components before sending it on to the addressee at the hotel. This approach inspired the students to use their newly acquired knowledge, problem-solving, and critical thinking strategies to improve their situation at work.

Because the students were able to relate these language lessons to their daily work, they were more engaged in the course. One evening, a student who had never before given directions to a guest came in and said, “I explained to a guest how to get to the ladies’ room today and she understood me!” For Maritzabel, who wanted to move from banquet server to captain, lessons on how to speak to guests were enlightening. She remarked that she could not believe the difference between “need to” and “have to.” She had been giving guests directions using “have to” and now realized why guests had not looked pleased. She learned that “have to” sounded like an order as opposed to the softer or more polite “need to.” The accumulation of seemingly small successes at work contributed to a greater sense of happiness and control. Students attended our class regularly; they did not want to miss a lesson.

Technology and the Sense of Professionalism

Although the Hotel TEACH technology component covered a considerable amount of material, the students’ motivation was kept high by the awareness that they needed computer skills to advance in their careers. In addition to three scheduled hours of computer lab per week, Hotel TEACH students, like students all over LaGuardia, often accessed the Blackboard classroom and the Internet from their home computers, thus practicing and reinforcing their technology skills, learning to upload and download lessons to their MP3 players, setting up e-mail accounts, writing resumes, and explaining the steps of these processes to their classmates. In class, as the students worked together on an assortment of projects, the lab became a communal environment: Using *Microsoft Publisher*, students designed “Certificates of Appreciation” for their managers, printing them out in color on glossy paper. Creating *Excel* spreadsheets, they drew up monthly budgets, getting in some extra practice on the four basic math functions along the way.

Our use of the MP3 player suggested new avenues for workforce training. By using the MP3 players, we could extend the class, address varying skill levels, and individualize lessons for students who worked in different areas of the Sheraton. Our students were amused that their fellow subway riders most likely assumed they were listening to music hits when, in reality, they were memorizing irregular verbs! We also developed our own podcast lessons so that students could download pronunciation or listening exercises (Thomsen). One example of individualized podcasts was “Intro to Wines & Spirits, Part 1,” designed in

response to Maritzabel, who needed to work on her pronunciation. As she was the only banquet server in this class, we were able to help her pronounce the names of a variety of wines and liquors without having to take extra time from the rest of the class. The students would sometimes practice the podcast lesson in class and later download it at home to review it at their convenience. The online podcast site is available for any other instructor to download or use. Currently, there are thirteen podcasts to choose from, on a variety of workplace situations.

At the end of the course, happy with his job in the laundry room and his ability to chat with his coworkers, Steven found that technology gave him even greater opportunities to send e-mails to friends and family all over the world. Other students, like Maritzabel and Sylvia, were able to complete online applications and submit resumes for the jobs they wanted. Significantly, eighty percent of the participants in this course made one to two level gains in English as measured by the BEST Plus test of oral English proficiency, which is recognized by New York State. We speculate that the patterning necessary to master specific computer tasks such as saving or recording procedures may have contributed to students' gains in English acquisition, given that as they practiced computer skills, they worked as well on identifying sentence structure or pronunciation patterns.

Conclusion

As described earlier, we designed Hotel TEACH's three-component curriculum and piloted it as part of a Department of Labor demonstration grant. Course outcomes indicate that the Hotel TEACH cleared a transitional path for the students' shift from worker to professional, first, by clarifying real world expectations and second, by providing concrete occasions for students to practice necessary competencies. Students increased their skill levels in English and technology; they demonstrated higher awareness of the emotional intelligence and social skills essential to advance in many sectors of the customer-service workforce. Although confidence and self-growth are difficult to quantify, the following measurable outcomes reflect Hotel TEACH's success at integrating English, career counseling, and technology:

ESOL Gains:

16 out of the 20 completers (80%) made at least 1 level gain; 7 made 1 level gain, and 9 made 2 level gains (Goldberg, and White 18).

Computer Skills:

In the preprogram assessment, only 1 student reported being able to do 15 or more tasks such as opening and saving a *Microsoft Word* document and sending e-mail. Postprogram, 12 of the 20 completers (60%) reported being able to do more than 15 of the tasks (Goldberg, and White 18).

Employer Feedback:

(14 Sheraton supervisors completed questionnaire.)

- All 14 reported some or big improvement in English communication skills.
- 13 out of the 14 reported some or big improvement in customer service skills.
- 11 out of the 14 reported some or big improvement in “soft skills.”

Postprogram Advances:

- One graduate was promoted to Assistant Housekeeping Manager (June 2006). Two others applied for new positions but did not get them. One subsequently applied for Sheraton’s Associate Training Program.
- Four graduates were accepted into the Summer 2007 Associate Development Training Program (Sheraton’s management training program) and are now training for various front-of-the-house positions at the hotel.

We conclude that our project contributed to our students’ rediscovery of their potential. Most important, student outcomes demonstrate that with educational and workforce support, change can happen. Sylvia and Maritzabel were selected to attend the Sheraton Associate Training program, which will prepare them to assume managerial positions and responsibilities that, prior to Hotel TEACH, they neither imagined nor qualified for. Maritzabel has been nominated to receive a Starwood 2008 Employee of the Year Award in recognition of her initiative and efforts to advance at Sheraton Hotel. We believed in our students’ abilities, and we communicated our confidence to them. Since the course ended, we have received appreciative e-mails and phone calls from former Hotel TEACH students, thanking us for the encouragement to re-envision their lives.

Replicating these outcomes and obtaining a long-term analysis of the effectiveness of this model will depend upon the willingness of workforce development and ESOL programs to implement similar curricula and, ultimately, to create ongoing collaboration between educators, workforce development programs, and employers.

NOTE

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CLINICAL AFFILIATION: A WORKING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Clarence Chan, *Natural and Applied Sciences*

An individual who seeks to become a competent healthcare professional must acquire a significant amount of medical knowledge through vigorous academic preparation. However, the theoretical knowledge must also be accompanied by the proper development of technical skills, critical thinking, and professional attitude that can only be honed by extensive “hands-on” experiences. The clinical affiliation provides this hands-on experience and marks the final stage of an academic experience and the beginning of a professional working experience. The clinical affiliation is a crucial time for student learning when students must face unfamiliar, real-world work experiences outside the protective walls of their academic institution.

As the Coordinator of Clinical Seminars for the Physical Therapist Assistant Program at LaGuardia Community College, I recognize the significance of the numerous challenges that our students must face during their clinical affiliations. In order to help students succeed in this stage of their learning, I have revised the academic seminar curriculum to complement students’ clinical affiliations. Through careful implementation of classroom activities and assignments, and incorporation of available technologies such as Blackboard, students can be successful in finding connections between their learning and working experiences. Strong faculty guidance and peer support are essential to this process.

Students in the Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) program at LaGuardia Community College acquire foundational knowledge in communication, medical science, and current health issues through an intensive academic curriculum. As shown in the program’s *Admission Information Handbook*, all students aspiring to enter the program must complete 31 credits of preclinical courses, such as Writing Through Literature, Developmental Psychology, Aging and Health, Functional Pathology, and a Liberal Arts elective, in order to be eligible for acceptance into the clinical phase (9). A maximum of 25 students are accepted twice a year into the clinical phase to complete another 37 credits of clinical courses. Those students develop strong clinical skills in physical therapy practice through lecture and laboratory courses. Ethical Concepts for PTAs, Clinical Kinesiology, Orthopedic Therapeu-

tic Exercises, and Neuromuscular Rehabilitation are among the courses that all PTA students must take in a highly structured sequence.

In order to graduate from the PTA program, each student must also complete three clinical affiliations, one part-time (150–200 hours) and two full-time (6–7 weeks), details of which are provided in the LaGuardia PTA program's *Student Handbook* (12). These are clinical work experiences that are essential for students to learn how to apply their theoretical knowledge in various clinical settings. Each student is individually assigned to “practice” under the close guidance of one or more clinical supervisors from a physical therapy clinic in a hospital, private practice, skilled nursing facility, or pediatric center. Students learn how to recognize clinical signs and symptoms of different pathologies and identify the disabilities, impairments, and functional limitations associated with these conditions. Students have many opportunities to practice the clinical skills learned in the classroom laboratory, and apply them to resolve real clinical problems.

As Mostrom and Shepard indicate, the integration of the classroom and the clinical setting is an important feature of all physical therapy professional training. For some students, this is indeed the most exciting part of their training. As stated above, it is the first opportunity to experience life as a clinician, and to be able to integrate the classroom knowledge in a real clinic. However, for other students, the opportunity to work with real patients with real medical needs can be the most difficult phase of their learning. To become a physical therapy clinician, one must be able to deal with vulnerable patients or clients, often in the midst of the most painful times of their lives. Students may be asked to become the source of strength, guidance, and inspiration for those who are recovering from a life-altering event such as a spinal cord injury, or struggling with the disabling effects of a chronic disease such as multiple sclerosis. Many of these clinical situations can be very frightening. Dr. Ruth Purtilo summarized this fact about clinical education:

The quality and quantity of teaching that takes place are determined by such wide-ranging factors as the availability of patients or clients and the familiarity of other professionals in the environment with the student's capabilities and limitations. The learning environment is much less controlled than in the classroom. New smells, sounds, and sights combine with new tasks to present a weighty challenge to the best of classroom students. (7)

PTA students often cannot adjust quickly to caring for complex and demanding patients and clients. Under stress, students can become discouraged. The realities of clinical practice make the clinical affiliation very exciting, but also very challenging for students.

While PTA students are learning how to meet the demands of working in the physical therapy clinic, they often echo the question: Is it really a learning experience, or is it merely a working experience? Among the many challenges experienced during the affiliation, one of the most common complaints from PTA students is the long hours working at a highly demanding clinic without any compensation. Students often have to work 10 to 12 hours per day in a very busy clinic. Because each of the clinical affiliations is a credited course within the PTA program, students also resent the fact that they are working gratis for a clinic while still carrying the burden of paying tuition. According to a study conducted by faculty from Catholic University of Leuven, in Leuven, Belgium, students fulfilling medical internships in clinical settings often felt that they were being (mis)used as unpaid workers, especially when the balance between learning and working was lost due to overwork or lack of actual duties (Deketelaere et al.). Since many LaGuardia PTA students are working adults with family responsibilities, giving up their normal working schedules in order to work full-time at clinical affiliations often brings severe hardships.

Another challenge for PTA students emerges from the need to become familiar and compliant with differing policies and regulations. This is no small task since every facility has its own set of policies. The regulations that determine standards of care for physical therapy delivered in a hospital can be very different from those that determine the standards of care in a private clinic. As a result, documentation style, billing practices, and administrative requirements can be vastly different among various clinical settings. Students are often mystified by and hard-pressed to comply with the policies and procedures that are unique to each clinic. Unfortunately, by the time a student becomes familiar with the inner workings of a particular clinic, he or she may near the end of a rotation and have to move on to another new and unfamiliar environment.

The biggest challenge PTA students must face is learning how to apply theoretical medical concepts to the reality of clinical practice. What the students learned in the classrooms and labs is textbook knowledge, easily measured by assignments and examinations. However, once a student enters the real-world clinical environment, tests

of competency are dynamic, spontaneous, and ever-changing. As an example, a student's ability to perform a set of balance exercises with a patient after brain trauma will be evaluated in the classroom laboratory by a practical examination using a classmate as an imaginary patient. The student must translate that laboratory experience into real therapeutic intervention when faced with a patient with an actual brain injury. A student must be able to apply immediately all the knowledge, technical skills, and sound judgment needed to deliver the appropriate and effective intervention under the watchful eyes of patients and clinical instructors. The pressure to perform can create enormous anxiety.

While trying hard to cope with the challenges posed by clinical affiliations, PTA students must face the fact that, for the first time in two years, they are no longer able to come to school regularly and share experiences with and seek help from peers and teachers. Facing these challenges seems inevitable; facing them alone should never be. This is the time when peer support and strong faculty guidance become most important.

Deketelaere and her colleagues acknowledged the complexity of clinical learning environments and concluded that “[m]onitoring and safeguarding the quality of learning during internship cannot simply be accomplished through standardized procedures, lists of skills and competences to be ticked off, etc.” (913). The PTA curriculum therefore includes a series of evening seminars to complement the affiliation. The three seminar courses, SCT290, SCT291, and SCT292, are scheduled to gather students back in school at 5:45 p.m. once a week to share program information and to discuss clinically-relevant topics. Students are also encouraged to discuss any clinical issues that might potentially jeopardize their clinical success.

During the 2004–05 academic year, I taught a number of these seminars. I noticed that, even though there were agendas planned for each seminar class, many of the evening classes would turn into simple Q and A sessions or meeting places for students to catch up with classmates. Despite the fact that some students appreciated the opportunity to connect with each other, most found the evening trip back to school unrewarding. Students often found reasons not to attend the seminars. After teaching several of these seminars, I knew a change was in order.

I assumed the role of the Coordinator of Clinical Seminars in 2005 and began working closely with all the attending graduating students. I came to appreciate the difficulties they faced during their affiliations.

