

ALL ABOUT

# MENTORING

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*Scattered throughout this issue of All About Mentoring are quotes taken from our recent publication, Explorations in Adult Higher Education. This, the sixth of our "occasional paper" series co-edited by Shantih Clemans and Alan Mandell with Associate Editor Karen LaBarge, focuses on the theme of "access, identity and power in American higher education." It includes edited guest presentations from two webinar series, as well as responses from our SUNY Empire State College colleagues Frances Boyce, Ruth Goldberg, Elliott Dawes, Jeffrey Lambe, Rhianna Rogers, Margaret Clark-Plaskie, and Renata Kochut. Our colleague, Raúl Manzano, provided the paintings that are included in the publication. If you are interested in receiving a copy of this occasional paper, please contact Janay Jackson (Janay.Jackson@esc.edu).*

## ALL ABOUT **MENTORING**

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**Special thanks:**

Thanks to our entire SUNY Empire State  
College community for being just that,  
especially now, when we all need it.

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## EDITORIAL



## SoTL for the Little Set

*"The thing is, with each story I could see that the children wanted to do something nice for someone, compliment them, or sit next to them. Some recognition of another person, a connection to another person had to be made."*

— Vivian Gussin Paley, *The Kindness of Children* (1999), pp. 19-20

On July 26, 2019, Vivian Gussin Paley died. Her name may not ring a bell for most of you, but for those involved in early childhood education or in the study of schooling practices, Paley's works — her example — have been powerfully present for decades. Even the titles of her many books, *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (1992), *The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter* (1990), *Mollie is Three* (1986), *The Boy on the Beach* (2010), offer first clues to the distinctiveness of her lens and to the quirky beauty of what she has offered us.

My own introduction to "Mrs. Paley" was of her as the mom of a dear college friend, David Paley ("Pale"). Dinner at the Paley's (always including the rather cold and formal "Mr. Paley," who, stunningly to me, died only weeks

after his wife) meant listening to her talk about her little students and their special ways and the worlds they created. And, without skipping a beat (because, of course, everything is connected to everything), she was onto the biggest themes of any time: fear, unfairness, hurt, care, stereotyping, rejection, love.

As I probably couldn't fathom at the ripe old age of 18 and 19, Paley was using the world of three- and four-year-olds to push us to wonder about (and even reimagine — her hope) the ethical strands of our lives and the problematic nature of ideas, feelings and attitudes that we, in a flash, take for granted. Why do we assume that it is OK to push a person aside or ignore someone not like us? Why, without a second's worry, can we think that someone is way too odd for words, or just pretty dumb? Is it only reasonable, only natural, to assume that it's our call to choose those with whom we want to spend any time? Paley, in her own way, was always teasing us into thinking that, yes, life could be different.

Years ago (before she was named a MacArthur Fellow in 1989), we invited Vivian Paley to SUNY Empire State College to meet with our students.

Our colleague, Mayra Bloom, took the lead at, then, the Hudson Valley Center, and we welcomed Paley. And with her keen attention so palpable, she listened to our students (many current or future teachers themselves) and their efforts to describe their own school experiences, as if they were (as I would guess her own students felt) at the center of the world. How lucky we were to have her with us.

Vivian Gussin Paley, masterful ethnographer and storyteller, is really an exemplar of what's now called "the scholarship of teaching and learning" (SoTL) for the little set. There she was, day after day, year after year, observing, glimpsing, listening, recording, transcribing, and then editing her thoughts, searching for themes and tensions, questioning a move she had made, wondering about a conversation between her students she had overheard or an interaction (all of those most sacred impromptu dramas and their unfolding) she had witnessed, probing her assumptions, trying out something new — knowing (and the books kept coming!) that there was no end in sight to a process of reflection-on-practice that often pushed

her back to her own early life and to her experiences with her immigrant parents. Paley wanted us to know — to really feel — that nothing is easy: there is always discomfort; we're always grappling with what we can't understand; there is no perfect set of rules or rubrics that can ever nail it. And, of course, there is always the possibility of a new insight, the discovery of a new quality of awareness that, itself, of course, needs scrutiny. This is what teaching is all about.

Our work with our students is really demanding. There's too much of it, and often (I think we all fear this), we lose the particulars of a student's work, or have too little sense of the life that student is living and all of the things with which she is grappling, especially now. And then, when we think we have an inkling, we can't remember it. We wish we had more time, we pray we could have more insight and smarter

answers — we are often desperate to provide that individual student with the academic and personal support we know she needs — that she deserves.

Taken together, Mrs. Paley's impressive corpus (thick description and storytelling everywhere) is really about what it means to be human. It's why I always thought that it would be terrific for us to host a conference of early childhood and adult educators. Put us in the same room: I think we'd discover we share the same core values; the same focus on the individual student and his/her idiosyncratic ways of learning; and the same need to talk together, as teachers and mentors, about what we are doing and why we do it, and what we still have to figure out — the same "recognition" that "a connection to another person ha[s] to be made."

*Alan. Well.*

### **Some Work by Vivian Gussin Paley**

*The boy on the beach* (2010). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

*The kindness of children* (1999). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

*The girl with the brown crayon: How children use stories to shape their lives* (1997). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

*You can't say you can't play* (1992). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

*The boy who would be a helicopter* (1990). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

*Mollie is three: Growing up in school* (1986). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

*White teacher* (1979). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



# The Return of the Social: The View from Labor Studies

Richard Wells, Manhattan

*Richard Wells is the recipient of the 2018 Susan H. Turben Award for Excellence in Scholarship. The following essay was adapted from Richard's subsequent SUNY Empire State College faculty lecture delivered to the college community at the Fall Academic Conference in October 2018. Thanks so much to Richard for editing his talk for All About Mentoring.*

A few years back, when working on an article about the usefulness of C. Wright Mills' notion of the "sociological imagination" in a Labor Studies classroom, I came across the philosopher of education John Dewey's (1916) discussion of vocational training in *Democracy and Education*. Dewey seemed to capture what could be called the class politics of an education whose main goal was preparation for a job. After rereading it, I saw that Dewey's critical discussion of "narrow trade education" provided a historical and theoretical bridge to the Labor Studies program at Empire State's Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies. I was also brought back to Mills' urgent call, almost 60 years ago now in the opening pages of *The Sociological Imagination* (2000 [1959]), for another kind of "training," in the craft and sensibility of politically-engaged sociology.

In what follows, I will look more closely at these themes: Dewey's critique of "narrow trade education"; how the Van Arsdale Labor Studies program follows on that critique; and then Mills' urgent call to "taking it big," to borrow from the title of Stanley Aronowitz's (2012) biography of the famed American sociologist. Then I'll look at a couple of examples of how the labor movement, due to the educational impulse of union organizing, "brings back the social" so to speak. By way of a conclusion, I will

discuss how, in the more academic setting of one of my Labor Studies classes, some small steps are taken in that direction as well.

So you all know, a lot of this is drawn from work I have done since being at Empire State College, some of it in collaboration with my colleague, Sharon Szymanski. It also represents a first pass at some themes I hope to pursue in a book. Most of all, it comes out of the experience of the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies — what its students teach us; what we on the faculty and staff have learned from each other. And I really want to thank Susan and Jack Turben and the Turben Foundation for the support it provides for this occasion. It is an honor to be up here and to have the opportunity to share with all of you some of what I've been up to. It is really great that a faculty member gets the chance to do it every year. Hopefully, this will be food for thought in terms of how we all use education to engage the world around us.

Dewey was certainly not against the idea that men and women should be given the opportunity to acquire the skills to find work. But important critical qualifications followed. Before industrialization and automation, training for an occupation meant learning something along the lines of a craft. And according to Dewey (2011 [1916]), more than just a rote "how to" kind of learning took place. "Education through occupations ... combines within itself more of the factors conducive to learning than any other method" (p. 169). Dewey argued that it was an active and ongoing kind of education.

But then the pace of factory production and technological innovation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries outran the ability of this deeper kind



Richard Wells

of occupational learning to adapt. Although Dewey didn't use the lingo, the competition induced drive to recalibrate the labor process and increase productivity (what Marx [1990 (1867)] referred to as the creation of "relative surplus value") was behind this. The labor historian David Montgomery and others have shown that technology combined with the new management practices associated with Taylorization generated significant struggle between labor and management over control of the shop floor, and importantly, over control of the know-how required to produce, say, steel. Montgomery turned to "Big" Bill Haywood of the International Workers of the World, aka the Wobblies, to drive the point home. "The manager's brains," said Haywood, were "under the workman's cap" (as cited in Montgomery, 1987, p. 45). Therefore, added Montgomery, the "quest for greater and more secure profits" by corporate managers meant a "search for ways in which to cut the taproot of 19th-century workers' power by dispossessing craftsmen of their accumulated skill and knowledge" (p. 46).

Dewey's (2011 [1916]) main concern in taking up the transformation of the labor process was its impact on the education of workers. What had been a unified experience "with an end in view" (p. 169) had been broken down into tasks, which were then assigned to particular workers. This stripped the kind of education required to accumulate that skill and knowledge — whether through apprenticeship or more organically on the job — of its broader value. No longer were the active elements of "observation," "ingenuity," (p. 169) discovery, and adaptation part of the program. In their places became "trade education," which Dewey described as a way of achieving mere "technical efficiency in specialized future pursuits" (p. 173). The active had gone passive.