I realized that, in order to help students succeed, the program needed to find a vehicle to connect students with each other and with faculty while they were working outside the college.¹

Starting in the fall of 2006, I introduced several new clinically relevant topics to the seminar curriculum. Insurance and reimbursement practices in the United States, orthopedic radiology, pharmacology for rehabilitation, and ethical and legal issues of healthcare were among the topics added to existing topics: medical documentation, national Physical Therapy Examination preparation, and the normative model-guide to evidence-based practice.

Strohschein, Hagler, and May also recommend other “non-technical competencies, such as communication, collaboration, and reflection,” as critical elements of students’ clinical experience (160). I found conducting the seminar as a group discussion, with students seated at a round table, more effective than lecturing. I began assigning group projects to be presented at the end of the course; these projects encouraged collaboration and promoted communication among students. I began observing that students were becoming more engaged in the seminars and were exerting more effort to stay in touch with each other.

Although these changes enhanced the seminar experience in many ways, none of them truly alleviated students’ stress in facing the many challenges they were experiencing at their clinical affiliations. The ability of the program to safeguard and enhance the quality of the students’ clinical affiliation experience remained inadequate. Students told PTA faculty that they needed guidance and support from their classmates during their affiliations. They were frustrated by having to wait a week to have their issues heard at the seminar. Students were particularly frustrated by the length of time between seminars when they had to deal with clinical situations that had to be resolved immediately.

I found an answer to student needs through Blackboard, a course-management system to which I was introduced in *Designed for Learning*, a faculty seminar offered by the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning. Blackboard provided a means for keeping students in touch on a more regular basis and appeared to be an ideal complement to the weekly seminars. Since the students at their clinical affiliations were scattered throughout the city, an online component of the seminar could serve as a vital and ongoing link among students and faculty, and between the clinical experience and the academic experience.

The most helpful feature of Blackboard, given the needs of PTA students, is the Discussion Board. It offers students a forum for clinical dis-

cussions, information sharing, and reflection on clinical experience. In Spring 2006, students started using the Discussion Board to bring their clinical experience into a virtual classroom experience. They eagerly participated in substantial discussion in response to topics posted weekly. Many of the clinical questions were generated and answered by the students themselves. The following material is excerpted from one Blackboard discussion forum:

What did you learn from the medical chart?

Last week, we briefly discussed topics regarding radiology, lab testing, and med classes. These are enormous topics and we barely even scratched the surface. When we meet again next week, I will have additional (lots of) hand-outs for all of you to keep. (Bring a big bag to carry them!!)

This week I want all of you to think about what you see in your clinic regarding those topics.

1. Comment on what kind of radiological or lab testing you see in the records.
2. What kind of medication profiles are documented?
3. What areas do you find it difficult to appreciate?
4. Did you have a chance to engage in some learning experience with your instructor regarding these topics?

I look forward to reading your posts. You are doing well with the discussions.

M. K.: Hi guys. From previewing medical charts in my facility I learned that at the first day when pt admitted to our nursing home RN takes pictures of any kind of wound, skin brake down, redness, rashes, and black and blues. Also, it is very important to preview chart especially when pt's status changes because the changing of their condition could be medication. For ex. last week I had a pt. who was able to walk with RW with CG, however this week she was sleepy and weak. As result she needs mod. assistant during ambulation. I found out from her chart her medicine was changed this week. That information gives me a clue that pt's condition was secondary to medication.

- M.S.:** I agree with you but sometimes it is very hard for me to read every chart before tx because I have patients from different floors and I'm not able to go on every floor and read charts especially when we have more patients. I can read only our charts: eval or progress notes every day.
- M.E.:** I agree that it is very hard, having to review patient chart before each tx, however we know a patient especially in acute/subacute setting are seen by many clinicians, therefore it is vital to know what is going on with the patient before starting tx. if you know what to look it only takes a couple of minutes. These few minute may prevent a catastrophe and at the same time preserve the license you hope to have. Good luck.
- H.Y.:** Hi guys, ... a few days ago I saw a 72 y/o female pt. who has MVA, She had a lot of pain in the right tibia but the doctors figured out that she did not have any Fx so the PT evaluation prescribe Pt OOB + gait training FWB. She walked with RW 20 feet with FWB for two days. PT was painful during both sessions. Two days after, the doctors found the pt has plateau tibial Fx. the new prescription was no Knee flexion, NWB and no ambulated pt until the orthopedist prescribe a knee brace. The status of a pt. can change dramatically from one day to another.

Blackboard became a meeting place for solving problems. Through those Discussion Board “meetings,” students provided each other with emotional support in the midst of trying times. Among the many experiences shared on the Discussion Board, one is particularly memorable to me. A very strong student, about to begin her last affiliation, was faced with an unsympathetic clinical instructor. After several days of harsh criticisms from this clinical instructor, the student lost all confidence. One night, in a posting on the Discussion Board, she expressed her frustration and the thought of not going back to the clinic the next day. She was ready to walk away from it all. Within the same hour that the frustrated student posted her message, several of her classmates responded. Some posted descriptions of their difficult experiences with affiliations, and offered her approaches to dealing with her situation. There was significant communication among classmates on Blackboard that night. The student who had temporarily lost confidence did not get

much sleep, but she was empowered to get up and return to the clinic the next day.

This magical night took place with neither my knowledge of the situation nor my intervention. The students hung together into the night and took it upon themselves to help their classmate persevere. Eventually, the PTA program was able to intervene and resolve the situation on behalf of the student. This student successfully completed her clinical experience and graduated in 2006. I was humbled by this incident and by the students' resolve. I also came to appreciate more deeply the immediate availability of the technology that enabled the PTA students to stay connected. That technology helped prevent a potentially disastrous clinical incident.

We cannot deny the fact that the clinical affiliation can be a challenging working experience. The clinical seminar alone can never completely eliminate all the challenges that PTA students must face during this critical time of their education. Perhaps there will always be a few PTA students who continue to wonder if their internship opportunity is really only a working rather than a learning experience. However, I believe that both the continual revision of the seminar content and the successful integration of Blackboard have satisfied many of our students' clinical education needs. With careful selection of clinically relevant seminar and discussion topics, intelligent use of technology, strong student commitment, and mentoring from faculty, students' clinical affiliations should become very rewarding learning experiences for all.

NOTE

1. Many of the changes that I implemented in the clinical seminars could not have happened without the continuous support and guidance from PTA program chair Dr. Debra Engel and clinical coordinator Dr. Jackie Ross. Their insight and experience gave me the foundation to build and refine the various components needed to improve the seminars.

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THERAPEUTIC COMMUNICATION IN THE CLINICAL SETTING

Suzanne Rosenberg, *Natural and Applied Sciences*

I. The Work of the Nursing Student

At the traditional pinning ceremony, LaGuardia nurses are naturally excited about their entry into the world of healthcare. But the new nurse will enter a profession of seemingly insurmountable pressures: increases in work hours, shortages in staff and services, unrelenting emotional and physical strain, and close and constant confrontations with suffering, disease, and death. Despite these familiar and unavoidable challenges, or perhaps because of them, nursing remains a calling.

Each semester at LaGuardia, over 200 students who have completed a challenging set of prerequisites in the sciences, achieving GPAs of 3.7 to 4.0, apply to an RN program that can accommodate a maximum of 70 applicants. LaGuardia also has a Practical Nursing Program (PN), inaugurated in 2005. The program admits 60 students twice a year; 3.4 was the minimum admission grade for fall 2008. Passing through LaGuardia's nursing programs is a demanding experience, but, having succeeded, our graduates have better than a 95% chance of passing the Nursing Boards. Well received at nurse recruitment centers, LaGuardia graduates place in specialty positions that include operating and emergency rooms, telemetry and respiratory units as well as medical/surgical units.

The hopeful LaGuardia nursing applicant is often a newly arrived immigrant or single parent, drawn to the profession by the promise of economic stability. If admitted, she or he sacrifices social and family life for a rigorous curriculum. Most students are on scholarship or receive financial aid; few, if any, are economically privileged. Some shoulder financial responsibility for personal and educational expenses by working full time while preparing for nursing careers; others work weekends and evenings while attending day classes. Students who are parents face unique demands on their time and energies: child care and other domestic duties do not cease, and study time arrives only after the children are asleep.

These competing obligations of school, work, and home can drain the student nurse's motivation. Yet our nursing students survive and fare well, gaining the academic success that, in turn, will lead to professional

status and pursuit of degrees beyond the Associate in Applied Science. The ability to make personal sacrifices and the determination to study hard, however, will not sustain a life of service; the nurse must possess another exceptional quality: the skill to create a trusting relationship that promotes growth and healing in the patient's life. In the nursing profession, the key to this relationship is therapeutic communication.

As the nursing student in clinical training soon learns, the most compassionate caregiver can be quickly exhausted by the work: patient distress, scarcity of support, unavailability of supplies, malfunctioning machines, and the competing demands of patients and families, supervisors, and doctors. If the nurse is to meet these challenges, she must possess the capacity to communicate effectively with the patient in a limited amount of time and in ways that conserve her psychological and physical energy.

This article explores therapeutic communication as a professional technique centered on empathy and practiced for the purposes of reducing stress and increasing understanding in both the caregiver and those cared for. Threaded throughout LaGuardia's nursing program, introduced in the classroom, and practiced in the clinical setting, the theory and practice of therapeutic communication help the nursing student in a high-stress workplace learn to connect with and assess her patient efficiently and empathically, thus making the enormous challenges encountered by the healthcare worker more manageable.

II. Therapeutic Communication Defined

Imagine the newly admitted patient surrounded by strange technology and intimidated by a threatening environment, anxious and uncomfortable. Dressed in a flapping hospital gown, pricked by a phlebotomist, unaware when the doctor will arrive, left to wait on a gurney in the cold hallway until a room is assigned, or the test results are ready, or the radiologist is available: too many of us know these all too frequent and unfortunate experiences. Now, when the patient is most vulnerable, the nurse's work begins.

The root cause of the patient's medical problem must be identified, personal information gathered, and options explained to a person who is frightened or passive. At this critical moment, the nurse's key goal is to gain the patient's cooperation. To succeed, the nurse must earn the patient's trust in a limited amount of time, eliciting the required data, yet communicating in a manner that conveys empathy, saves energy but encourages the patient to reveal fears or frustrations, bridges cultural

differences, and recognizes individuality. Given the frequently short length of hospital stay and the absence of familiarity between patient and nurse, how are these objectives to be met?

In our everyday lives, we often speak or act casually, without reflecting on the effects of our words or deeds. Consequently, we unwittingly risk a relationship by asking personal questions, changing the subject, giving personal opinions, or responding dismissively or automatically, all of which can lead to defensive or negative reactions. Blunt why and how questions may seem aggressive; advising and judging may appear to assume authority and belittle our partner in conversation. In a hospital room, these forms of nontherapeutic communication will most likely elicit only monosyllabic responses, yielding neither the reflection nor the information necessary for the patient's healthcare assessment and treatment plan. In this case, the relationship of the patient and the nurse is in jeopardy; stress for both caregiver and cared for increase, and the nurse's work becomes more difficult.

In the world of healthcare, then, professional caregivers must be especially sensitive to approaches that keep communication open. In the LaGuardia nursing program, students learn that therapeutic communication can express care, interest, and respect in several ways. *Active listening* may be signaled through body language. Sitting and facing the patient in an open and forward-leaning posture with frequent eye contact, for example, sends a message of interest and attentiveness. *Careful observation and conversational prompts*, such as "You look tired today," or "I noticed you didn't want to eat this morning," can draw out the quiet or withdrawn patient, leading the nurse to understand the underlying causes of the patient's discomfort. *Asking open-ended questions* invites the patient to lower his or her guard; and by responding attentively, the nurse communicates commitment to staying focused and professional. Conversely, moving around, avoiding the patient's eyes, and doing most of the talking are behaviors that indicate a lack of interest in the patient's experience. *Recognizing nonverbal communication* helps healthcare workers remain keenly aware that a patient's cognition and behaviors may not match. A diabetic, for example, may state an understanding of the need to manage intake of carbohydrates, yet continue to stash chocolate bars in the bedside table. In this case, a therapeutic approach recognizes the patient's lack of readiness to commit to healthier choices, and communicates support by modifying strategies and identifying alternative solutions. *Empathy* is the calm understanding and acceptance of the thoughts and feelings

of the patient. When empathetic, one is nonjudgmental, sensitive, open, and capable of imagining another person's experience. For example, an empathetic nurse responds to a patient's need to smoke in ways that neither promote the habit nor alienate the smoker. Finally, *reminding a patient of her strengths and previous successes* in solving problems, the nurse conveys hope and the optimistic belief that the patient is capable of participating in a plan of care.

In summary, therapeutic communication is holistic and patient-centered, and engages the totality of the patient's condition – environmental, spiritual, psychological, as well as physiological elements. The practice of therapeutic communication helps form a health-focused and stress-reducing collaborative relationship; its primary goal is the establishment of trust in order to create a healing exchange between nurse and patient. In a properly functioning relationship, the patient communicates his or her experience, and shares necessary data, thoughts, and feelings with the nurse who listens carefully to the patient's expression of physical and holistic needs. Ideally, the result of this reciprocal exchange is the formulation of a unique, mutually-designed but patient-managed treatment plan.

III. The First Semester: Introduction to Therapeutic Communication

Having already completed the required classes in science, English, and psychology, the newly admitted nursing student enters the first semester of the nursing program, which requires courses in Fundamentals of Nursing (SCR110) and Perspectives of Nursing (SCR150). In Fundamentals, students attend approximately ten hours of lecture/lab per week and six hours of weekly hospital/clinical experience; Perspectives is a basic patient care course that requires a ten-page research paper, oral presentations, and class discussions of assigned readings.

On the first day in the Fundamentals of Nursing course, new students learn that, for the next twelve weeks, they must say goodbye to their social and family lives. Fortunately, most nursing students possess the set of characteristics necessary to make these sacrifices and to meet the demands of course work, labs, and exams that will consume the weeks ahead. Focused, energetic, and driven, they are, in a word, “type-A” personalities. Instructors can easily spot these students, as they are goal-oriented and obsessed with grades. But what instructors may not see is that many also work long hours to cover their living expenses. Personal obligations, combined with rigorous program requirements, call for efficient organization of time and resources.

When teaching Fundamentals, I introduce students to strategies that communicate empathy and those that result in distancing and defensiveness. Through role plays and discussion, students identify therapeutic and nontherapeutic responses, and learn the rationale behind effective communication techniques. In one scenario, students assume the experience of patients, and express the feelings and fears of individuals anxiously awaiting life-altering information in an unfamiliar hospital; in a second role-play, students engage in therapeutic and nontherapeutic communication with caregivers. By practicing both the facilitators of and the blocks to therapeutic communication, students learn that the phrases that may be appropriate coming from family and friends (“Don’t worry, you’ll feel better soon,” “How can you feel that way when your lab results are normal?” or “Why didn’t you go for a second opinion?”) are alienating when spoken to a frail, noncommunicative patient. After the role plays, students discuss the scenarios, and write descriptive analyses of the participants’ communication skills, identifying barriers to and facilitators of productive nurse-patient interaction, and emphasizing specific areas for improvement. Students then present a more positive therapeutic version using body language and other facilitators to engage, interview, and assess the patient. Finally, we review strategies of therapeutic communication to be used throughout nursing practice. After one or two weeks of preparation in lecture and lab, students are ready to enter clinical training.

IV. The Application of Therapeutic Communication in the Clinical Setting

Graduating nursing students have often described patient interviews on the very first day of their clinical practice as among the most frightening aspects of their training. High achievers in the classroom, on the floor they become robotic, tongue-tied and unable to apply their learning. More than once during the transitional process from class to clinic, my students have described patients who “won’t let me wash them,” “won’t eat,” or “won’t talk with me,” implying that the problem is with the patient. Claiming to legitimize the patient’s autonomy rights, the student nurse appears almost relieved to forego clinical responsibilities.

In these cases, students need guidance to become more assertive in educating the patient to the benefits of care. The student must learn that care refused or postponed is nevertheless necessary; without it, optimum standards will not be achieved. After several weeks of practice under the guidance of hospital personnel and course instructors, students become

more confident of their bedside care; as their interaction becomes therapeutic, patients refusing care will generally become more cooperative.

Application of therapeutic communication in student-patient interaction is best observed in the clinical hospital setting. Typically, student nurses begin each preconference, which is the preparation time prior to the student-patient experience, with a focus for the day. In the summer of 2008, as the instructor of 10 PN students at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, I observed nurse-patient interaction as the students performed tasks and engaged in dialogue related to several gastrointestinal conditions. In their last semester before graduation, these students first reviewed the gastrointestinal material in lecture and preconference, and then applied this knowledge to the determination of their patients' health needs, prioritizing and delivering the appropriate routine hygienic care.

In the postconference hour at the end of each clinical day, students discussed the ways therapeutic communication had enhanced their caregiving. To complete the student evaluation, I asked patients to offer feedback about the level of satisfaction with the students' care. In postconference, students reported on their patients, often recounting the personal stories, struggles, and successes that patients had shared. For example, they reported that depressed patients had increased conversation, suggesting regained energy to cope with their condition; described menus modified according to a patient's cultural/palate preference; or narrated life experiences that, when shared, fostered the nurse-patient relationship and helped empower the patient. Students also reported positive practices of assertive communication that clarified misunderstanding, and helped to gather necessary information or contribute reassurance.

By exchanging information and feelings with patients, students used therapeutic communication to aid patient care. By reflecting genuine interest and listening attentively, they opened up a dialogue, allowing them to better understand their patients, as the sample responses indicate:

... using empathy, understanding, patience, I saw how TC enhanced my relationship with my patient. He trusted me more and more, and shared with me his life before the surgery and told me how much I helped him to understand his condition and to take care of himself after the discharge.

... I used the therapeutic technique of listening. When I just listen to what my patient is saying, I am showing that I care about the patient's feelings and problems. I used assertive communication when I explained to Mrs. J. why I needed to take her pulse and respirations... I did this without violating her rights. ...a good listener can provide reassurance, lighten another person's burden...

It was hard to communicate verbally because of the language barrier but he and I communicated using non verbal cues. He nodded and smiled; he responded to what I was saying. To his wife, I taught her to communicate with her husband, to exercise his brain, and also for him to practice starting to talk. In addition, cultural sensitivity enhanced the care...(he) prefers Indian food rather than hospital food; therefore the patient eats more and prevents nutritional imbalance.

During my time at Elmhurst Hospital, I used listening and touch as therapeutic techniques. When I asked patients if they were doing fine, I touched them by rubbing their arm or back a little... Listening and touch sends a message of care and trust...

Yesterday, my patient refused a.m. care. When I entered her room, I talked in a calm voice, asked why she refused to take a shower. Through TC, I gathered information needed for my plan of care. I learned she feels really cold, that's why she refuses to take a bath. My action was to teach the importance of hygienic care. TC means a lot to a patient... A simple gesture, a smile or hello has a great importance.

Therapeutic Communication is one of the most valuable tools that nurses have to build rapport or trust. This trust allows the nurse to provide reverse care. This means that the nurse allows the patient to feel secure enough to share information, such as his/her feelings, frustration, pain, happiness, or improvement. The information provided by therapeutic communication gives nurses the clues or heads up of any exacerbation in the patient's condition, as well as any developing disease. TC is needed in nursing for both the progress of the patient, as well as the growth of the nurse in her practice.

In the workplace, a nurse's responsibilities and duties can be enormous. As these responses reflect, using therapeutic communication helped students create a nurse-patient relationship that allowed the nurse to better understand and provide nursing assistance.

Conclusion

Usually by the end of the first year of clinical training, LaGuardia nursing students know what to expect when they walk onto the hospital floor. They know that patients who must make life-altering decisions will often lean on the nurse for support, and that the nurse who expresses confidence is better able to motivate her patients to cooperate with the plans for that day. After intensive clinical application, the ability to communicate therapeutically will become almost second nature to the nurse who has learned to balance the stresses of demanding daily tasks with the acquired skills of assessing a patient's needs and determining an effective treatment plan.

The work of nursing in the 21st century is changing. With managed care, and the quest for universal health coverage, there will be greater demands upon our system to provide high quality care with a high rate of efficiency. Using therapeutic communication effectively helps to create a nurse-patient relationship that promotes choice and responsibility, gains patient input and cooperation, maximizes positive care outcomes, and helps to avoid litigious confrontations. It is only when the patient is able to partner in the management of his own healthcare that the nurse's work can be fully utilized and the patient's success maximized. Integrating knowledge with compassion, reducing stress and establishing rapport, the skill of therapeutic communication is the nurse's greatest asset.

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WORK-BASED LEARNING IN NURSING EDUCATION: THE VALUE OF PRECEPTORSHIPS

Andrea Morgan-Eason, *Natural and Applied Sciences*

In a constantly changing situation, where reliance on static knowledge does not make sense anymore, it is important to help students to develop autonomous ways of learning, which will be of vital value through their career.
(Mantzorou 1)

Work-based learning (WBL) is not new in education. John Dewey had long argued that “life and learning should be uniquely integrated” (qtd. in Swail, and Kampits 1), and that the best way to achieve “the finest product of schooling” was “to integrate the working world with the education curriculum” (Swail, and Kampits 1). Work-based learning values learning that takes place outside of an educational institution, integrates practice with theory, encourages reflection, and contributes to the development of professional knowledge.

Various types of work-based programs include internships such as those offered by LaGuardia’s Cooperative Education program, job-shadowing, and youth apprenticeships. As a nurse educator, I see tremendous value in preceptorships for the ways they facilitate the clinical competence of nursing students and sustain nurses once they have entered the profession.

Originally, nursing schools were hospital-based programs with most of the education and training of nurses taking place in hospitals. With time, however, nursing schools became part of higher education institutions. Clinical instruction emerged as a way “to deal with the problem of the inconsistency of classroom teaching and hospital practice,” and the aim of higher education institutions to have “total control of their students” (Mantzorou 1). Although most nursing programs today are part of higher education institutions, they still require nursing students to get hands-on training in the hospital through clinical experiences. These clinical experiences are regarded as the heart of nursing education, providing students with the opportunity to apply classroom learning to real situations, and to develop core competencies needed to make the transition from the classroom to the workplace.

Clinical experiences are generally accomplished by two methods: clinical instruction and preceptorship. Clinical instruction is a period of training for student nurses under the guidance of a nurse-instructor for a period of thirteen weeks. The student/instructor ratio is 10:1 and the clinical instruction occurs in the hospital setting once per week for eight hours or twice per week for four hours. The majority of nursing courses have a clinical instruction component. In clinical instruction, teaching focuses on group learning and has a teacher-centered approach, in which the instructor guides the process, making sure that all students are highly engaged, at some level, in patient care. As a clinical instructor, if I have a student who is about to perform a procedure, I ask other students to observe the procedure, with the patient's permission. At times, I partner two students to take care of one patient, especially if that patient has a diagnosis that meets the teaching objectives of the clinical day.

Preceptorship, on the other hand, is an “individual teaching and learning method, in which each student is assigned to a particular preceptor [a person experienced in the area] so that she/he can experience day-to-day practice with a role model and resource person immediately within the clinical setting” (Chickerella, and Lutz, qtd. in Wood 34). As a formal period of training for each student nurse under the guidance of an experienced nurse, the preceptorship is often tailored to meet the individual student's needs. The preceptorship lasts for three to four months and usually occurs during the last semester of the nursing program, preparing students to assume full patient care as soon as they are employed. More than clinical instruction, the preceptorship is student-centered, with students becoming more deeply engaged in patient care by providing more hands-on care. This engagement promotes independence and autonomy in student nurses, qualities that will be important in their future work. Preceptorships provide “an individual learning pathway, not a generic way of learning, which [makes] the learning outcomes very personal” (Swallow et al. 821).

Preceptorship training is extremely useful in helping student nurses bridge the gap between theory and practice. The way a patient's illness presents itself in the hospital setting can be completely different from what was taught about the illness in the classroom. This gap leads to the difficulty and disillusionment experienced by nursing students and constitutes one of the biggest challenges currently confronting the nursing profession. According to Wood, despite having a degree of knowledge and competence, many nurses may feel that they need

support and guidance from more experienced colleagues until they “find their feet” professionally (34). By providing increased exposure to medical situations and professional nurturing in day-to-day work, the preceptorship supports a smooth transition for the student nurse into the nursing profession.

The preceptorship can also be a valuable asset in “confronting the present day challenges of recruiting and retaining professional nurses in the hospital setting” (Allanach, and Jennings 27). Many newly graduated nurses who have completed preceptorships explore job opportunities at the hospitals where they trained. Most hospitals, when hiring nurses, give preference to those nurses who were involved in their preceptorship training program. “By easing the transition into the professional practice role, preceptorships may be useful in mitigating negative affective states which, in turn, may effectively reduce the premature exit of new nurses from the profession of nursing” (Allanach, and Jennings 27).

Jean Flanagan and her colleagues state in their article “Work-Based Learning as a Means of Developing and Assessing Nursing Competence,” that “[n]urse education needs to . . . move towards work-based approaches [which can be] crucial to the development of the profession” (367). Linda Chapman concurs: “Good clinical practice is closely linked to education, so one cannot be developed without the other” (41). LaGuardia’s nursing program, always open to innovation and improvement, is in an ideal position to embrace preceptorships and embark on the initiative of incorporating them into the nursing curriculum in the near future. The final clinical nursing course, Medical-Surgical Nursing II (SCR290), has the right components to include a preceptorship. SCR290 offers more clinical instruction hours, two eight-hour days per week, and the students are beginning to make their transition into the profession, exploring job opportunities.

Over the years, I have gained a deeper appreciation for preceptorship training. As a nursing student at Adelphi University, I participated in preceptorship training in my last semester. I had the opportunity to choose a specific area of nursing and a hospital. I chose the maternity unit at South Nassau Community Hospital in Oceanside, New York. Assigned to a preceptor on the unit, I was scheduled to work on the same shifts that she worked. I made my own objectives for the course and the preceptor made sure that all my objectives were met. The preceptor and I worked very closely together, yet she emphasized that I should emerge from her shadow and develop my own capabilities.