Dewey also directed attention to broader sociological and political consequences. "Trade education," said Dewey (2011 [1916]), would leave "unchanged the existing industrial order of society, instead of operating as a means of its transformation" (p. 173). To provide the workers "an education conceived mainly as specific trade preparation is to treat the schools as an agency for transferring the older division of labor and leisure, culture and service, mind and body, directed and directive class, into a society nominally democratic" (p. 174). From the perspective of those in power, the "directive" class in Dewey's terms, to provide a generalized exposure to the liberal arts to the "directed" class would be "to waste time" (p. 174). Workers, in other words, should be limited to the "training" that satisfied employers and kept the machines — the literal machines as well as the sociological machine of class power — running. The elite, the well-born, the children of the employers, got a more rarified training in the arts of holding and personifying political and cultural power. For one class, competencies that consolidate and extend control; for workers, competencies that kick in and then out

with the clunk of a time card. Dewey, it seems, saw evidence of class struggle in educational practice and policy.

Harry Van Arsdale Jr., longtime business manager of Local 3 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), was very much an old-school trade unionist. But as he matured as a labor leader, Van Arsdale embraced a much bolder social vision. Beginning in the 1950s, Local 3 organized "critical thinking" seminars designed to familiarize, and in a sense "train," Local 3 members to take the lead — in their union and in their communities — in discussions around important public issues of the day. These seminars led to an even bigger educational project, that of the labor college that he, along with Ernest Boyer (with assistance from then-governor Nelson Rockefeller), founded as one of the original components of Empire State College and is now known as the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies.

Van Arsdale came at it from the perspective of a committed and experienced trade unionist, but his goals were very much in line with Dewey's thinking. For his members, and indeed for workers more generally, he demanded an education that, in Dewey's (2011 [1916]) words, "acknowledges the full intellectual and social meaning of a vocation" (p. 174). That kind of education — acquired at Empire State College's Van Arsdale Center — became a required component of the apprenticeship training program, as it is to this day. The Van Arsdale Center has since partnered with other unions, with the relationship structured a bit differently in each case: the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters, Local 1, the paraprofessionals of the United Federation of Teachers, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, and most recently, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades. Apprentices from Local 3 IBEW do, however, continue to make up the bulk of our students.

For Van Arsdale, the broad understanding of vocation may have come organically. His whole career circled around a union that represented skilled craft workers. Indeed, the ability of building trades unions like Local 3 to maintain possession of the "skill and knowledge" required to do high-quality and safe work through their own apprentice training programs was (and remains) a critical component of its market power. But as a creative and pragmatic unionist, Van Arsdale believed that there was also power in gaining access to what had become increasingly inaccessible to workers: a base of knowledge beyond the experience of the mundane; meaningful participation in cultural and civic life; readiness for leadership in the wider society.

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As the German sociologist and well-known worker educator Oskar Negt put it in an interview (I owe former Van Arsdale Dean Mike Merrill for this reference), "democracy is the only form of government that has to be learned, while all other forms of government do not" (Pohl & Hufer, 2016, p. 204). In *The*

*Public and its Problems*, Dewey (1927) seemed to grasp this as well, via De Tocqueville. Closer to Van Arsdale's turf was William Michelson, a contemporary of Van Arsdale's on the labor scene in New York City (and considerably to the left of Van Arsdale politically; also our colleague, Elana Michelson's father). "Harry was continuously an advocate for the broadest kind of education for his rank and file," he said. "All that he knew," Michelson continued, "was that the labor movement was the road to building better lives for his members and better lives meant not only higher wages and better pensions and severance pay, but opportunities to learn, to travel, to participate, to undertake responsibilities" (as cited in Ruffini, 2003, p. 110).

Van Arsdale would not have put it quite like Negt or Dewey. But his own version of pure and simple trade unionism led him to a similar conclusion about the mutually constituting relationship between education and democracy.

As my colleague, Sharon Szymanski, and I (2016) have written, the educational charge provided for us at the Labor Center by our union partners was not to "train" members so that they could move up the "ladder" and presumably, out of the union and into management. Rather, the Van Arsdale Center follows the progressive tradition within adult education, as well as long-standing tradition and practice within labor and worker education. From the days of a young Samuel Gompers reading the newspaper aloud while his fellow cigar rollers toiled away, to the experimental labor colleges of the early 20th century, to the labor extension programs at various public universities instituted in the 1950s and '60s, to the internal educational efforts of various unions and worker centers today, education has been seen an integral part of a broader democratic mission: the full and equal participation of workers in economic, political, and social life.

There are, of course, challenges. Our students don't necessarily buy into this vision. There can be pushback precisely because, at least at first glance, there is no "practical" value in the study of world history, say, or in reconsidering received understandings of the meaning and purpose of art. When experiencing this resistance in the classroom, it can be ascribed — to a degree — to a "blue-collar" reaction to "book learning." In our own explorations of this, Sharon and I have argued that the trials of a five-year apprenticeship and the complicated legacy of a storied building trades union like Local 3 have instilled a narrow, almost defensive brand of solidarity that can, sometimes, work at cross purposes with the broader collective goals of the program.

I imagine that colleagues across the college have seen something like this. After all, many of the students at Empire State College are not just "adults," but working adults, strapped for time, if not also strapped financially. Some may struggle with required components of their degree plans — this or that general education requirement, for example — that don't seem to be related, in solely practical terms, to the career goals they may well have borrowed thousands to fulfill.

There is also the pressure on institutions of higher education, especially public ones, to be accountable, not so much to a historic democratic mission, but to the transactional goal of providing students, increasingly understood as "customers," a solid return in the labor market for their educational investment. Salaries graduates bring home are now seriously being considered as a central measure of a quality college experience. These are tough times, no doubt, for the notion that higher education should be about setting one's regular imagination alight, much less a sociological version.

But why is a general and liberal education important? It is important for really quite practical social purposes. At a 1954 conference sponsored by the

Center for Study of Liberal Education for Adults, C.W. Mills (2008) gave a talk that was later published under the title "Mass Society and Liberal Education." Of the purpose of the "liberal college for adults," said Mills, it is "to keep us from being overwhelmed" (p. 117).

To radically compress Mills' argument: In the "mass public" of capitalist modernity, the broader social relations that shape individual experiences are filtered through large, impersonal social and political institutions: the bureaucratic state, private corporations, the mass media. In this context, as Mills (2000 [1959]) suggested in the opening pages of *The Sociological Imagination*, the "private lives" of individuals are experienced as "a series of traps." In their "everyday worlds," individuals sense "that they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite right." When they become even vaguely aware "of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel" (p. 3).

Maybe the imagery is overblown. But a case could be made that the "trap" metaphor remains relevant, and perhaps even more so now. While critical individual freedoms in the realms of civil society and in formal political participation have been won, what Max Weber (1992 [1930]) referred to as the "tremendous cosmos" (p. 181) of capitalism has evolved, as have the inequalities inherent in it. The necessity of compounding rates of growth has driven a deep thirst for fossil fuels; climate change that threatens the basis of civilization has come in tow. The financialization of the capitalist system has made its workings all the more opaque, all the more volatile, all the more geared toward the accumulation of wealth and power at the top. And while the internet has made information more accessible, its more lasting impact may come from its capture by the profit motive, which is leading to an atomizing commercialization of social life.



One could go on. Frankly, it is overwhelming. So we are back to Mills and the increasingly urgent purpose of a liberal education for working adults. A liberal education should aim to demystify “society” by providing a view of the way it is structured, so the personal feelings of insecurity, which lead to various kinds of retreat, can be transformed into a more critical mindset, one that interrogates the social basis of these feelings. Relief from being overwhelmed comes when personal troubles are turned into what Mills (2008) called “social issues and rationally open problems” (p. 118), around which women and men can together actively engage and organize their intellectual and practical efforts as citizens.

Mills (2008) also offered some interesting tips as to how to make this process of “interpreting the world” more manageable and relevant. Inquiry “must begin with what concerns the students most deeply,” and with materials that connect to those concerns but also “enable” students “to gain increasingly rational insight” into them. “There should be much small group discussion,” said Mills (p. 119). The result should be an expansion of the social imaginary. Men and women would come to understand that their “personal troubles are often not only that but problems shared by others and indeed not subject to solution by any one individual but only by modifications of the structures of ... groups” and “sometimes the structure of the entire society” (pp. 119-120). “To the extent that the adult college is effective,” wrote Mills, “it is going to be political; its students are going to try to influence decisions of power” (p. 122).

The basic method Mills proposes is very much line with the practice and theory of popular worker/adult education, in that it insists on starting where the students are, with their concerns, and through dialogue and debate (rather than the teacher “depositing” knowledge in their heads, as Freire [1972] would have said) working toward a collective

and critical interpretation of the social world and the relationship of their concerns to it. Antonio Gramsci, the Sardinian Communist, political prisoner of Mussolini, and formidable social theorist in his own right called it the “intense labour of criticism” (as cited in Mayo, 2008, p. 422).