Thus, with her support, I became more independent, gaining confidence and competence.

More recently, while teaching one of my clinical rotations at Queens Hospital, I came across a student nurse from Adelphi who was involved in preceptorship training. We discussed our respective experiences in preceptorships. We both felt that our preceptors had created environments that provided a transition into nursing, and we each felt fortunate to have matured professionally in our preceptorships. Most importantly, each of us recognized that our training experiences had had positive effects on the quality of care for patients. I introduced this student to my first-semester nursing students and she began to share her experiences and knowledge with them. In observing how clearly and confidently the senior nursing student imparted her knowledge and experiences to my entering class, I imagined her as a future preceptor.

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THE POWER OF A FACULTY PARTNERSHIP

Marie Sacino, *Cooperative Education* and
Angela Wu, *Business and Technology*

To help students launch careers in business and accounting, we, a Cooperative Education professor (Marie) with a strong commitment to and extensive record of placing students in internships, and an Accounting professor (Angela) with recent work experience in Big Four accounting firms and an investment bank, have developed a partnership based on shared goals. We want to prepare students to perform at exceptional levels on demanding internship assignments that require functional skills as well as personal and professional competencies. Knowing that internships are widely recognized by undergraduate and graduate programs in business as an essential part of business education and that internships can also lead to students' first full-time jobs, we want to use internships to prepare students to continue their educations and find rewarding employment in their chosen fields.

Cooperative Education finds the theoretical bases for complementing workplace practice with classroom learning in John Dewey's statement that "all genuine education comes through experience" (5) and in the experiential learning model of David A. Kolb, who argues "that while experience is an essential element, it is not a sufficient element for learning" (132). Learning, particularly deep-level learning, relies on the student's ability to reflect on work. Guided reflection on work is central to the department of Cooperative Education's seminars, which complement students' internships. The seminars include Critical Reflection and Learning at Work (CPA041), Fundamentals of Career Advancement (CPB041), and The Future of Work (CPC041).

We see the internship experience as particularly crucial for LaGuardia students who are largely low-income and working-class. According to the 2008 Institutional Profile issued by the LaGuardia Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, in 2007, over 54 percent had annual household incomes of \$25,000 or less (6), and 57 percent of new students work, with 40 percent of them working more than 20 hours per week (ix). Many LaGuardia students and their family members spend long hours in low-paying, labor-intensive positions. LaGuardia students want opportunities to work with organizations that can offer them the potential to move up the economic ladder by providing them

with compensation packages that can dramatically change their families' incomes and, thereby, their lives. The story of Bob, a LaGuardia student who, with his family, emigrated to the United States from a rural area of China over three years ago, speaks to this desire. Bob's father and mother worked sixteen hours a day in a local restaurant as chef and waitress, respectively. Aspiring to transfer to a four-year college, Bob was motivated by his father's advice: "We have been working so hard to support you for full-time college study because we hope some day that you will wear 'shoes' and not the 'sneakers' that we are wearing now." To Bob and his parents, "shoes" symbolize white-collar office jobs while "sneakers" represent blue-collar, low-wage, and labor-intensive jobs.

Between the fall of 2002 and the summer of 2007, 1,235 business and accounting students from LaGuardia Community College, Bob among them, were placed on 1,748 internships in accounting/finance and business positions in 500 different New York City workplaces, including banks, pharmaceutical companies, cultural institutions, health providers, and social service agencies. Many students' internships turn into their first full-time positions with a salary range of \$30,000 to \$45,000 per year, health insurance coverage, 401(K) pension plans, employee stock-purchase plans, and tuition reimbursement (Sacino, and Wu).

Let us take a closer look at how the partnership between Marie and Angela works. The following is a typical e-mail from a corporate manager, listing qualifications for an internship and tasks that the intern will be required to perform. The e-mail provides a job description and qualifications:

- Prepare quarterly trial balance
- Prepare general ledger analysis and reconciliation report
- File supporting documents
- Working knowledge of MS Excel is required; MS Access is a bonus
- Positive attitude
- Ability to work well in a team
- Detail-oriented
- Strong communication skills
- Initiative – willing to assist with small tasks – copying, making binders – work that is a little bit less than fun
- Professional and personable attitude
- Flexible to work overtime.

The corporate manager adds this note: “The project will be interesting and also very fast-paced. We are looking for your best and brightest.”

As collaborating faculty, we are well prepared to respond quickly to such requests, knowing that speed is important if we wish to secure this opportunity for a LaGuardia student and additional opportunities for others. We have conferred on how we will prepare our students in two of their second-semester courses, Principles of Accounting II (AMA112) and Fundamentals of Professional Advancement (CEP121), to meet both the functional and personal/professional requirements of this internship. In the accounting class, students learn the financial reporting and Excel modeling skills required by many internship assignments. Our shared familiarity with e-mails from managers alerts us to the meaning behind the manager’s request for the “best and brightest.” We know that many organizations have a minimum GPA requirement of 3.60 for interns.

We respond to this e-mail by first identifying students whom we might recommend for this internship. We speak with those students to explain the requirements of the position and respond to their questions. We assist students who are interested in pursuing the internship with final revisions to their resumes. We rehearse them for interviews, posing questions that we know will be asked. At least three student resumes are sent to the employer for every position that exists. The employer generally interviews all three candidates; interviews are often conducted by two or three managers. We encourage students to provide examples of their knowledge and skills by referring to their work in Angela’s class – individual presentations, team accounting projects, and research on selected companies.

We also use e-mails from corporate managers and our knowledge of the requirements of internships to educate students in both the Accounting and Cooperative Education courses about the requirements of the internships they desire. The impact of this double dose of crucial information is often quite pronounced. Understanding that GPA may have an impact on their internship eligibility, students often make changes in attitude and performance to move into the category of “best and brightest.” They complete readings and hand assignments in on time; they move more quickly to begin team projects. Knowing that good grades are essential, students can begin to make changes to raise their GPA sooner rather than later, and faculty from both areas can work with students to discuss study skills, time management issues, and positive behavioral changes.

Our partnership provides students in Angela's accounting classes with the opportunity to work with Marie prior to the internship cycle. These early meetings are crucial for successful internship placement. For example, Marie recently met one of Angela's students who had returned from military service in Iraq. The student had a high GPA – a wonderful accomplishment, especially considering that he has a young family and works part-time. Marie had an opportunity to get to know the student – his interests and goals, his plans for senior college, his dreams for the future. When several positions came in from a major Wall Street organization, we knew that this student would be best suited for the treasury department, as opposed to banking operations or reinsurance. His goals were to work in finance or trading and funding. The internship in the treasury department was the closest match to his interests and skills. The student interviewed successfully for the position and was delighted to begin his internship.

We see our work with individual students as crucial not only to the successful placement of students in internships but to the role we occupy in students' lives as college professors. Research conducted by Robert Winston and his colleagues clearly demonstrates that greater faculty-student interaction promotes higher levels of student satisfaction with the college experience. As Michael Scott Cain notes, "The teaching faculty is the key to the community college's work. Other factors in the system, such as support staff, administrators, politicians, and students, might help draw up the route for the trip, but it is the faculty members who drive the bus" (47). The faculty members can serve as the professional mentors and role models that may not appear anywhere else in a student's life. Because the faculty members are in such a position, their influence over students can be very significant. In a frequently-cited study of student retention, Astin concluded, "Next to peer group, the faculty represents the most significant aspect of a student's undergraduate development" (410).

We receive frequent calls from internship supervisors who commend LaGuardia interns for their intelligence, skills, knowledge, work ethic, and energy. A manager of an intra-company accounting area in a major financial firm recently stated that he would rather have a LaGuardia intern than an intern from any other college. Corporate managers keep coming back to us seeking more LaGuardia interns. We recommend that faculty in many disciplines partner with colleagues in Cooperative Education to promote increased engagement in students' academic and career development. We see this type of partnership as

crucial to building the connection between classroom work and student advancement beyond LaGuardia. Internships are a point of entry to careers that have often motivated students to enroll at LaGuardia; we believe it is our responsibility to help students achieve the goals that brought them to us.

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TEACHING THE BUSINESS OF DIVERSITY

Milton Hollar-Gregory, *Business and Technology*

Introduction: The Moral Imperative

As barriers continue to obstruct the progress of women and minorities long after the Civil Rights movement, it is essential that educators continue to heed the moral imperative that has fueled battles for equal opportunity. In the Robert H. Atwell Lecture given at the 89th meeting of the American Council on Education on February 11, 2007, Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, President of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), emphasized the potential results of a failure to educate a diverse population:

Just this past week, the ETS recently released a new report that underscores the urgency of “the access imperative.” America’s Perfect Storm [(Kirsch)] focuses on the national impact of three converging forces: disparities in the education and skills levels of our population; a restructuring of the nation’s economy; and changing demographics. The report, which echoes themes from the National Academies’ Rising Above the Gathering Storm [(Committee)], says, essentially, that if current trends continue over the next quarter-century, increasing numbers of educated professionals will leave the workforce and millions of native-born Americans, who will be less qualified for these jobs, will find themselves vying not only with one another and recent immigrants to this country, but also with other better prepared workers earning lower pay throughout the world. Without our intervention, large numbers of Americans will continue to be left behind.

President Hrabowski continued by declaring that the challenge is to recruit and support students from all backgrounds so that the colleges and universities reflect the face of America.

Recruiting diverse talent must, therefore, be a major priority for American businesses. “[C]orporate recruiters and campus career services professionals share the belief that college and university campuses represent the most important source for diverse talent” (Roach 47). As a constituent element of the workplace, diversity is mandated

in virtually all public institutions and implicit in the central values of American democracy: equality, liberty and justice (Flume 51). America's community colleges, "which account for nearly 40 percent of all college enrollments today, play a critical role in educating students from low-income families," (Cook, and Córdoba, qtd. in Hrabowski), and different races, religions, and nationalities for participation in the business of work.

LaGuardia is a leading community institution focused on enhancing the prospects for educational and socioeconomic mobility of students from diverse backgrounds including low economic class. According to the 2008 *Institutional Profile* issued by the LaGuardia Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, the college's student body in 2007 was a blend of 38 percent Hispanic-American, 20 percent African-American, 21 percent Asian-American, and 14 percent white students (many of the latter from Eastern Europe) (5). The college serves more than 15,000 credit students and over 58,000 non-credit students (viii) hailing from over 156 different countries and speaking 119 different languages (1). The college's students are largely poor and working-class – over 42 percent of degree students were awarded some financial aid in 2007–08 (6) and 57 percent of new students have jobs, with 40 percent of new students working more than 20 hours a week (ix). In the LaGuardia academic environment, it is morally imperative that faculty appreciate multiculturalism in its many forms – race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and nationality – and not waste the talent assets of any of our students.

Diversity and Program Development at LaGuardia

LaGuardia has established a Task Force on Pluralism, "in response to the request from the CUNY Board of Trustees that each campus 'develop a specific local plan to combat racism and promote pluralism and develop mechanisms for anti-racist pluralistic interaction and cooperative projects with its immediate community'" (LaGuardia Community Coll. Human Resources Dept. 23). The LaGuardia *Instructional Staff Handbook* goes on to say that "[p]luralism encompasses such areas as culture, gender, race, ethnicity, ageism, sexual preferences, and differences in ability (23). LaGuardia prides itself on building multiculturalism into the curriculum through programs such as the following:

1. Learning communities have been "part of LaGuardia since the early 1970s, when Roberta Matthews created the first Freedom Clusters"

(Koolsbergen). Clustering courses from different disciplines around specific themes, often related to culture and identity, has proven to be an excellent medium for addressing diversity. One learning community, “Constructing Gender,” recently codesigned by Professors Heidi Johnsen of the English department and Leslie Ann Aarons and Patricia Sokolski of the Humanities department, focuses on the expectations that different cultures place on men and women and the resulting roles often expressed in social, political, and professional interactions (“Liberal”).

2. LaGuardia’s ePortfolio program, under the direction of Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs Bret Eynon, has gained national recognition. ePortfolios provide students with the “tools to tell important stories about their experiences in the complex global society of the 21st century.” Students include essays, poetry, interviews, paintings, family photographs, and resumes, showcasing diversity (“History”).
3. The Cooperative Education department, led by Chair Francine White, offers both part-time and full-time internships in over twenty majors at LaGuardia. Students earn academic credit by working or volunteering in a wide variety of business, government, or community agency settings. In addition to internships, students take seminars such as Critical Reflection and Learning at Work (CPA041) which includes exploration of workplace values, culture, and ethics (“Course”).
4. The Division of Enrollment Management and Student Development invites students to participate in its Leadership and Diversity Program, a series of workshops in leadership skills and diversity awareness. Under the direction of Brian Goldstein, Director of Recreation and Student Life, the program helps students develop personal and professional skills as citizens in diverse environments, including the workplace (*Leadership*).