Gramsci came to the notion while working as a journalist, political analyst, and as an activist organizing factory councils and study groups after workers gained control of factories in Turin, Italy, in 1919-1920. As three commentators put it, through this experience, Gramsci realized that the “most pressing task” in the class struggle “was cultural and educational in nature” (Borg, Buttigieg, & Mayo, 2002, p. 4).

Indeed. For when one really thinks about organizing workers it becomes clear that unions themselves are inherently educational institutions. To successfully bring working men and women together in common purpose, when as individuals they might feel trapped in different ways and to different extents, requires that each must learn about each other, and together come to understand and name the social forces bearing down on them.

To begin with, discussions of workers’ immediate concerns on the job is a basic principle for union leaders and organizers; once those discussions get

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underway, connections can be made to the bigger picture. Here is one recent concrete case. In 2012, the Chicago Teachers’ Union went on strike and not only won important pocketbook gains, but new positions in the arts and physical education. The union also fought off two demands of the “reform” minded leadership of the Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel: the removal of caps on class size, and a heavier weighting of student test scores in teaching evaluations. No small task, given the fact that this city’s power structure was behind the school system’s demands, and was helped in this by a carefully cultivated general hostility to teachers’ unions.

As recent analyses of the 2012 strike have shown (Alter, 2013; Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Uetricht, 2014), education was at the heart of the effort. It started with a reading group that connected individual concerns to a broader pattern of disinvestment and privatization in public school systems. As the study groups multiplied, energies went into a campaign amongst parents and working-class communities. When the teachers struck, the mayor and the system administration expected parents to get frustrated and turn against the teachers. But due to the organizing and educational efforts of the union, they too grasped the issues at stake: they too wanted investment in the schools they actually had, rather than the backdoor privatization of the charter schools pushed by the city’s powerbrokers. Instead of walking through the picket lines, parents either joined them or honked in support as they drove by. The even more recent teacher strikes in union-unfriendly places like West Virginia followed similar scripts: rank and file workers were able to change the conversation and bring the public to their side. Investment in the public good that is the school system was again the rallying cry.

I want to focus now on the story of Tony Mazzochi. Born and raised in Bensonhurst (Brooklyn), Mazzochi was

a high school dropout. But he parlayed his boundless energy and the politically engaged “dinner-table” education he received in the 1930s into a memorable and deeply impactful career as a labor leader. It is a great story, and as told in Les Leopold’s (2007) biography of Mazzochi, *The Man Who Hated Work and Loved Labor*, it is an important part of the Educational Planning for Labor Studies course we offer at the Van Arsdale Center. Through the example of Mazzochi’s leadership, our students can understand the importance of ongoing education for workers’ ability, as Dewey put it (2011 [1916]), to see “the historic background of present conditions,” and gain the “power of re-adaptation to changing conditions” so as to “not become blindly subject to a fate imposed upon them” (p. 174). There are many moments in Leopold’s account that get at this. Drawing off of Leopold’s account, here I will describe just two.

Mazzochi first rose to prominence in the 1950s as president of Local 149 of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), whose members toiled at a Helena Rubenstein plant, which had just relocated to Roslyn, in Nassau County, after years in Long Island City, Queens. To succeed once he became president — which he did, winning contracts that abolished a two-tiered wage structure, winning groundbreaking health plans, and forcing management to open up hiring to African Americans — the membership had to be transformed into a fighting force. And in the suburbs of the 1950s to boot, which in Leopold’s (2007) words were “the alleged graveyard of class consciousness and radical politics” (p. 107).

How did he do it? The short answer, unsurprisingly, is organizing flushed through with education. He democratized the local by expanding participation in executive board and labor management meetings, creating committees by election rather than appointment. Money for individual per diem travel costs was pooled so

more members could attend labor-related meetings and forums from D.C. to Albany, and then report back what they had learned to the membership. Mazzochi also turned Local 149 into “a strike support machine” by sending members to join picket lines across Long Island (Leopold, 2007, p. 115). This not only built confidence amongst members, but it also increased awareness that they were part of something bigger.

And Mazzochi started a reading group, because there was, observed Leopold (2007), “no school that taught about labor as a cause” (p. 117). While it started out small, the reading club grew. They read and discussed the novels of Howard Fast (1944), such as *Freedom Road*, which dramatized the racialized divide and conquer tactics of the post-Civil War planter elite. They poured over classic texts of labor history, like Philip Foner’s (1950) *The Fur and Leather Workers Union*.

The collective learning allowed activists to situate their own experiences in a wider cultural and historical field. Helped along by popular, union-centered social activities, the whole shop floor became energized by discussion and debate. As one of the original members of the reading group told Leopold (2007), “there were constant debates on every friggin’ subject under the sun” (p. 137).

During the 1950s, Local 149 had become “one of the finest locals in the country,” said Leopold (2007, p. 139). It was later recognized in a scholarly account of the routinized workplace as not only being responsible for good pay but for the noticeable dignity with which workers carried themselves on the shop floor.

By 1965, Mazzochi made his way into the national leadership in OCAW as legislative director. It was from this position that Mazzochi would make perhaps his most dramatic mark as a labor leader, and it was his insistence on a national dialogue on workplace safety and health that did the trick. The

Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 was not a radical intervention in labor/management relations. But for the first time, responsibility for a healthy and safe workplace was put on employers instead of workers. It was a breakthrough.

OSHA had many authors, but Mazzochi was certainly one of the most important. He provided workers with the space to tell their own stories, and then brought in scientists to anchor those stories in a world of cold hard facts. Before the workers of OCAW found their political voice, all they had to go on was what the company was telling them.

The process began at the 1967 OCAW national convention. The endgame for Mazzochi was to get a resolution passed clearing him to pursue a national campaign to pressure Congress for legislation on workplace safety and health. He succeeded. Plowing ahead in 1968, a year of assassination, civil unrest, and the Tet Offensive, he set out on the road with university-based experts to hear from workers themselves.

First was the need to, in Mazzochi’s words, “ventilate the issue” (as cited in Leopold, 2007, p. 245) amongst workers at OCAW district meetings. In airing their experiences to one another, and then hearing from the experts, workers from different plants realized how much they had in common: Their work was putting their health, and their lives, at risk. And although no one at the time used this kind of language, from Leopold’s account we can see that there was a participatory, dialogic education taking place, with workers identifying the chemicals to which they had been exposed, and the trained scientists working to clarify just how dangerous they were. “Sharing their misery and asking questions,” said Leopold (2007), “broke these workers out of their isolated, silent anger and grief” (p. 253). For their part, scientists were able to put formal education and smarts to practical public use outside the laboratory.

Leopold suggested that perhaps the most lasting contribution of this creative mix of worker testimony, engaged science, and Mazzochi's visionary leadership was an idea, one that identified worker safety and health not as a "trouble" for individual workers but as a public issue of enormous importance. The whole effort brought into focus the fact that pollution and environmental degradation more generally were not things that happened only to the land and the air, and to the communities that lived off it and breathed it. It happened to workers, and most often, it happened to them first. As Mazzochi said on national TV in 1970: "You can't be concerned about the general environment unless you are concerned about the industrial environment, because the two are inseparable" (as cited in Leopold, 2007, p. 272).

OSHA did not solve the issue of workplace safety and health. Over the years, it has been worn down by political pressure, lax enforcement, and the ability of corporations to absorb OSHA fines as the cost of doing business. But understanding the role of Mazzochi-style "organizing by education" reminds us that democracy must be learned, continuously, and that this is best done collectively. It also reminds us that the politically-engaged spirit of sociological inquiry that Mills called for — one that challenges assumptions, turns private concerns into public issues, and pursues solutions — is an essential component of trade unionism at its best.

Just to be clear, I understand that this kind of education is not the same as that which takes place in the formal setting of a university. There are no exams, essays, or research papers. There is no administrative assessment, no accreditation visits. But in describing the educational work unions in the U.S. have done, I do hope to convey the basic importance — to democracy — of the learning that does take place as workers come together in a union, and

the "courageous intelligence," to borrow again from Dewey (2011 [1916], p. 174), that develops alongside it.

So let me finish up this essay by drawing off a recent article of mine (Wells, 2019) to describe a bit about how I try to bring that spirit into one of my Labor Studies classes. I have taught a course called The Political Economy of New York City for some eight years now. Broadly, the goal is to pose a historical contrast between today's "luxury" city and the period from the 1940s to the mid-1970s, a time when a strong labor movement led a unique experiment in urban social democracy. Students discover a much different New York, which while far from perfect, was arguably more economically dynamic and democratic than the city they presently experience. Just as important, they have the opportunity to ponder the power and influence workers and worker-based institutions like trade unions can wield for the greater good. More specifically, the course provides the opportunity for students to take a close look at the famous Fiscal Crisis of 1975, which essentially slammed the door on municipal social democracy, and opened another to the brave new world of austerity politics.