Engaged teachers and students are key to training young adults for various roles in the workplace. In an article about diversity and education at LaGuardia, President Gail O. Mellow, Professor Phyllis van Slyck, and Assistant Dean Bret Eynon state:

LaGuardia faculty has developed a wide range of strategies for working with this complexity. Probably none is unique. What makes LaGuardia stand out is the pervasive attention to the

issue of diversity, the multiplicity and interconnectedness of its approaches and the degree of institutional focus on its students. The college's diversity has forced a systematic, layered dialogue about appropriate pedagogy and curriculum content, led to innovations that create community, and stimulated faculty introspection. (Mellow, van Slyck, and Eynon 12)

This fall, as every fall, LaGuardia will welcome a large cohort of new faculty. This new group “will become a key element of the larger teaching community at LaGuardia. To support these new members. . . and help them grow as skilled and effective professionals,” the Center for Teaching and Learning will offer a year-long New Faculty Colloquium. The college recognizes its responsibility to support new teachers as they enter LaGuardia's teaching community and to share with them LaGuardia's tradition of caring and innovative teaching. Additionally, there is a specific need to develop reflective teachers who are responsive to the vocational goals, the academic skills, and the diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds of students (*New*).

Teaching Diversity in the Business Classroom

I agree with Professor Ximena Zúñiga of the University of Massachusetts who states that “the main objectives of the intergroup dialogue process are to encourage self-reflective conversation and inquiry that break through the surface tension created by difference; [and] clarify and address issues of potential conflict.” In Introduction to Business (AMM101), my students are representatives of LaGuardia's diverse population and many wish to pursue careers in business. Hence, I begin discussion of diversity within the first two weeks of class, stressing that the topic has direct relevance to the students and their ambitions. The initial presentation begins to expose issues of racism and sexism, providing a foundation for future dialogue. The relatively early discussion lessens tensions, minimizes any reluctance students might feel about sharing personal experiences, including injustices they have witnessed or experienced, and encourages debate about charged topics. Later in the semester, when we spend more time on the subject of human resource management, I deliver a comprehensive lecture about diversity and engage students in a related group activity focusing on the workplace. I give each group, which I have organized to be heterogeneous, the following information and situation related to diversity in a typical business setting:

Workplaces in the United States are becoming more diverse. Employees bring varying customs, traditions, values, and languages to the workplace. It can be difficult for some employees who have worked in business for a long time to adjust to the changes that accompany diversity. The work environment may become tense and full of distrust and hostility as conflicts erupt among employees. This is the situation at Zebra Corp., a manufacturer of food containers made from recycled plastic and glass.

As the company's Human Resource Director, you are faced with an environment with particular differences between the majority white male employees, and the newer minority and female employees. How would you go about fostering cooperation, trust, and respect among the different groups?

What are the issues and problems with diversity at the company? What benefits and opportunities exist for the company? How can you encourage employees to be more understanding of each other? What would your plan look like?

After about twenty minutes, I ask each group to select a spokesperson to report out on the group's responses to the situation and to the related questions. In recent group reports, students have presented the following recommendations:

- "Create a workplace that is aware and respects a broad spectrum of human values through awareness training."
- "Sponsor lunches and group activities that encourage discussion and behavior changes."
- "Hire a Chief Diversity Officer to work with managers and employees."
- "Encourage the development of groups so that employees with common issues can openly discuss and share experiences."

After the group presentations, using corporate websites, I direct students' attention to real workplace situations. For example, McDonald's website illustrates how one of the country's most successful business

enterprises seeks to manage its human resources. McDonald's "Diversity" portal opens with a mission statement:

McDonald's is the world's community restaurant. We are proud of our long-standing commitment to a workforce that is diverse. We believe in developing and maintaining a diverse workforce that will strengthen the McDonald's system. Diversity at McDonald's is understanding, recognizing and valuing the differences that make each person unique.

The student group exercise is reinforced by the visual and textual materials of the McDonald's website that includes information about awards and recognition programs, diversity facts, diversity educational seminars, and relationships with community-based organizations. Many of the programs that McDonald's has engineered are similar to those suggested by the students.

In a subsequent session, we review the relevant chapters in *Business*, the course textbook, and discuss benefits that a diverse workplace offers an organization (Pride, Hughes, and Kapoor 314). Students invariably agree that such things as the marketing edge provided by the ability to communicate with minority and women consumers are an advantage of a diverse workforce; that problem solving and decision making are enhanced through a wider range of perspectives and critical analysis of issues; that creativity is better achieved through diversity of perspectives; and that cultural diversity in the workplace brings with it bilingual skills which are advantageous in a global marketplace (317).

This approach – the introduction of diversity as a topic early in the term, the lecture, group exercise, and use of a corporate website highlighting a major company's approach to diversity – emphasizes the importance of diversity in business. It gives students a detailed perspective of an area that is increasingly complex and important in creating and maintaining a competitive workforce, particularly in a global economy. In addition, I continue to reinforce the issue throughout the semester by my constant challenges to students "to rethink many of their attitudes, assumptions, and political and social understandings through sharing of feelings and experiences, critical analysis of historical and sociological material, and consideration of alternative perspectives" (Zúñiga).

Conclusion: The Future

The greatest impact we can make as educators at LaGuardia is by remaining true to our commitments as a valued community institution. We must remain vigilant in our mission to enrich our ever-changing and expanding student population, preparing them for work in a diverse and global environment.

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PART THREE

WORK, ART, AND
THE AESTHETICS OF WORK

WORK ETHIC? OR WORK AESTHETIC?

Seán Galvin, *Communication Skills*

In “Making Things Our Own: The Indigenous Aesthetic in Digital Storytelling,” Candice Hopkins describes how Zacharias Kunuk, an Inuit screenwriter and film producer, introduced the Sony video Portapak to document Inuit culture. Inspired by the similarities video shared with Inuit oral traditions, Kunuk argued that video could provide a perfect medium to capture the tales, customs, and traditions of the people who lived far removed from “the outside world.” It would also serve as a countermeasure to the “non-Inuit television programming that had begun to infiltrate their communities in the early 1980s” (342). Hopkins also cites the Hopi filmmaker and videographer, Victor Masayesva, who wrote that it is “the accumulative experience (all the experiences, traditional or not, that inform our lives as native people today) that ‘refines and defines the indigenous aesthetic’” (342). In other words, using video to record and preserve the folkways of indigenous people “upholds the importance of community, acknowledges how much the past continues within the present (in Inuit culture the past and the future can coexist . . .) and recognizes the vital role of oral tradition” (342).

For the purposes of this essay, I will also define aesthetic as “accumulative experience,” but will apply it to LaGuardia students. My primary objective is to demonstrate how my students develop into a community that preserves diversity and integrates “outsider” and “insider” approaches to learners. Finally, I draw attention to the classroom as a community of shared experience in which patterns of meaning may be observed, perceptions and discriminating judgment made and shared, and ways of seeing self and world reflected upon and changed.

I am an ethnographer by training and practice. As a consequence of Hopkins’ observations, I mused: Is there an aesthetic of work that applies to LaGuardia College students? Is there an accumulated collection of shared experiences informed by their upbringing, their work history, and their academic lives that gives them a particularly rich college experience – one that is perceptibly different from the experience of the average American “Joe College”? What elements of experience specific to LaGuardia Community College students contribute to their work aesthetic?

Academic Culture at LaGuardia

Each semester, I make it my charge to find the best means of eliciting an evocative narrative from my students. I want to know how they feel about their college experience in light of their daily circumstances. I want to understand the coping and time-management strategies that they employ vis-à-vis their “out-of-class lives.” I know many, many of their stories anecdotally – how they “are juggling child care with a spouse or mother,” how they “are stealing time from their workplace to do homework,” or how they “really cannot get the assignment in on week nights because they don’t get home until after 11:00 p.m. and they are up and out the door by 6:00 a.m., so can they please give it to me after the weekend?” There is every reason to believe that our students have a *work ethic*, but the coping mechanisms and time-management strategies that they utilize, especially evening students, lead me to believe that this population also develops a *work aesthetic* that allows them to thrive and succeed in an unforgivingly difficult work environment.

With its 155 nationalities and 110 languages¹, LaGuardia is uniquely regarded for its diversity in the world of community colleges. Almost without exception, the students I teach are in their first semester of American college, are non-native English speakers, have families of their own to manage, are older than the average American college student, and are working full time during the day. In addition, those who are working are not often working in the field in which they aspire to major; in fact, most are working as day laborers, cab drivers, or house cleaners, or in other hourly-paid, nonprofessional jobs. Some of the students have had some college in their home country, some have even completed degrees, and it is particularly frustrating for them to “start over” again in terms of money and time expended and disruption of their lives.

I teach “Vocabulary Enhancement” (CSE105), a three-credit course designed as a developmental reading-skills class to improve the vocabulary skills of incoming students so that they can more successfully read their textbooks in their major subjects. CSE105 is most often offered in a learning community, clustered with CSE095 (Fundamentals of Reading I) and ESL097. These students, initially grouped according to their ESL placement scores, quickly bond into a community whose lowest common denominator is their progress along the ESL continuum: from 097 to 098 to 099. From there, they can qualify for required ENG101/102 courses only after they have satisfactorily passed the

Reading and Writing Compass tests and Basic Writing (ENG099). The path to college-level English is, thus, a five-semester sequence.

During this time, the group may be seen as a distinct subculture within LaGuardia, a subculture whose boundaries – home, work, and school – create a dynamic tension. The French have an apt expression: *metro-boulot-dodo*, subway-work-sleep, to describe the endless cycle of daily life. LaGuardia students are united by the common goals of academic achievement, finding a job in their chosen field, and improving their financial status. To help them along this path, I teach them how to fine-tune their multiple cultural repertoires, enabling them to move easily among their homes, their workplaces, and their classrooms, effortlessly switching between spoken languages; voluntarily switching between roles (e.g., boss to student); or momentarily switching between formal and informal language (e.g., e-mail, texting, IM).

While attending LaGuardia, my students also work hard to gain the necessary cultural capital to shed their outsider status as speakers of a language other than English in order to overcome the odds of failure in mainstream American society. By right of participation in their LaGuardia subculture, they learn what they need to succeed both academically and culturally. Over several semesters, they work individually and in small groups to reach their version of “the American Dream,” which, in American parlance, really means self-transformation. For most LaGuardia students, achieving the American Dream means acquiring the tools for upward mobility and job stability based on a combination of education, work, and socio-cultural skills.

Work Ethic

The exploration of the high value accorded work in American culture was introduced in Max Weber’s 1904 theory that the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) is in part responsible for the creation of our capitalist economy (Severinsen 111). The PWE leads to the expectation that the rewards of post-educational job placement are more than worth the delayed gratification or financial hardship of a college education. The traditional work ethic required that students view the college experience as a utilitarian goal, as a career path. In the post-World War II era, men went to college and then began their careers, and women perhaps completed a “finishing school” with the likelihood of marriage and family foremost in their minds. After the socio-cultural changes of the 1960s and ‘70s in the United States, college and careers became more widely acceptable and obtainable for women.

As the baby-boomer children reached college age, universities began expanding their professional programs, particularly for law, business, and medicine, not only to accommodate the influx of students but also to capitalize on the booming United States economy. These expansions mirrored the work ethic in terms of encouraging a utilitarian career path but raised important questions at the same time. According to Maddock, this new post-industrial era of work brought into question the assumptions of the Protestant work ethic (qtd. in Severinsen 112). Career counselors, especially, began to “examine the existing alternatives to the traditional work ethic” (Severinsen 112). Morris takes this idea one step further by saying that post-industrial students have taken on

an existential perspective of career . . . [C]hoice of life work is decisive in defining oneself. [Less a reflection of] how much one can accomplish, one’s career becomes a “human project” placing not our work, but *ourselves* on display (italics in original). (qtd. in Severinsen 112)

By the 1980s and ’90 s, career counselors and educators had learned that there were multiple pathways to career and success, and that not all of them required strict adherence to the PWE, although, in truth, the PWE has never been completely abandoned. This era was a transcendent moment in American education, and marked what Thomas Kuhn called a “paradigm shift” in thinking about careers (Kuhn 1962). For, if we fast forward thirty years, we find that the traditional work ethic – “work hard and you shall be rewarded” – becomes metamorphosed, for my LaGuardia students at least, into an academic work aesthetic – “I will undertake this academic work because, through this process, I can be more fulfilled as a person.” The potential to earn more money or to advance in one’s job is a secondary motivation.

Work Aesthetic

Here I find myself back in my undergraduate Aesthetics class reading John Dewey’s essay, “Having an Experience,” for the first time. Dewey defines the aesthetic narrowly as a vivid experience, and likens the lived experience to an aesthetic state. Initially, he makes the distinction between things that are experienced, and having an experience. Accordingly, we might remember a particularly wonderful meal or surviving a nasty storm by saying “that *was* an experience” (italics in original) (172). But the totality of that experience is not demarcated by the sit-

ting and eating, or by the running helter-skelter into a safe haven. The dining experience may have begun with the trip to Paris, and the storm may be an unconscious childhood memory, forgotten until a particularly violent storm waited out in adulthood. These experiences are not final or complete, but become part of a larger life narrative which we revisit and revise and reconstruct as we have other more or less meaningful experiences which may or may not share common patterns; an experience is the totality of the relationships between the doing and the undergoing (178).