Since the course is designed to meet the social science general education requirement, we discuss the sociological concepts and methods that can be brought to bear on this important transformation. Most important are the related concepts of social class and power, and the method of a historically-based class analysis that incorporates processes of structural transformation into descriptions of class-based configurations of power. There is also discussion of the importance of ideas, or more broadly, ideology in the making of these contrasting periods in the city's history: for the early period, the twinned notions of social unionism and social solidarity, which pervaded an incredibly diverse labor movement, and to an important degree, the political culture of the city; in the later period, two other intricately related notions: one, that

overly generous public spending on social services caused the fiscal crisis, and two, that austerity was the only real solution to it.

A new narrative is emerging that grasps the "social" basis of both the post-World War II period and of the rise of a different, less generous city. In class discussions, students work through their suspicion of politics, politicians, and government armed with a new perspective on the working-class presence in the city's past, and in particular the labor movement's layered influence on the municipal state and social programs addressing public health, education, housing, and

*"Just as important, they have the opportunity to ponder the power and influence workers and worker-based institutions like trade unions can wield for the greater good."*

culture. Common sense assertions about how the city can't spend money it doesn't have merge with discussions about tax abatements, subsidies, and other forms of private accumulation by public subsidy. An emerging critical and historical perspective is brought to bear on students' personal frustrations with long commutes from more affordable neighborhoods and towns. More and more, students wrestle with their own contradictory position, as union construction workers who have, in real terms, built the city yet also have been displaced by it.

I will leave you with some student reflections on trips to The High Line, a world-renowned park constructed on an out of use elevated rail bed on the West Side of Manhattan, which have been

published in *Labor Writes*, the Labor Center's student magazine. We go to The High Line every term, precisely because it forces an imaginative encounter with changes the city has undergone since the fiscal crisis. One student recalled the High Line's beauty and the images of a bustling industrial past that it conjures. And yet, surrounded by the glassy condo towers and high-end boutiques that now dominate the area, he "almost immediately felt out of place in my own city." As another student put it, The Highline was an "inspiration" and a cautionary tale. It shows that "we can refurbish and recycle what is already visible and going to ruins and make it useful ... as long as it isn't a means to an end of pushing people out of their homes to build ones they can't afford" (as cited in Wells, 2019, p. 331).

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# “In the Noise and Whip of the Whirlwind” or The Poetry of Teaching Poetry

Elaine Handley, Saratoga Springs

*“Poetry, like all art, has a trinitarian function: creative, redemptive, and sanctifying. It is creative because it takes the raw materials of fact and feeling and makes them into that which is neither fact nor feeling. It is redemptive because it can transform the pain and ugliness of life into joy and beauty. It is sanctifying because it thus gives the transitory at least a relative form and meaning.”*

— Vassar Miller (as cited in Owen, 1970, p. 84)

Like solving a trigonometric function or analyzing an abstract painting, poetry insists we think differently. And that’s my joy: to lure my students out of their comfort zone and enmesh them in poetry. Poetry allows us to express our lives’ complexities using language and metaphor. Even when I am not teaching poetry per se, I use poems to illuminate ideas.

I bring poetry into my Critical Thinking class — often “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden (1966). I ask students to come to the study group with five questions about the poem; this takes the pressure off them to have figured out just what the poem *means*. We analyze possible meanings together by asking their questions aloud and seeing what answers we can find. Hayden’s poem is one that students can relate to because it is about regret. Written in the voice of an adult son, he now better understands his father’s struggles and how love was there all along, although not articulated in words. His regret comes in never acknowledging his father’s hard life or love.

As a class, we look at some of the descriptions in the poem and I ask students to ponder phrases like “blueblack cold” (line 2), and “fearing the chronic angers of that house” (line 9), and the final question of the poem “What did I know, / of love’s austere and lonely offices?” (lines 13-14). We read the poem aloud and listen to the words that make a crackling sound, like the fire the father set to warm the house on frigid mornings: *blueblack, cracked, ached, weekday, banked, thanked, wake, breaking, call, chronic*. As poetry is both sound and sense, I work to help them hear the music of the poem and find meaning, enhanced by elements, like structure and rhythm, working together to create an intense experience for the reader.

Because poetry is typically short, it is an excellent genre to use to introduce students to textual analysis. They like looking for clues. It is also easy to use poetry to point out the work that strong nouns and verbs do in writing, how parallel structure works, how clichés don’t. It’s the best way I know to teach figures of speech.

I like to make students aware of metaphorical thinking, and two favorite poems for doing that are “Metaphors” by Sylvia Plath and “Your Eyes” by Octavio Paz. It often takes students several readings of Plath’s poem to realize that it’s about pregnancy, and to see how much fun Plath was having by creating a nine-line poem, with each line containing nine syllables. By contrast, the Paz (1963) poem offers a list — one metaphor after another describing a specific someone’s eyes and what they reveal. The metaphors are complicated: “trapped birds, sleepy golden beasts” (line 4), “a lie that nourishes” (line 9), “the absolute, quivering, / cold



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uplands” (lines 12-13). Students come to understand and speculate on the problematical relationship between the speaker and the subject.

Poetry is a crystallized way of exposing students to human dilemmas, to help them find their own lives and selves in verse. Everyone can relate to the loneliness that informs Frost’s sonnet, “I Have Been One Acquainted with the Night.” “Miss Rosie” by Gwendolyn Brooks, on the other hand, resonates as a poem about human dignity in the face of old age and poverty. Wisława Szymborska’s poem “The End and the Beginning” helps us to contemplate what happens when a war ends; she graphically describes the mundane tasks that need attending to in the face of unspeakable grief and loss.

One of the very best pieces of professional advice I ever received was from a wise high school English teacher who told me (as if I were going to be teaching poetry someday), not to overdo it — “just give students a taste of poetry.” I understood her to mean to be

careful not to ruin poetry by analyzing it to death, not to engage, as Billy Collins (1988) says in his poem "Introduction to Poetry" in "beating it with a hose/ to find out what it really means" (lines 15-16). I seek to make students curious enough, and provide them with sufficient resources, that they might go on reading poetry outside of class.

In a Peanuts cartoon, Sally says to Charlie Brown: "We've been reading poems in school, but I never understand any of them. ... How am I supposed to know which poems to like?" Charlie Brown answers her: "Somebody tells you" (Schulz, 1989). I'm not that teacher; I love infecting my students with poetry so the only cure is more poetry. I often hear "Oh, I don't like poetry ... I don't understand it." That's a personal challenge I find hard to resist. Most people don't like poetry because they have been exposed to so little of it; poetry isn't taught much (and I fear not well) in elementary and high school. Besides, there still exists that lingering notion that poets and poetry are only for the effete.

Many years ago, I was teaching College Writing in a prison. I started each class by handing out a poem that I would read aloud — no discussion, no analysis. Each class, the students expressed eagerness for the poem ... they were more open to poetry than I ever could have imagined. Why did poetry make a difference to these men? I can't speak for them, but I suspect what they loved about the poems I gave them was what I love about poetry: the music of the words, the imagery, the way poetry gets to the heart of things, captures a

moment or a feeling you know. Maybe it's the way a poem can contain so much sheer humanity.

I ask poetry haters if they will allow me to find a poem I think they might like ... and I have had some success in converting people into zealous poetry fans. Mostly, I make some progress in helping people get that poetry is about *them*. They come to see that poems can be serious and goofy and heartbreaking. Yes, some are obscure, intellectual, full of literary allusions and are therefore off-putting, but mostly poetry is about experiences we all have.

Poetry springs from the human desire to convey feeling and insight, to bedazzle, bewitch, startle, horrify, delight, disgust, mourn. In short, to express the complications, mystery and quirkiness of being human. Gwendolyn Brooks (1968) wrote:

It is lonesome, yes.  
For we are the last of the loud.  
Nevertheless, live.  
Conduct your blooming in the  
noise and whip of the whirlwind.  
(lines 35 – 37)

From what I know of our students' lives — even our own — challenges are many, both personally and in our present society. We live in the whirlwind of family and job responsibilities, academic endeavors, illnesses, financial worries, community obligations, politics — all of it demanding, much of it difficult. It is easy to lose heart.

I think Robert Frost was right when he described poetry as "a momentary stay against confusion" (Tayiabr, 2014,

para. 4). Poetry demands our presence, our attention, our heart, and our head. It keeps us connected to what other human beings have endured over the centuries, to our own human condition, and gives voice to our lived experience.

Isn't that, in part, what lifelong learners need, deserve, and crave?

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# The Marines Have Landed

Connelly Akstens, SUNY Empire Online

For most of my life, I lived in fear of discovery. I was convinced from childhood that if anyone discovered my gender identity issues I would be humiliated, ostracized and sent to a reform school or an insane asylum. I survived by the most rigid compartmentalization imaginable. The compartment that held my gender conflict was the most camouflaged and scrupulously hidden of all. I did what my instinct told me to do to protect myself. But without realizing it, I had grown up developing the skills of an addict, bigamist or con artist. Not exactly consistent with my core values.

When I was 55, I decided I didn't want to live like that anymore. As I explained to my spouse Susanne, "I've been closeted for 50 years. I suppose I could go for another 50, but then I'd be — let's see now — 105. So. ..." She agreed that it was about time to find some community. But where?