Through reflection, experiences become part of an aesthetic whole. Here Dewey says that “esthetic [refers to] perception and enjoyment (180),” and is “inherently connected with the experience of making” (182). To that end,

[a] drama or a novel is not the final sentence, even if the characters are disposed of as living happily ever after. In a distinctly esthetic experience, characteristics that are subdued in other experiences are dominant; those that are subordinate are controlling – namely, the characteristics in virtue of which the experience is an integrated complete experience on its own account.(187)

I have learned, after many years of teaching, that the intellectual process of reading or writing is void of meaning in isolation. For my students, the intellectual experience becomes complete with the aesthetic reflection on a semester-long assignment that is ostensibly about words, but is, in reality, about themselves and the worldview they hope to create by attending LaGuardia Community College.

LaGuardia Experiences: Pedagogy of the Work Aesthetic

The Vocabulary Enhancement class challenges students to spend the semester researching their chosen major using databases, books, journals, and the Internet in order to find keywords and operative terms relevant to their profession. Then they must write and publicly present a narrative about why they have chosen that major or career. This meta-cognitive exercise – essentially an exploration of “What do I want to be when I grow up, and why?” – gives LaGuardia students an early look at the career choice they are pursuing and helps them to make further judgments and choices, and, ultimately, to see the shortcomings of the unexamined life.

And so it is with the rest of their education. The “college experience” is a long series of smaller experiences: the students respond to these experiences, then reflect upon them, and then use these pristine experiences as a foundation to inform their future experiences. Students actively make the value of the “college experience” qua experience come fully alive by their ongoing perception and aesthetic evaluation of their classroom experiences. To value the aesthetic experience, one must be discriminating – choosing those parts that will enhance and further that experience and ignoring that which will distract from achieving one’s goal. Thus, the notion of education for education’s sake is akin to drudgery. Unless an experience is interesting and meaningful in and of itself, there is little impetus to continue that endeavor. In other words, the absence of aesthetic judgment of the lived experience, or the neglect of placing a value on that experience, means never examining it critically and missing the forest for the trees.

LaGuardia students willingly accept the delayed gratification of pursuing their career goals in the classroom. For many, the biggest handicap is overcoming a language deficit and that requires an investment of *years*. They also understand that they have much to gain from a process of socialization that promotes linguistic fluency as well as socio-cultural competency. Yes, they all willingly undertake this academic course of action for the potential jump in job status from cab driver or nanny to professional. When asked in a questionnaire given at the beginning of the class why they are in college, many respond that they would like to earn more money, but a majority of my students also add that their true motivation for attending LaGuardia is more altruistic: they emphasize the experiential component of their achievement; they know that it is the doing itself, with others in community, that enhances the value of their education.

Similarly, in a recent study at Hostos College (CUNY), Santos researched the incentives of 179 first-semester Hispanic students in an effort to determine why they would choose to enroll in a two-year college. The motivational factors, in rank order, were knowledge, self-development, job enhancement, social status, and improving social life (24). This study correlates closely with what I have found among my LaGuardia students. The Hostos students had, foremost, a desire to learn more about the world around them and to improve themselves, and then they wanted a career, rather than merely a job for work’s sake.

Although my own classes are not statistically significant as research samples, LaGuardia students’ responses to “Why are you *really* here at

LaGuardia?” are somewhat analogous to the work of Kunuk and other Native American community activists and may represent an indigenous LaGuardia aesthetic. Just as Portapak video recording stimulated small underrepresented communities to band together for self-preservation and protection of their heritage, so do LaGuardia’s learning communities bring together small groups of students of differing languages and cultural backgrounds in such a way that they build upon their native language and heritage and become proficient in the academic and career folkways of mainstream America, gaining “insider” status while struggling to maintain their “native” selves in a new environment.

Academic achievement is not the thrust of my research. However, there is at least anecdotal evidence that LaGuardia college students’ abilities, as measured by placement tests, combined with their zeal and the support of the college learning communities, are potential predictors of student success and persistence. My role as cultural moderator encourages the process of making the communal experience part of the aesthetic experience. I can use the differences in language and culture to foreground the importance of the learning community environment but the success of that experience has to originate from the students themselves.

The fact that LaGuardia evening division students are motivated to learn is evidenced by the workload they voluntarily take on – 30- to 40-hour work weeks and 20 to 25 hours of nightly classes – not to mention the primary impediment to their success: they must first learn English before they can progress! Adding to this mix, note that the majority of LaGuardia students are here because, first and foremost, they want to improve themselves and only secondarily because they want to find a suitable career. It may just be that the aesthetic motivational factor, enhanced and supported by a variety of educational experiences in LaGuardia learning communities, contributes to their eventual success.

NOTE

1. 2007 figures (LaGuardia 1).

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THE CLASS OF BUKOWSKI: ENGAGING LAGUARDIA WORKING CLASS STUDENTS WITH THE NOVELS OF CHARLES BUKOWSKI

Carlos Hiraldo, *English*

Despite the great diversity of the LaGuardia student population, our classrooms have a predominantly working-class ethos. Clearly, the meaning of the term “working class” is open to contention, its definitions expanding and shrinking according to the politics of the user and the exigencies of time and place. I do not wish to imply that our culturally diverse students are economically homogeneous. In my seven years as an English professor at LaGuardia, I have met students from a range of economic backgrounds, including the very poor and the relatively well off. Still, I believe that by occupation and education, many of our students are connected to the working class. Directly or indirectly, through personal experiences or the experiences of parents and relatives, they are familiar with the struggles of working for wages and securing and retaining jobs that promise economic and social stability. The challenges and triumphs we encounter in the classroom as instructors often come from meeting and overcoming the anxieties of students who exhibit a working-class lack of familiarity with academic culture.

LaGuardia students confront many of the same difficulties that educational experts have found working-class students experience in a college setting. In “Ethical Representation of Working-Class Lives: Multiple Genres, Voices, and Identities,” Nancy Mack argues that working-class students lack “a sense of entitlement about obtaining a college degree” and are “fearful of exposure” (56). I have observed that students in my classes are usually the first in their families to attend college in the United States and they are proud of this achievement. Nevertheless, they doubt their chances of completing their educational goals as well as the significance of their ideas. In English classes, students fear being criticized as poor writers, and they view literature as something lofty, like fine china kept high in the cupboard for a special occasion, seldom, if ever, used.

Because many of our students feel alienated from literature as not speaking to or for them, I am judicious when selecting texts for Writ-

ing through Literature (ENG102). I believe that when engaged with what they read, students write stronger analytical essays and become more motivated to complete research assignments. In the past, when I taught literary texts primarily concerned with ethnic or racial identity, my lessons and assignments met with varying degrees of success, depending upon the makeup of the class. Though I strongly believe in the importance of teaching students the concept of “otherness” conveyed through these texts, I also find dissatisfying the degree to which the lesson’s success or failure rests upon the accidental groupings of identities and personalities that take place through the random process of registration. I have discovered, however, that texts directly addressing economic struggles and the difficulties of the work world engage the majority of students regardless of nationality, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or academic skill level.

If themes of ethnicity alienate some students by touching on personal prejudices or indifferences, discussions of work and economic survival draw many students together, and away from more apparent identity divides. In “Diversity, Discourse, and the Working-Class Student,” published by *Academe*, Janet Galligani Casey states,

While every minority group may stake a claim to its own specialized needs and concerns, [...] working-class students stand apart from students in all other minority categories, even as they cut across all such categories, precisely because of their fundamentally oblique relationship to the entire enterprise of higher education.

In my view, the broader challenge and opportunity of teaching at LaGuardia, where all are in the minority, emanates precisely from the students’ working-class distance from the liberal arts and academic discourse. The students simply do not believe that their lived experiences are relevant to the classroom, and they doubt that what they learn in the classroom can provide any insight into their personal lives.

I teach the novels of Charles Bukowski in Writing through Literature (ENG102) to help bridge the gap that students perceive between their working-class experiences and academic learning. One of the few American writers concerned with authentically portraying work and the working class, Bukowski once criticized inaccurate descriptions about working life in a letter to his publisher, John Martin:

You know the places where I came from. Even the people who try to write about that or make films about it, they don't get it right. They call it "9 to 5." It's never 9 to 5, there's no free lunch break at those places, in fact, at many of them in order to keep your job you don't take lunch. Then there's OVERTIME and the books never seem to get the overtime right and if you complain about that, there's another sucker to take your place.

Bukowski made an effort to get it right and often did so. His narrative fiction details the drudgery and the injustices of low-level employment as well as the fleeting moments of rebellion possible in a working-class existence.

Every time I have taught Bukowski, students have expressed intense interest. During the 2006–07 academic year, I taught two of Bukowski's novels – *Factotum* in the Fall I 2006 semester and *Post Office* in Spring I 2007. Both novels are narrated by Bukowski's alter ego, Henry Chinaski, and are fictionalizations of Bukowski's real-life experiences. These works question the promise of the "American Dream" and its implicit guarantee of upward mobility for those who work hard, regardless of their starting position in society. This critical thrust might seem strange at first to students who look at a college education as a means of upward mobility, and as an escape from their own physically intensive and routine employment. Some students quickly identified with Bukowski's characters and style; others, because of cultural conventions and upbringing, were taken aback by the writer's occasional use of foul words, frank depiction of sexual encounters, and portrayal of petty acts of rebellion. However, the more we engaged in discussions of the ideas about work found within Bukowski's novels, the more the students realized that their own experiences were not that different from the ones depicted in the texts. In the end, the majority of students valued both Bukowski's honest rendering of Chinaski's working-class experiences and the immediacy of his language.

Although the first reaction of many students when they read Bukowski was enthusiasm, my goal was to focus their energy on the discipline of literary analysis. The number of students who told me they had completed *Factotum* before we started discussing it was unexpected. They were surprised to realize that the experiences of a common worker could be the raw material for powerful literature. In addition to informal and excited conversations about how fast they had read the novel and how eager they were to read more of Bukowski,

students also put their feelings into writing. Reflecting on the author, one student wrote, “I like him because he pulls no punches and makes sure his reader understands what he’s going through [...] the scary part about his work is he uses actual situations that can happen to you and me.” I welcomed the student’s sense of camaraderie with Bukowski and his alter ego, and realized that this feeling could serve as an entrée into deeper literary analysis.

My writing assignments required that students analyze the literary mechanisms put into play in *Factotum*. One student keenly noted that, though Bukowski elicited strong emotions, his language was straightforward and descriptive: “It’s funny how he describes things to the most precise detail, but he doesn’t necessarily express excessive emotion about that certain subject. He is detail oriented. I like how he paints the whole picture, the whole scene, with his words.” Here the student taps into the commonly held critical observation that, as a twentieth-century author, Bukowski does not invest much time in describing scenery. His settings are spare; as the student noted, his language is precise and to the point. A quick sketch of the surroundings – a messy room, an ugly factory – is enough to portray the inner lives of the inhabitants.

Later, when I assigned *Post Office* to a different group of Writing through Literature students, I was not surprised by one student’s report that, on her own, she had started reading other works by the author. Bukowski’s first novel and the one generally accepted as his best, *Post Office* recounts his twelve years in the United States Postal Service, first as a mail carrier and then as a clerk. The autobiographical novel humorously follows Chinaski in his travails as he makes his deliveries, battles superintendents and co-workers, and endures the troubles of a low-wage public servant. But behind the humor there is seriousness. Chinaski’s relationship to his supervisor, Jonstone, whom he calls “the Stone,” demonstrates the petty unfairness that can infect any work environment, unfairness particularly insidious in blue-collar settings where economic insecurity threatens workers’ rights. Chinaski, who receives daily wages as a part-time letter carrier, files a formal complaint against Jonstone, who in turn retaliates by refusing to give Chinaski more work. The imbalance of power between boss and worker is not lost on students, one of whom offered the following observation:

Chinaski is being punished by his manager for complaining about him. Jonstone is deliberately not giving Chinaski jobs so

that he will quit. Obviously, there are jobs because all the other workers are out there working. “At 7 a.m. Jonstone swiveled again. All the other subs had been assigned jobs or been sent to other stations that needed help. ‘That’s all, Chinaski. Nothing for you today’” (16). The injustice occurs when Jonstone refuses to give Chinaski work when all the other workers are getting jobs. The job of a manager is not to be petty. Jonstone needs to talk out the problem and not be a baby about it.

The job of the manager is not to be petty: the student-critic succinctly locates the insight in Bukowski’s portrayal of the relationship between Chinaski and Jonstone. Chinaski is by no means an ideal worker, but it is Jonstone who escalates the tension, arbitrarily assigning the best routes to his favorite letter carriers and punishing with the longest and most difficult routes those whom he considers insufficiently subservient. Students understand this petty abuse of power – they have seen it in their own jobs, and have gone through it with their own managers.

I do not mean to imply here that students should only be taught works that speak openly to their previous experiences. Like many other instructors, I believe that there are certain texts that educated Americans should be familiar with. However, if we insist on introducing working-class students to literature and literary analysis exclusively through texts they “should” know, we run the risk of further distancing them from the academic process. Furthermore, I would argue that intellectual development, like the process of creating a powerful metaphor, comes from finding previously unexpected connections between our messy lives and texts previously made stale by decades and centuries of stodgy canonical worship behind the air-sealing glass of a “gentlemen’s academia.” In order for the educational process to be truly meaningful, students need to feel comfortable finding connections between what they already know and what they are learning in the classroom.