The internet was the obvious starting place. In 2002, a Google search for "transgender" yielded a strange gumbo of websites: reviews of obscure Scandinavian films, rip-off artists selling large-size clothes and shoes at exorbitant prices, cheesecake photos of nightclub "female impersonators" from the 1950s, homepages of desperately lonely people, solicitations from "escorts" and "models." On the positive side, there were links to websites of a few organizations that seemed legitimate. I knew nothing about any of them, so I settled on a group called "Tri-Ess" for my first contact. The name was an acronym for Society for the Second Self. The group billed itself as "an organization for heterosexual crossdressers." Well, I thought, *that sort of describes me ... I guess. ...*

I didn't recognize the homophobia implicit in their statement of purpose. I didn't realize that "crossdresser" was already under critique as a reductive term. And why *second* self? Why not an integrated self? Anyway, my thinking wasn't that evolved in 2002. I just wanted to connect with somebody to talk with and maybe befriend. I sent an email and after a rather Byzantine security process, I was invited to attend the group's upcoming convention in Manchester, New Hampshire.

I registered for the event, booked a room for the weekend at the Holiday Inn and spent the better part of a week deciding what clothes and accessories to bring. That was a challenge since I had little fashion sense and no personal style to fall back on. "Keep it simple," Susanne suggested. So I packed lots of basics. Everyone looks good in black, right?

I had thought that Manchester was an odd place to have a convention, and when I surveyed the scene, it seemed even odder. The hotel was marooned in the middle of a vast, icy parking lot, like a vessel aground on an asphalt sandbar. The façade was unwelcoming, the lobby was cold and my room was shabby around the edges. I began to wonder exactly what I was going to do for the next three days. I pulled the curtains to get a better view of my dismal surroundings. Like a mirage, a big red Macy's sign loomed at the far end of the parking lot. If all else failed, I could at least shop.

The scheduled event for Friday night was a cocktail hour and dinner at a big Italian restaurant near the river. I spent the afternoon getting ready. I learned that shaving a toe is like shaving an okra. Every outfit I tried looked worse than the last. Basic black? *Drab. Boring.*



Connelly Akstens

Something bright and colorful? *News flash — it's winter.* Something a little glamorous? *Is there anything more hideous than a 50-something floozy?* The mirror was not my friend. Before I knew it, it was after 6 o'clock. I was already late. I threw on something. I combed my hair and grabbed the first jewelry I saw. I rushed out the door.

Well, *almost* rushed out the door. I had never been in public before in anything other than conventional male attire. When my hand reached the doorknob, I froze. *Can I actually do this?* I opened the door, peered up and down the corridor and listened for footsteps and voices. So far so good. I made my way cautiously to the elevator. The coast seemed to be clear. I pushed the button. There was a *ding* as the elevator reached my floor. The door opened. I was face-to-face with four young Marines in khaki uniforms. "Our floor," one of them said. And then, "Excuse us, ma'am," as they swept past me. No smirking. No irony. Four Marines. My first time out.

I couldn't begin to process what had just happened, so I followed the example of sharks that keep moving forward through the water, no matter what. I drove to the restaurant, rushed inside and found my group, huddled together in an alcove sort of space. I introduced myself and people were cordial enough — the women more so than the men. Women? Yes, as it turns out I was the only person in the group who did not have a wife in tow. Here were "heterosexual crossdressers" with a vengeance. I had a scotch in honor of the Halls of Montezuma and pledged to myself to do more listening than talking. I tried to gauge the group, looking to see how I might fit in. It didn't seem promising.

We went in to dinner, and one of the wives sort of took me under her wing. She was calling me "dear" as if I were 11 years old. She manufactured a compliment about something I was wearing. Then there was an anticipatory silence. It took a moment before I realized that she was indoctrinating me into a female ritual in which compliments are exchanged. I responded with the first thing that popped into my head. "Your hair looks nice," I ventured.

She tilted her head, smiled coquettishly and confided in a loud whisper, "Tons of spray. Feels like a Brillo pad on my head." I laughed out loud — to the

evident annoyance of her husband, who was sitting next to her with her own tonsorial Brillo pad. We went back to our girl talk. I asked her if she had encountered the Marines. She told me they were as surprised to see us as we were to see them. Their commanding officer had put them on their best behavior, "or it's a blindfold and a firing squad at dawn." She had a zany streak. I was having fun.

It was too good to last. As the meal got underway, the "heterosexual crossdressers" began to completely dominate the conversation. Maybe the booze was beginning to kick in. One of the "ladies" began a sentence, "So I told the son-of-a-bitch. ..." Her wife shushed her. Tension was building. Gradually, the wives retreated into silence. I realized then that you can take an obnoxious middle-aged professional man, put him in a wig and a dress and what you get (drumroll, please) is an obnoxious middle-aged professional man in a wig and a dress. I finished my scampi and apologized to my new friend for departing early. "I know," she confided. "I've had my fill, too." And she wasn't talking about the food.

I made my way back to the hotel, thinking that a nightcap would suit me just fine. But the lobby was full of young Marines, this time in fancy dress uniforms. They had been joined by pretty young women in party dresses.

Somewhere a band was playing. Forget the nightcap. I took a deep breath and plunged toward the elevator. I pushed the button. *Ding*. The door opened. This time I was face-to-face with two young Marines and their dates. One Marine said, "Excuse us, ma'am," as they swept past me. The other added, "Have a nice evening, ma'am." The girls smiled pleasantly as they passed me. I wondered if I were dreaming the whole mad episode.

The answer came at about 3 in the morning, when I was awakened by shouts of "Ooh-rah! Ooh-rah!" I thought the place was on fire. I grabbed the powder-blue robe I had bought at Macy's that afternoon and opened the door. The hotel was built around an atrium, maybe five stories tall. A few of the Marines, who had loosened up a whole lot since I had last encountered them in the elevator, were in their boxer shorts, rappelling down from one floor to another on ropes. Some of the pretty young women had lost their party dresses somewhere along the way and were swimming in the pool in their underwear.

I watched the kids having their crazy fun for a few moments, hoping they wouldn't get hurt or busted. Elsewhere, in the bowels of the Holiday Inn, Brillo pads were resting on wig stands and "heterosexual crossdressers" were snoring the night away.

# Pears

Reamy Jansen

*A note of explanation: Reamy Jansen, who died in April 2019, was a long-time faculty member at Rockland Community College (RCC). With great enthusiasm, intelligence, and just the right humor, Reamy taught in the English department, was a loyal union member, guided the student newspaper for many years, and was always a wonderful colleague and champion of SUNY Empire State College. When ESC's offices (then, the Lower Hudson Unit) were located in the basement of the RCC library, Reamy visited often, encouraged his RCC graduates to consider ESC, and spent a lifetime writing reviews, poems and essays. To honor him, we are very glad to include this little piece that he wrote, which was originally published in r.kv.r.y. quarterly literary journal in July 2007.*

Today I bought pears here in Wadena to begin my residence as a visiting writer. My host, Kent Sheer, had driven me to the Wadena True Value, where he had tried to entice me to buy "our" (a.k.a., Central Minnesota's) turkey and wild rice sausage, but I would have none of gizzards and grain. Instead, I headed off for the fruit section. Coming from a tree whose genus is *Pyrus communis*, a pear or two was what I, a new arrival, had to have. I don't know the many varieties of this fruit and can only conjure a few names: Anjou, Bartlett, Seckel; that's pretty much it. The three I bought were a speckled yellow brown, silting into a fading green, a muted blend that I hoped was carrying my pear closer toward ripeness.

I'm not a good judge of a pear's freshness; they're hardly as simple as apples, which if they're firm, you pick

one up and bite in. The solidity and shape of pears, though, don't give them the lightness and evenly distributed weight of apples. Pears are compact and hard, hard as rocks, actually, dense and grave with specific gravity. I tried to pick up some that gave a bit of give, but this supposed tenderness was likely my imagination, for when I tentatively bit into one at home, it was...hard as rocks. I let the second selection sleep on its side undisturbed for two more days and then sliced into it the way my father did — part of his politesse with fruit, cutting, not biting. He'd bring me six even sections on a plate when I was a teen in the living room reading. This one was excellent.

My dad loved a bit of fruit, savored the juices, the entire activity of preparing, serving, and eating, offices hinting at the sensuousness behind his solid, upstanding Republican affect, one fundamentally jolly and good-natured, and which I seem to have largely inherited, along with a jigger's worth of my mother's madness. Pears, cherries, red grapes, and peaches, the runny fruits were his favorites; and was it this physicality my mother desired to avoid by going to bed later than he? Perhaps the juniper in gin may be considered fruit, for, as Spenser tells us, "Sweet is the lunipere." My mother would stay on in the living room reading, as my father would head upstairs, his hand lightly gracing the polished mahogany banister. Certainly I possess his taste-in-touch.

When he was in his seventies and living alone in too large a house, I would bring him cherries, Bings, and I would always laugh at his standing joke about Crosby not fitting into the bag. And when we

would shop together, he would buy pears, which he could hardly see but knew well by hand through his delicate, tapering papery fingers.

I buy a few pears whenever I'm away somewhere writing, like now, where my studio is in the town's assisted living center, The Pines, and which is filled with a number of widowers like my dad once was. I have a shyness about buying them and linger before their open baskets, never quite able to remember what I succeeded with last time. Since I like both the idea of pear-ness and something of the thing itself, too, I just choose a color, usually red or yellow, the color of maple leaves in the fall. I handle each one carefully, though I learn little from doing this. Each day here, I'll check them with my right hand, which directs my most responsive fingers, and gently test the taut middle, one pear always lost in the trial for ripeness. The second is usually perfection a day or two later, desire finally grafted onto that Ding-an-sich. Its swelling side makes way for my father's pen knife, his still-sharp blade easing through the slightly grainy flesh, making thin, even slices, leaving a square core behind. I eat those gleaming pieces slowly, wetting my fingers.

At home, my wife, Leslie, who wants to give me all things, will sometimes buy me pears knowing that they mean something — what some people, perhaps the French, like to call the presence of absence. Knowing the nurturing lore of her grandparents' Maryland farm, she puts them in a paper bag, sure that this is how they will ripen. And they do.

# Transcending Vegetation

Sandra Winn, Saratoga Springs

*"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."*

— Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (1911, p. 407)

I have been in a love affair with Asia since 1989. The area called to me and I answered it by moving to Japan and working there for six years. The time spent in this lovely country taught me more about myself than about the island. Of course, after moving back to the States, I still had the urge to visit more Asian countries, but, like our students also experience, life tends to happen and more travel to Asia was put on hold — until the summer of 2018.

I applied to be a fellow with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).



Shanghai Bund District.

This association, in partnership with the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE), created a fellowship program to bring academics to mainland China. The goal was to teach us about China and its people over a three-week period. It was anticipated that this information would then be used to teach Chinese exchange students better, integrate information about China into our work, and overcome misconceptions about the Chinese people. I was chosen to be one of eleven academics in this program.

In this essay, I want to share with you the experience of this fellowship. I also want to encourage you to consider taking part in such exchanges in your future. It is true, as Twain wrote, that experiencing another culture only serves to broaden our minds and our hearts. I found this fellowship confirmed my love affair with Asia; its people are what make it such a beautiful country.

Let's set the stage. All participants traveled anywhere from 15-25 hours to arrive in Shanghai. We all came from different parts of the country and were in different stages in our careers. Some worked as administrators, some were full professors, others were assistant professors, some came from tier-one research centers and others from teaching colleges, such as ours. Our disciplines were equally diverse. What was the same about all of us was that we deeply love to learn and that was our purpose.

We started our adventure in Shanghai where we stayed for one week. We then flew to Xi'an and stayed for five days before traveling by bullet train to Beijing. (For those who may not know, a bullet train is a high-speed railroad run using magnetic force). We were in Beijing for eight days, which was the end of our journey. We visited nine universities, one



Sandra Winn on the Badaling Great Wall, the section of wall nearest to Beijing.

vocational school, one high performing high school associated with a top tier university, one vocational high school, and one higher education technical park. (Just as a little side explanation, this tech park is an institution that provides satellite campuses for universities around the world.) Every day was packed with activities.

A day would look something like this: We would rise early (which was easy in Shanghai as it was the first stop and I wasn't on China time yet). We had breakfast on our own. We then boarded a bus by 9 a.m. to travel to a university. We would receive a lecture about Chinese culture followed by a lunch provided by the school. Once we ate lunch with other academics and just a few times with administrators. Most of the time, we ate on our own as a group at the school or a nearby restaurant. We would board a bus again and move on to another institution or to a cultural activity, which was usually sightseeing. Dinner was always arranged for us at a specially chosen restaurant where we were lavished with delicacies of that region. To give you an idea, Beijing is

known for its Peking duck. We were taken to a specialty restaurant where a separate room was reserved for us and we had Peking duck. We didn't just eat meat; the meal had many courses based upon the duck with a table rolled in for a special duck carving, which was spectacular to watch. The last night in each city was a special event where a chicken is presented. This chicken is cooked in a wrapping of clay, or bamboo leaves, or hard-baked rice. The outside was hard for the purpose of cracking it open with a mallet. A person was chosen at the table to pound open the shell while people sang a song of good fortune. This was a symbol of closing one's journey in this place with well wishes from natives of that city who shared the journey with them.

After this very full and rich day, we arrived back at the hotel around 9 p.m. or so. This was our time to decompress. Some would need some time alone. Others would spend these after hours with colleagues. This time was very special to me. This is where deep connections were made and good conversations were had. We would share a drink and discuss our insights as well as taboo topics that we couldn't otherwise discuss with our Chinese colleagues.

At every visit, one of us would give a presentation about our college/ university and academic interests. We would describe our academics, students, and colleagues. When it was my turn, I spoke about our differences from a traditional college, online education, and the beauty of serving nontraditional students. The participants at Beijing University were very interested in online education. They had questions about how this works and if it is successful. I was proud to share that we are a premier institution in online education, and it works well for many.

In general, this is how our days went with an occasional sightseeing day built in.

We did get to see the Terra Cotta Warriors, which was a real treat. The Terra Cotta Warriors are located outside Xi'an. It is a burial ground for China's first emperor (he lived approximately from 259-210 B.C.). Emperor Qin had thousands of clay warriors, horses, carriages, et cetera, made to accompany him in the afterworld. The tale of these warriors and their discovery in the 1970s is quite interesting, but I divert myself. Needless to say, it was a full day excursion.

I could continue to describe the daily routines and the amazing sites we saw. However, I want to turn to what I learned by participating in this experience.

I have been fortunate to travel to many places abroad. I usually go away for a month or more when I get the chance. What I have learned is that people, everyday people, are incredibly generous. This held true in China as well. One example: In a park in Beijing, there is a playground for senior citizens. You may be thinking that this playground had benches and maybe some swings. Nope. It was a full-fledged playground that children would use. These seniors walked on balance beams, swung on monkey bars, and balanced on half-exposed orbs in the dirt. My new friend and I looked in our mid-50s, which is the age of retirement in China (China has mandatory retirement at age 50 for women and 55 for men). Therefore, when approaching this playground to watch these spry seniors jump rope, play catch, and somersault on monkey bars, we were approached and asked to join. This gentleman wanted to give us his cylindrical toy to play catch with him. Since neither of us spoke the other's language, he used gestures and pantomimes to encourage us to join his game. We declined but the invitation was genuine and generous.

On yet another day in Xi'an, we took up a table in a busy restaurant until late at night; half of us didn't order anything to eat or drink. Even so, the host brought



*Delicious seaweed and garlic bread — Street food in Shanghai.*

us cups of rich noodle broth, which was a specialty of this place, for free. We weren't shooed away or told not to take up space from other customers. This was another one of the everyday generous acts we experienced.

Our tour guides and general guide were unbelievably generous. We had a guide who accompanied us for the whole trip; and, for each city, we had a guide for that location. They would buy us little gifts and share stories about their own lives. They answered innumerable questions with patience and adjusted the schedule when they could to fit our interests. These four women made our trip as easy as they could and taught us more than I could have ever imagined just by their presence.

Of course, finding these generous acts required being amenable to a very different way of being human on this earth. Chinese people have a very different sense of space and speaking. The large cities of Shanghai and Beijing have 26 and 21.5 million people living there, respectively. The space is tight. There are people everywhere, day and night. The buildings are extremely tall, and people live in apartments that would make a New Yorker uncomfortable, at twice the cost. What this translates into is that people are not being rude if they bump into you, cut you off, yell at you, move you along





*Muslim Temple – Xi'an.*

quickly, or squish against you; these behaviors are adaptations from living in small quarters. They are not trying to invade a Westerner's space; they are just living with many other people close together. Once you look past this, you can begin to see people wait for others, carry packages for the elderly, take in cats (contrary to popular opinion, I saw a lot of family pets), assist one another in tasks, and so on. I smiled at everyone and usually got a broad smile in return. I was not surprised that open-heartedness was returned in kind. People would even talk with you using a translator app and share a bit of who they are — indeed, a wonderful gift of generosity.

These adaptations to space lead me to my next topic, which is the unique use of public areas. Due to apartments being so very small, people congregate outside of the home for entertainment. We found people who were doing tai chi in parks, playing instruments (violins, erhus, flutes), yelling at trees (yes, you read right — yelling at trees — I have

no idea why), doing calligraphy on the pavement with water, singing, playing cards, playing on the playground, dancing ... and much more that I didn't witness. The larger point is that open locations are used communally daily.

I am very curious about this communal use of space. I asked everywhere we went what people did, how they interacted, and, most importantly, why. Here is what I learned from our guides: Being a communist country, all space belongs to everyone. People do not own homes; they "buy" a home, which is really just a 99-year leased rent to the government, which belongs to everyone. The same is true of public space; the people own this space. It is theirs to share and enjoy. Since most homes are so small and space to entertain or pursue hobbies does not exist, these areas become the place to enjoy oneself. Thus, we saw reading and singing groups, card playing, organized dancing, dancing lessons, and so on. People are using what belongs to them out in the open communally.