Bringing our own experiences to the interpretation of a text creates a fuller and more honest environment for students and professors. Sometimes, when it was necessary to explain Bukowski’s more confusing passages, I described my own working-class experiences. Reading *Factotum*, my students objected to Chinaski’s elaborate schemes to steal from his employers. Why didn’t he simply walk out the front door, they asked, hiding what he stole in a bag? To illustrate, I shared my childhood memory of my mother’s indignation about the random and humiliating searches that occurred when she and her coworkers

ended their shifts at Madame Alexander's doll factory, a practice that I also encountered when I worked there the summer after my freshman year in college. The students came to understand that some employers, assuming without evidence that their underpaid workers steal, institute "preventive" measures.

My openness about my own economic background, coupled with our critical analysis of Bukowski's novels, created a classroom environment in which students learned that knowledge drawn from their "outside" lives was not only valid but was indeed crucial to acquiring necessary academic skills. During the 2006–07 academic year, as students became more engaged with the works of Bukowski, the perceived divide between the classroom and the real world faded. Because they felt that their working-class experiences were vital to the classroom and to the overall academic process, they were more focused on improving their writing and more willing to seek and heed my assistance. Student writing, like our classroom discussions, was no longer a distant academic exercise, but came alive with vigorous insights produced by the connection between the experiences depicted within a literary work and the lived experiences recalled by the engaged reader.

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WRITING THE WORKPLACE: APPROACHING LABOR IN THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION AND CREATIVE WRITING

Kristen Gallagher and Chris Alexander, *English*

Work is a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash . . . in short, for a life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.

– Studs Terkel, *Working*

Introduction

At LaGuardia Community College, we are often faced with the complex task of teaching students to be literate and effective in American society – work culture included – while at the same time creating and implementing pedagogies that are student-centered, student-driven, and student-empowering. Teaching in the tradition of Paulo Freire, we place value on teaching students to think for themselves, to stand up for their ideas, and to engage in creative and collaborative problem-solving. However, we are well aware that the dominant culture often gives students different messages that can undermine our work. Those messages are often most pronounced in the workplace where workers – and LaGuardia students are often workers – learn that cheeriness, helpfulness, and ready submissiveness to those in power reap the quickest rewards. Another message, which may appear contrary to the emphasis placed on submissiveness, concerns the route to power: Disregard the rights and interests of other workers. Often, the messages workers receive pool in a mix of “keep your chin up” and “look out for number one.”

It has become harder and harder for educators to cut through these rhetorics and teach in such a way that school is not perceived as a stepping stone to becoming the exploiter instead of the exploited. Nevertheless, we believe that we must keep educating to assert the rights of students and workers and to generate the transformative power of collaborative discourse and collective effort. As writers and writing teachers, we recognize the power of the writing classroom – with its demands for reflection, analysis, and the development of complex, risky ideas – to intercede. We see the topic of work as worthy of student writ-

ers' reflection and analysis because the subject is complex and points to shared experience. As the poet Kit Robinson says, "The limits imposed by work represent not simply an obstacle but an opportunity for writing – not least because the workplace is the site of common activity and therefore enables writing to bear witness to our common experience" (n.pag.). Therefore, we both regularly emphasize exploration of work through writing. By using, on the one hand, the new concept of labor in Michael Hardt's 1999 essay, "Affective Labor," and, on the other, Erving Goffman's concept of "dramaturgical analysis," as presented through excerpts from his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, each of us strives to create a student-driven dialogue about work that leads to independent thinking, expressed in writing.

Kristen's Story

In graduate school, I had a job in a call center taking classified ads for the *Buffalo News*. Many of my coworkers at that job had little placards with sayings pinned or taped all around their cubicles. Under the guise of "inspirational messages," these placards usually contained commands about how to behave in a friendly and helpful manner at work. One placard read: "When you think you have been nice, be nicer; when you think you have been helpful, be more helpful; when you think you have done the job, ask what else you can do." On the face of it, such office decor may seem ordinary, maybe even good. We are all accustomed to these kinds of messages in our culture: "work hard," "always be professional and courteous," "the customer is always right." But there is a more insidious message here, one about our national work culture and its effect on our constructions of self and our connections to others. The workplace often requires us to present a certain affect, a certain outward appearance. Those placards and the requirement they signaled were to become significant, years later, in my writing classrooms.

I became interested in teaching writing using the context of work after the first time I taught Creative Writing/Urban Studies (ENN198) at LaGuardia in fall 2006. At the end of the semester, I asked my students to fill out a questionnaire that I had made to assess the course in relation to their needs and concerns. One question I always ask is "What, if any, obstacles do you see impeding you from continuing to write?" One of the most common answers was some variant of "work," "my job," "my boss," "too much to do." It became clear that, if I were really to teach students to be poets, playwrights, fiction writers, or documentarians, I was going to have to teach them to write in conjunction with,

as a part of, or in the middle of working at a job – and sometimes the job would not be one that the writer desired. When I was a call center operator, I used the occasion of the job to write a series of poems about telephone operation. This project gave me a new angle on my work at the *Buffalo News* and brought a lot of pleasure to a job that I otherwise did not enjoy.

Because of my experience and the feedback I received from my creative writing students about writing about work, I put together a lesson on writing and work beginning with Hardt's essay in which he examines the passage from a manufacturing to a service economy in terms of changes in work behavior. In a manufacturing economy, workers had to punch in on time and work the machine efficiently. The manufacturing economy had its own problems, of course, but one's personality or facial expression certainly was not a major feature of why bosses hired and fired people in, say, factories. Hardt observes that many of the goods now produced are primarily immaterial "such as a service, knowledge, or communication," or what is often referred to as "an experience" (94).

Hardt discusses at length how caretaking labor and even the production of sociality itself – the "affective labor of human contact and interaction" (95) – have become central forms of capital production in many of what we used to call the industrialized nations. I give students a quotation from Hardt and his collaborator, Antonio Negri, in which they argue that we "can recognize affective labor, for example, in the work of legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile)." One indication of the rising importance of affective labor, and also its power to narrow the field and import of human experience, "is the tendency for employers [in all fields] to highlight education, attitude, character, and 'prosocial' behavior as the primary skills employees need" (*Multitude* 108).

Based on Hardt's ideas, I ask students first to discuss, then to write about how different jobs and work environments produce different feelings and allow or repress free expression. Students often engage in vibrant conversation, both in small groups and then in sharing from those groups with the larger classroom; the conversations evoke stories and questions about freedom, emotion, and power in the workplace. Many students discuss having to smile while being treated as if they are stupid, having to smile while enduring sexual harassment from customers, having to speak cheerfully and enthusiastically while repeating inane sales lines over and over as a call center operator, or having

to appear busy while sitting in a cubicle stamping envelopes for seven hours a day. With these stories in mind, we discuss the ways some work stifles writing, or, in some cases, subtly coerces individuals into conformity with codes that, though they may serve companies perfectly well, do not always serve workers. We also discuss work situations that trust, support, and encourage workers. At this point, students often become curious about my experience with regard to these issues. Knowing that I am an active, publishing poet, they wonder how my writing has influenced the kinds of jobs I have taken and how I have managed to continue to write. I share my own stories – the best and the worst – and explain why I became a professor. I also tell them about other writers who have worked hard and managed to write prolifically at the same time.

With the goal of preparing students to write stories and poems based on their work experiences, I show them some of my writing from the period when I was an operator and I have them read *Local History*, a book of poetry by Erica Hunt, based on Hunt's experiences as a social worker in New York City. One moment of particular excitement comes when I show them copies of the little slips of paper on which Emily Dickinson wrote much of her late work. Dickinson was in charge of her household's baking and for years spent hours a day in the kitchen. Much of her late work is written on torn brown paper – the kind the flour delivery typically came in – with grease stains and poor penmanship. She was writing while working. Like a jazz musician who plays while listening, a good poet is always at the ready for the right word, the phrase that strikes the imagination like lightning – even if it's in the middle of kneading dough.

Next, I present the students with a medieval tradition best described by the French: *la perruque*, defined by Michel Anteby in 2003 as “factory production of items for personal use, made on working time” (454). The literary point of access to this idea that I provide is John Ashbery's poem, “The Instruction Manual” (14–18). On the job, in a tall building in New York City, the young poet-satirist must write an instruction manual. He seems positively depressed by the task. The poem starts with the main character looking out a window, down on the small figures below, wishing he didn't have to write an instruction manual on a subject he seems utterly disconnected from: the uses of a new metal. However, of his work Ashbery tells us little more. The occasion of the poem is precisely the mundane task, but the poem posits this mundane task as an occasion for the human imagination. Looking

down from the window at the sidewalk, watching the tiny figures below, he is suddenly reminded of Guadalajara, and the poem and its reader are transported to a scene more vibrant and alive than the office and the instruction manual. The bulk of the roughly three-page poem narrates Ashbery imagining himself entirely elsewhere, in Guadalajara.

Ashbery's poem introduces the concept that periods of boredom at work may be used for the exercise of personal creativity. This idea is the key element of *la perruque* – that the worker exercises personal power to allot her own time and creative energy. We discuss the value of “downtime” at work, the fact that it can, if used creatively, be replenishing, even soul-nourishing. Students come to appreciate the title of Ashbery's poem in a way they had not before; it becomes clear that Ashbery is offering instruction to his readers, to young poets, possibly even to these students. In the end, Ashbery's “instruction” turns out to be encouraging. Not only does the imagination rush in to save us from the boredom, but boredom and disaffection can provide an opportunity – an opportunity for writing.

Students who see themselves as writers must choose either work that will grant them enough time to write, or work that will provide them with enough intensified contact with reality, and, therefore, with something urgent to write about – all the better if the job allows the writer always to be seen with pen and paper, or puts the writer in an environment with a lot of windows.

After we study some of the nuanced ways in which writing and working life are intertwined – and could be more intertwined in our own lives if we wanted – I ask students to write a poem or story in the spirit of Ashbery's poem. We do what Kit Robinson suggests: take the limits imposed by a bad work situation and review that situation as an opportunity for writing – “writing to bear witness to our common experience.” I suggest they think of their writing for this assignment as a way to examine a part of their “work past” that they would prefer not to repeat, one that demonstrates a kind of affective labor they do not want to perform in the future.

In reading and discussing Hardt's essay and Ashbery's poem, students prepare to write and share detailed stories that represent their real experiences, feelings, and desires. The readings and discussions of Hardt and Ashbery also move students towards understanding the social and political dynamics of the postmodern worker. That understanding is crucial to an understanding of how choices of work can keep us from writing, or provide us with material for writing.

Christopher's Story

My conversations with students and the materials that students bring from their lives into their writing have taught me that, particularly in evening classes, the proportion of working people in Composition I: An Introduction to Expository Writing (ENG101) approaches one hundred percent. I have learned that most students in my evening classes work in the “service industry,” or at the service end of the corporate sector, frequently as clerical workers and in other “office support” positions, staffing the phones at call centers, pulling shifts in restaurants, retail stores, or hotels. A few work as “light industrial” laborers, or in the public sector, as postal carriers, forklift drivers, packers, or delivery personnel.

Arriving at the college at 5:45 p.m., students often speak of the classroom as a hiatus in the work day or an interval between work and their personal lives. Some have just arrived from their places of work, with only the train ride as “personal time” for processing the events of the day; a few will be heading off to their jobs after class, with only the train ride to prepare mentally for the transition. In response to this situation, I have recently begun to develop a unit in my ENG101 classes that allows students to reflect on the experience of work, with a focus on the performance of social roles and sociality in the workplace. As part of this unit, writing is an essential tool for articulating and sharing reflections. I encourage students to recognize the common threads that connect their varied work experiences and to see work as a collective experience – the work culture of the contemporary American. Student efforts are structured by assigned readings and small-group discussion using a variant of the “problem-posing” method (see below, p. 121). Those discussions lead to informal group presentations that form the basis of individual essays in which students analyze their work experiences.

The work unit begins with a bit of sociology using brief selections from Erving Goffman's 1959 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which introduces the technique of “dramaturgical analysis.” Goffman divides personal experience into a metaphorical “front stage,” on which an individual tries to negotiate social norms and rules of behavior as well as idiosyncratic “audience” expectations that he or she believes inform a social situation, and a “back stage” which represents that individual's interior life or behavior when no audience is present. In this way, Goffman is able to show us social interaction as a site for performance, shaped by the environment and the immediate audience, in which actor-participants attempt to manage

the impressions others have of them. Goffman's highly-specific use of terms can present a challenge to composition students. Students work in small groups to come up with their own definitions of Goffman's terms, then we come back together as a whole class, compare definitions, and work out together what we think Goffman is saying and how it relates to our lives as workers. This allows students to quickly move from "dramatur-wha??" to showing their understanding of Goffman's basic point: Everyone in a given exchange is playing a role. From there, students go on to use Goffman's theory to analyze their own work experiences.