The same premise applies to restaurants. Restaurants run the gamut from small street stalls to large department store-size establishments. Eating in restaurants is very common. Again, due to the small housing space, people go out to eat with friends; dinner parties are rare. It is very common to meet up with co-workers to eat after work, have larger family gatherings in private restaurant rooms, or enjoy friendships while eating noodles from a street vendor. This use of space is an adaptation of a very populated country with an extremely long and rich history.

When living in Japan, I had the distinct impression that I touched an ancient world. It was a world full of wonders and mysteries. It was similar to the magic I felt exploring the pueblos at Colorado's Mesa Verde National Park, which was home to native people. Traveling to China had the same power. It was evident that we were walking in the shoes of ancient peoples. Of course, we visited World Heritage sites with ancient buildings and warriors. It was more than this; I could feel ancient lines in everyday life. It was the old streets and fortress walls integrated into modern society. It was the innovative way people used bikes to carry belongings or trade tools. It was the familiar interactions among peoples and the closeness of communities. It was in this shared space and gardens around pagodas. This ancient world permeated everything, even though Mao tried to destroy so much of what went before him.

That legacy of the ancient perseveres even in the collectivist mindset. These societies focus upon the group — the collective. How one acts or what one does should be in harmony with the world around them. That makes it easier to share such tiny space with others, to lease one's home for 99 years and call it your own but knowing it is not, to abide by the rules set before one because it is for the larger good of the Chinese people. It is a mindset very different



from our individualistic society. I can see why this way of thinking can be difficult for Westerners to understand.

What was difficult for me in China had to do with this collectivist mindset. It is too easy to sell the mistreatment of others if it is done for the greater good. While we were there, the Chinese government was quietly collecting many in the Muslim population (who have lived in China long before Genghis Khan) and sending them to reeducation camps because religion is still considered Marx's (1970) "opium of the people." No one, but our group over drinks after a long day, spoke about this. It was not in the news. Not spoken about by academics, or our guides. I am not sure that many of the Chinese people knew about this. Even as we visited Muslim streets and a mosque in Xi'an, it appeared to be unknown. There were Muslims at the mosque while I visited, which added to my lack of knowledge. What we did see in the *China Daily* newspaper was the positive outcome of reeducating Tibetan children in Chinese schools, expounding on the great deeds

done by the prime minister, or the strength of the Chinese army. These news articles read over breakfast left me with so many questions. I left wanting to know what lies underneath all of this. When I returned home, I learned of this atrocity happening to China's Muslim people as our country started separating children from migrating families and placing everyone into our own detention centers.

I hope to one day teach over the summer months at a Chinese university. I want to hear what youth have to say and think. Despite the restrictions in technology, young people are more connected than one might think. They know more than the government might want them to know. They are growing up with different ideals and exposure. They will get married without having to restrict the number of children they have (this policy changes in 2020). More and more Chinese are studying abroad in Europe and the United States. I want to listen to them and hear their stories. It is the youth who are going to mold the future of this world and I am curious

about what the youth is like. I want to see if the new policy to eradicate poverty works. What will be in their/our futures?

Learning to explore the world and not vegetate in our own backyard will help us to not judge different ways of living. This is one method for acquiring "... broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things ..." (Twain, 1911, p. 407). I'm looking forward to deepening this love affair that I'm in.

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## Observation on the Daily Trek to Work — My Take

Lear Matthews, Manhattan

Over my more than 20 years as a faculty member at SUNY Empire State College, I have noticed some interesting, albeit remarkable transformations in the public sphere as I travel via the New York City subway and continue my trek to work as a pedestrian. Admittedly, it is a uniquely multifaceted, multicultural experience, which provides a continuous education.

Unlike previous years, train commuters of all ages and ethnicities are today starkly mesmerized with their contemporary fashionable, portable, manual technological devices, particularly the iPhone. There is clearly less reading of printed matter such as books, magazines, and newspapers, and a paucity of verbal interaction among passengers, I dare surmise even among those who may be connected through family relations or friendship. A few of these urban sojourners are seen engaged in such literary exercises with electronic *tablets*. (Perhaps some of us take two of those for arthritis flare-up in the morning before leaving home. Oh, not that *tablet!* Sorry, I couldn't help that self-inflicted jab!)

Their attention is focused penetratingly on the palm-sized electronic magnets, many with plugged earphones, seemingly never disturbed by the presence of active or noisy underground entertainers, potential danger or panhandlers. Perhaps, for many, the latter has become more of a nuisance and distraction rather than an appeal for charity. This new trend exacerbates the perceived labeled impersonal relations characteristic of urban settings, or rather the relations of which "city dwellers" are often accused.

As I emerge from the 30-minute subway ride from Brooklyn to the Hudson Street campus in Manhattan, particularly on the days when I lead an evening study group, another noticeable transformation is the trend in street vending. As an occupation, street vending, considered the cornerstone of many cities' historical and cultural heritage, has existed for a very long time. In North America, in cities like New York, this public entrepreneurial activity has evolved from the plain, minimally regulated wooden pushcart to the artistic commercial culinary activity conducted in technologically-equipped mobile kitchens. It attracts the casual, uninhibited, perhaps adventurous, as well as nutrition-conscious, sophisticated customer. The artistry and kaleidoscope of colors on the outside of some of these retrofitted vending vehicles are quite elaborate and futuristic. They also provide a growing source of revenue for the city's coiffeurs. One can imagine the exorbitant fee required to peddle such a business in a metropole such as Gotham City.

It is not uncommon to see long lines of patrons, from construction workers, students, office workers, service recipients, to shoppers and formally-attired professionals at lunchtime queuing up at the vending spot, cradled in the shadows of skyscrapers, some under reconstruction or rebuilding, and other burgeoning edifices representing symbols of perpetual gentrification.

However, no longer are the vendors predominantly immigrants peddling ethnic dishes and snacks from their



Lear Matthews

archaic lunch carts, but now include Generation X's and millennials busily eking out a living from this traditional occupation. Perhaps to some established, more permanently located businesses, street vendors and their transported load represent an eyesore, while others may view them as less-deserving commercial competitors. Whichever it is, they seem to coexist mostly peacefully. This is but one of many urban changes, perhaps unnoticed in plain sight, as we traverse the bustle of one of the most diverse cities known. My take.

*Postscript: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly cause unpredictable transformation of the city and beyond, perhaps of the likes never imagined. Will it ever return to the routine practices, trends and habits described in my trek? Only time will tell!*

# On Trying Not to Grade

Rebecca Fraser, Manhattan

*"If you're a teacher and you hate grading, stop doing it."*

— Jesse Stommel, *"How to Ungrade"* (2018)

This short essay is a reflection of my experience of "ungrading" — not grading student papers last year. Particularly, it is about how the experiment did *not* work the way I intended. Let's go behind the scenes and see what actually happened.

First, for context, the study was Working-Class Themes in Literature, and we were focused on the mystery/detective genre. We read a number of short stories and three novels, and saw two movies; we discussed the detectives who appeared in these media, whether or not they were working class or not, and if they were, what difference that made. We asked the same questions for the setting of the story/novel/movie as well as the victim/s of the crime. In the beginning, I spent a number of sessions, while we were discussing the short stories, helping students develop a critical awareness of the mystery/detective genre, giving them a language to use to reflect on and analyze the stories, novels, and films we would be engaged with over the term.

Students were assigned three main papers; each one addressed a specific question about a novel or film. They also did a fair amount of informal, in-class and out of class writing about topics raised in class discussions. Sometimes I pause a class discussion and have students write about the discussion and their take on the topic at hand. They collected all this work in a portfolio, which was read and responded to by a writing coach at midterm; they then handed in all their work again at the end of the term. The three main papers were 60% of their final grade; 20% of the

final grade was based simply on their completion of the informal assignments, and the final 20% was based on what I like to call "good citizenship": did they help the discussions in class, did they participate in activities, were they present, did they hand in work on time — that sort of thing.

As to my grading experiment: 99% of the time, 99% of the papers turned in were given the grade of an "A" by the students. At first, this disturbed me. I had, after all, had them create a rubric by which they would grade their papers. They got in groups and discussed possible items on the rubric, and then we got together as a large group and put everything on the board, finally narrowing it down to five agreed upon items. I didn't know if I should be disturbed or not at their use of "teacher talk" when it came to the rubric. That is, they clearly know what their instructors want from them and being able to recite it back to me did not seem as reflective or deep a task as I had hoped for. We had talked about self-reflection and evaluation as a mindful exercise, and I had hoped that they would grade more accurately than being motivated simply by the desire to get an "A" in the class. But they didn't.

I read Jesse Stommel's blog in the middle of a rough term when the piles of papers kept stacking up and students were writing more revisions than usual. I teach writing and literature classes, as well as Educational Planning classes. I assign a lot of writing because I believe that writing is thinking and that one way to get students to reflect on the content of the course we are learning together is for all of us to always be writing — informally, formally, sometimes in a journal, sometimes on scraps of paper they throw away (as a way to demonstrate that there is nothing



Rebecca Fraser

overtly special about the written word). I collect a lot of what students write, reading it and commenting on it. It is not true for me that "the work of grading is framed less in terms of giving feedback or encouraging learning and more as a way of ranking students against one another" (Stommel, 2018, para. 4). During other terms, I've graded and provided a great deal of feedback, often with a requirement that students work with a writing coach before turning in a revision based on the response from me and the thoughts of the writing coach they worked with. At times, I've had students write back to me, responding to the comments and grade on their papers.