In order to ensure that the dialogue remains student-driven, I use a variation of the "problem-posing" method first introduced by Elsa Auerbach. Kristen and I have been working to develop our own version of the problem-posing method based on Auerbach's work as well as work by Paolo Freire and Sarah Nixon. Our five step problem-posing assignment is as follows:

- Articulate the concept. In your own words, define the specific question posed by our reading.
- Identify a quotation to support your definition. Keep it textual! Show us that you know what you're talking about by connecting your definition of the concept with a quotation from the reading.
- Personalize the concept. Relate the idea under discussion to your own working life. Share workplace problems, past or present, that serve as examples of the concept. How does this concept help you to see the problems in a new light?
- Possible responses to the problem. What alternatives to your example problem have been tried and failed, or were tried and then abandoned. Why did those solutions fail? Should any of them be revisited? (This is also an opportunity to voice doubts or frustrations with the difficulty of solving the problem.)
- Alternative responses to the problem. Using Goffman's concept, imagine new and different possibilities for solving the problem. Key word: IMAGINE. Seize on the ideas of your fellow students, no matter how impractical or far-fetched they seem at first. Eliminate the voice of criticism. Solving problems requires the free exercise of creativity!

This method allows students to digest Goffman on their own in small groups, connecting his concepts with problems from their own working lives.

Once small-group presentations are under way, students analyze their work situations using Goffman's language and theory. Their presentations offer responses to these questions: What are the performance pressures we encounter at work? What are the institutional rules of the "front stage," the various codes of workplace propriety (appropriateness of dress, manners, behaviors, activities)? What values do they encode or reflect? Usually students are able to introduce a number of problematic or culturally loaded examples. For instance, during one particularly fruitful session, a student brought in photocopies from the employee handbook at her place of work, which included the following:

Nail polish is not permitted in any food production area of the restaurant. Employees working in non-food production areas may wear clear polish. Nail ornaments and artificial fingernails are not permitted in any area of the restaurant.

We strive to maintain a "Family" restaurant image. Employees must remove all visible pierced jewelry while at work. Exception: Females are permitted to wear two small earrings in each ear if working in a non-food production area. Visible tattoos must be covered while working.

These two rules alone provided us with half-an-hour's discussion: What are the cultural and class associations of artificial fingernails? of nail ornaments? What does it mean to say that some cultures are more "appropriate" than others? What is a "Family" restaurant image? Whose family? Why is the word "Family" capitalized and in quotation marks? What about the word "image"? What is the relationship between "Family," "image," and the covering of visible tattoos? What is the nature of this performance ("front stage"), and what is being concealed ("back stage")? Who is the audience for this performance? What do we know of their actual expectations? Who is the "We" in "We strive"? Who are "we" being told to be?

Goffman is very useful for analyzing work situations, and my students, many of whom are entering new working environments and new labor conditions as a result of attending LaGuardia, usually have a lot to say about the "drama" of work. Goffman is particularly good for thinking through service industry labor, where the idea of creating an experience for the customer and of managing impressions is explicit

and paramount. Goffman enables students with similar as well as vastly different sets of work experience to see commonalities.

In the wake of students' informal presentations, students write individual essays using the problem-posing rubric to structure their papers. In the resulting essays, they draw on their small group discussions, presentations, and subsequent class-wide discussion for inspiration and material. Looking over these essays, I have generally found that students arrive at a solid understanding of Goffman's basic ideas, and that the complexity of those ideas provides a useful challenge in the development of their composition skills, notably the use of summary, paraphrase, and quotation as tools for explicating a difficult text. The essays show evidence of genuinely engaged discussion, close listening, and synthesis. Although the interaction is not explicitly required by the assignment, in these essays it is remarkably common to find students citing classmates' comments.

Typically, the next writing assignment follows the same contours. I ask students to describe a work situation and then to analyze that situation using the terms and concepts of dramaturgical analysis. In this subsequent assignment, we turn to Jill Sprecher's 1997 fictional film *Clockwatchers*, a close look at four women working as office temps in Manhattan in the '90s. We observe the subtle contours of the power relations between the full- and part-timers, and how they create and move the drama, and we discuss them with a view to honing students' analytical skills. "Dramaturgical analysis" of the film makes a good follow-up to the first assignment, and makes a good semester-ending assignment for ENG101 because it provides an introduction to concepts of literary analysis, which students will encounter in ENG102, *Writing Through Literature*.

Conclusion

If affective labor can be defined as the production of knowledge, attitudes and dispositions, it should be clear that teaching is itself a form of affective labor, a relatively privileged form, since it retains a self-directed, creative aspect. In an attempt to generalize this freedom, student-centered and Freirean pedagogies have been developed that work against the idea that the teacher prescribes affect for his or her students (for example, by limiting classroom attitudes to appreciation, mere comprehension, or position-taking within an established "pro-anti" discourse). Instead, these pedagogies place the teacher in the role of facilitator, assisting students in the exploration of their problems as they

discover and refine their own approaches to those problems. Understood this way, teaching has long had the power to raise consciousness about how received social forms are both created and reproduced, and how they may be changed. Given the increasing fragmentation of the global labor market and the increasing shift toward the production of affect (an experience, a knowledge, a feeling, an impression) rather than of material products, this kind of teaching may be more urgently needed and also more powerful than ever.

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

Connecting Students, Connecting Classrooms: ePortfolio and the Power of Engagement

Faculty work together to reconsider ePortfolio, focusing on the fourth component of the college's ePortfolio mission – Collect, Select, Reflect, and Connect – and using ePortfolio as a tool to strengthen the ties among students, faculty, and learning.

Professors Marisa Klages, *English*, and Ellen Quish, *Adult Learning Center*

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, including online inquiry, wikis, discussion boards, and introductory work with ePortfolio.

Professors Scott White, *Library*, and D. Priyantha Wijesinghe, *Natural and Applied Sciences*

DFL Mini-Seminar on Hybrid-Online Teaching

This mini-seminar will explore online teaching pedagogies and offer an opportunity for faculty to redesign a traditional course for hybrid-online delivery. Faculty will explore a range of online instructional strategies and facilitation techniques, considering which are most likely to maximize learning for different students.

Priscilla Stadler and Judit Török, *LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning*

DFL Mini-Seminar on Web 2.0

Reshaping the world of digital communication, Web 2.0 technologies emphasize more open participation, collaboration, and creation of user-generated content. This mini-seminar will focus on the opportunities Web 2.0 technologies offer for students as collaborative authors while they engage with course content.

Josephine Corso, Priscilla Stadler and Judit Török,
LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning

Faculty Scholars Publication Workshop

This year-long faculty development seminar is designed to assist faculty in their scholarly writing and publication. It seeks to help faculty complete academic writing projects and place them in external, peer-reviewed publications.

Professors Nancy Berke and Ting Man Tsao, *English*

Focus on Learning Communities

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

Professors Gary Richmond, *Humanities*, and Phyllis Van Slyck, *English*

Integrated ePortfolio Mini-Grant Program

This initiative aims to advance the comprehensive integration of ePortfolio into curriculum. The program offers departments and academic programs up to \$7,500 for the 2008-09 academic year to support faculty development and needed curriculum revision processes. Examples of activities supported by the mini-grant are: revising courses and refining syllabi to include ePortfolio and holding workshops or mini-seminars for full-time and adjunct faculty.

Ros Orgel, *LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning*

Making Connections

Making Connections provides professional development support to universities in the NYC metropolitan area who wish to advance their use of ePortfolio. In 2008, funded by a major FIPSE grant, Making Connections provided mini-grants and a sustained seminar to faculty representing 10 colleges, from St. John's University and Connecticut's Norwalk Community College to CUNY's Queens College and Bronx Community College. Applications for the 2009 program will be released in October 2008.

Professors Clarence Chan, *Natural and Applied Sciences*, and Max Rodriguez, *Education and Language Acquisition*

New Faculty Colloquium

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

Professors Ana María Hernández, *Education and Language Acquisition*, and Gordon Tapper, *English*

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.

Professors Louis Lucca and Patricia Sokolski, *Humanities*

Project Quantum Leap

Now in its second year, this seminar brings together faculty from mathematics and other disciplines to adapt the nationally recognized Project SENCER approach of teaching science and higher-level mathematics in "compelling contexts" to a new setting and population: LaGuardia's high-risk urban community college students in basic-skills mathematics classes. The National Science Foundation developed Project SENCER (Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities).

Professors Prabha Betne, Gordon Crandall, and Frank Wang, *Mathematics, Engineering, and Computer Science*

Re-Thinking the Capstone Experience

Exploring scholarly literature and models from across the country, seminar participants will develop and test new approaches to LaGuardia's capstone courses. They will consider critical questions including how capstone courses help students synthesize their learning within and across disciplines, how integrative pedagogy can inform the capstone experience at LaGuardia, what role capstones play in institutional assessment, and the ways in which ePortfolio can help scaffold capstone pedagogy.

Professor J. Elizabeth Clark, *English*

Student Technology Mentors (STMs)

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*

Teaching the Digital City: Building Information Literacy in Urban Studies

Designed to help faculty grapple with key challenges as they guide students toward a deeper understanding of New York City culture, politics, business, health, and society, this seminar will help faculty to balance different modes of learning, designing experiential and active-learning assignments that advance students' abilities to access, evaluate, and interpret data from primary and secondary sources.

Professors Charles Keyes, *Library*, and Steve Lang, *Social Science*

Teaching the New Student Seminar

Working with the Counseling Department and the Division of Academic Affairs, the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning offers a professional development seminar for faculty interested in teaching the New Student Seminar course. Recent participants report that the wealth of information shared in the seminar proved invaluable in providing assistance to students in their transition to college life.

Professor Robert Durfey, *Counseling*

Virtual Interest Groups (VIGs)

VIGs bring students together in online communities based on shared academic/career interests and provide a three-pronged support network for developmental advisement: from a faculty leader in the field, from a member of the Counseling, Advising, and Academic Support staff, and from one or more Student Mentors who have excelled within their respective programs. The VIG faculty leaders engage in a year-long seminar to share approaches, develop new ideas, and refine their practice.

Dean Paul Arcario, *Academic Affairs*

Writing in the Disciplines (Affiliated Program)

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

Professors Marian Arkin and James Wilson, *English*

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR VOLUME 4, FALL 2009

Theme: Reflection

We are pleased to invite proposals for Volume #4 of *In Transit*, scheduled to appear in Fall 2009. We encourage faculty to submit brief (two or three paragraphs) proposals for an article on the theme of Reflection. The deadline for proposals is *17 October 2009*. Proposals should be sent to Michele Piso at mpiso@lagcc.cuny.edu.

Final articles will be approximately 3,000–4,000 words in length. The deadline for papers is *20 January 2009*. Information about editorial policies, submission guidelines, and writers' workshops will be emailed upon request.

Reflection and its role in education is a rich and multifaceted theme. John Dewey identified reflection as an essential element of learning and cognition. Reflection is a process of making meaning, a process that transforms experience – classroom experience, reading experience, artistic experience, lived experience – into knowledge and understanding. It is critical to the creation, construction, or reconstruction of our identities as learners, professionals, and citizens. Becoming human, according to one Dewey scholar, requires the development of “reflective intelligences that enable us to tell masterful and moving stories of our participation in community.”

LaGuardia faculty have done important work on reflection from many different angles. We welcome proposals for articles that focus on one or more facets of this theme, such as:

How is reflection used in building literacy and language acquisition? What is the function of a reflective journal? A memoir? Other kinds of reflective writing? What strategies enable reflection to be used most effectively in this context? How do they affect student learning?

How can reflection be used to deepen students' self understanding? How does faculty use it to support the development of new career and professional identities? How does it function in experiential learning processes, including internships and field placements? How do different academic and professional disciplines approach reflection?

While encouraging our students to be reflective learners, many LaGuardia faculty also seek to become more reflective practitioners. Classroom inquiry and reflective exchange are crucial to many programs of the Center for Teaching & Learning. What has it meant to you to reflect on your teaching? How has it changed you, as a teacher? What have you learned through this process?

What role does reflection play in the ePortfolio? What kinds of reflections are students putting into their portfolios? What can we learn from their stories? What kinds of themes and issues do their stories reflect? How does the technology enhance or change the reflective process?

What does reflection look like in non-written format? Can art and design be a form of reflection? What about video and music? What kinds of reflective thinking can be found in a Digital Story? What changes when reflection is conducted in these different media?

What makes reflection effective? What strategies make it particularly meaningful and valuable? Is it an individual process, or a process that involves the classroom as community? What approaches have you used, as a teacher, to encourage reflection? Which ones work best, in your experience? Why? How do you know?

In Transit promotes exchange about key educational issues among new faculty and more seasoned colleagues and encourages faculty across the college to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education.

Executive Editor, Bret Eynon, PhD., Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning

Editor, Professor Gail Green-Anderson, English (on leave 2008–2009)

Editor, Michele Piso, PhD., Center for Teaching and Learning and Humanities

Guest Editor, John A. Een, EdD., Associate Director, The English Language Center

Guest Editor, Sigmund Shen, Assistant Professor, Department of English