My students in the last term, my experimental term, however, did not bring a critical eye (or use the rubric we created) to the grading of their papers. I still provided qualitative feedback on their papers; my hope being that they would take that feedback and apply it to their next papers — and that did occur (I think) on a limited basis. For example, on a paper that had not been edited and had been written like a text message (and perhaps even written on a phone),

I wrote I would not accept another paper that was of that caliber. My threat was taken seriously and the next paper that student turned in had been “cleaned up” and did not have the same errors as the previous paper had (no more lowercase “i’s,” more periods and commas, paragraphs and citations). But I had not required my students to write out a rationale for the grade they gave themselves, and that is where I think I failed my students. It was this omission that made the most difference to me.

Namely, I rediscovered that students need to be taught how to evaluate their own work — and not simply taught, but have self-evaluation modeled, practiced, and demonstrated over time. Our work in one hour of one class to think about, discuss and create a rubric was not enough for these students. They had no experience grading their own work, so rather than see it as an opportunity for self-reflection, they saw it as a chance to get an easy “A.” I blame myself for the fallacy of “I’ve taught this so many times before to so very many students, this group of students must know what I’m talking about.” I “forgot” that even though this was an advanced-level course, these students probably didn’t have the experience of reflecting on their own work and so it was new and uncomfortable to do. So why not take the easy road and slap an “A” on their papers?

The interesting thing, or one of the interesting things, is this: at the end of the term, I felt that final grades were fair grades, grades based on formal and informal writing, as well as “good citizenship.” Many of the students who didn’t deserve an “A” on their papers didn’t turn in any of the informal papers and were not the best citizens in class (that is, they didn’t participate, perhaps they fell asleep in class and had to be woken up, they didn’t do the reading, or they didn’t bring the book we were discussing with them to class). Consequently, 40% of their grade was not an “A” and that 40% was enough to

lower their grades to something that reflected more accurately on the work they did for the class.

Too many times I have seen students stuff their papers in their backpack without even looking at the grade. Too many times I have spent half an hour on a paper, commenting on it, noticing patterns in grammatical errors, or problems with logic, or mistakes in an argument, or the use of a quotation only to have that student turn in their next paper with exactly the same problems, and I have the sense that the time I so carefully spent reflecting on and grading the paper has been wasted time. Consequently, in the last term I was ready for this change, that is, I was ready to “ungrade,” and I think the experiment was not a bad one, but I do think I went about it poorly. Ironically, I didn’t do my own reflection thoroughly enough, just as the students didn’t reflect on their own papers. I can’t say I did not reflecting — that would be inaccurate. But I didn’t think through, thoroughly, what I wanted from students and how I would elicit that from them, how they would get to where I hoped they would be before they started to grade their own papers.

*Can we imagine assessment mechanisms that encourage discovery, ones not designed for assessing learning but designed for learning through assessment?* (Stommel, 2018, para. 17)

So how might I do things differently if I were to try this experiment again? First, I would spend more time with them discussing the rubric they create — specifically asking them, how they would know if they met specific criteria or not, and how that assessment would impact the grade they would give themselves. I can’t believe I didn’t do this the first time around! Second, I think the first paper they grade would be a “practice run” — where they would grade the paper and I would grade the paper, and where we would both explain or reflect on the grades we gave. Then I would encourage

them to do more or less of what they had done, and then let them “have at it” with their next paper. Then, if I got a handful of “A” papers, we would have a class discussion about that. Why all the “A’s”? Were their assessments fair? How so? With that said, I would try and keep them “honest” with their grading.

The other thing I would do differently is to share my syllabus with a colleague and have a thorough discussion about

*“... and I have the sense that the time I so carefully spent reflecting on and grading the paper has been wasted time.”*

the assignments, the students’ grading, and the way I went about engaging students in reflective thought that would (hopefully) go into their grading and commenting. I need that sort of collegial interaction and discussion about what I’m doing. Being the only full-time writing person at the Van Arsdale Center, I sometimes long for writing colleagues with whom I can discuss my assignments, my grading, my reflective processes — that is, the work of teaching writing.

Finally, after teaching for more than 35 years, I feel the need to make myself “new” again. I need to come to my courses and teaching with a freshness that I think I’ve lost. I think that might be a root cause for my decision to try to “ungrade” last term. I wanted to learn something new, to do something different. I was, perhaps unconsciously for some period of time, looking for a way of mentoring that engaged students in new, untried ways. It is also true that I was trying to solve my “mini-angst” about grading, grading and grading some more — something I think we all feel from time to time. And I do agree

with Stommel that “the work of teaching shouldn’t be reduced to the mechanical act of grading or marking. Our talk of grading shouldn’t be reduced to our complaining about the continuing necessity of it” (Stommel, 2018, para. 1). And that was happening to me before I tried “ungrading.” I was beginning to feel robotic with my “awkward sentence; needs attention,” and “this comma needs to be a semicolon; please explore sentence boundaries at the Purdue OWL” comments made over and over again.

The good news is that this experiment, as well as this essay, has me rethinking grading completely. And I hope it has you thinking about how you grade, why you grade, and what you hope grading will do for your students, as well as for you. Perhaps we, the faculty of Empire State College, need an open forum online or perhaps at the Fall Academic Conference to discuss these questions. Stommel (2018) believes that “grades are a morass education has fallen into that frustrates our ability to focus on student learning” (para. 28). I agree with

him, and my hope is that an honest, ongoing conversation about grading would open up into a discussion of student learning.

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*“Given that effective adult learning is predicated on relationships, neglect cannot be part of the recipe for success in our vocation. As a result, how we think about, approach, and operate when confronted with difference is an indicator of how effective we will be as adult educators. In other words, a big part of our job requires negotiating cultural differences. People matter; in fact, when you get right down to it, at the end of the day, when all is said and done, people are what count the most.”*

— Lisa R. Merriweather, “Negotiating Polyrythms: Moving Toward a Praxis of Inclusive Adult Education”  
Explorations in Adult Higher Education, 2020, p. 7



# A Study of Representations of Women in Art History Textbooks

Alice Lai, Saratoga Springs

*"Yet, textbooks are more than simply mediators of knowledge. They always contain and enshrine underlying norms and values; they transmit constructions of identity; and they generate specific patterns of perceiving the world."*

— Fuchs and Bock (2018)

**W**hy have there been no great women artists? Feminist art historian, critic, and educator Linda Nochlin posed this provocative question in 1971 to her fellow art historians and art critics. To answer this "tricky" question, Nochlin advised her colleagues to not fall into the trap of defensively attempting to identify exemplary female artists comparable to their great male peers. Rather, they should examine the institutionalized assumptions that define (great) art and govern how (great) artists are produced. In doing so, they can also recognize and further envision ways to transform the deep-seated structure of male privilege in the Western art canon. Nochlin asserted that great art is "to be learned or worked out, either through teaching, apprenticeship or a long period of individual experimentation" (p. 483) and argued against the misconception of "genius" that was "thought of as an atemporal and mysterious power somehow embedded in the person of the Great Artist" (p. 488). Following Nochlin, Griselda Pollock (1999) described the canon as a discursive formation that "contributes to the legitimation of white masculinity's exclusive identification with creativity and with culture. So long as feminism also tries to be a discourse about art, truth, and beauty, it can only confirm the structure of the canon" (p. 9). These feminist scholars tenaciously

challenged and deconstructed canonized myths about art and the artist and investigated institutionalized norms and discrimination against women, hindering opportunities for them and their positioning as "great" artists. They suggested that educators could only reform the institutions of art and address gender injustice in arts and humanities curriculum materials through a feminist interrogation of the androcentric system.

In the 1990s, I was taking undergraduate studio art, art history, and art theory classes, but I was not yet aware of Nochlin's theory or other critical or cultural theories based on gender critiques of Western art traditions. Still, I had the same nagging feeling about the sparse sample of female artists introduced in my classic art history textbooks in particular and departmental curriculum in general. This feeling eventually motivated me to dive deeper into the history, theory, and praxis of art education from a critical perspective. At SUNY Empire State College, I have continued expanding this research interest and began creating and teaching undergraduate arts and humanities courses incorporating curriculum materials about female artists and using intersectional feminist methods. In other words, my courses invite students to uncover and study female artists across diverse identity categories, for example, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, faith, age, and nationality, and to ponder multiple forms of privilege and oppression in the art world intersected with various identity categories. In doing so, I also aim to prepare students to engage in a feminist investigation of androcentrism in the art world.



Alice Lai

During my six-month sabbatical, I spent time reexamining the instructional materials, especially textbooks, I had chosen to guide students in the critical study of art history and theory, women's art, and the art of diverse cultures. During this process, I happened upon the opening quote by Fuchs and Bock (2018), which reminded me of Nochlin's discontent with the canonical beliefs and prompted me to probe the norms and values embedded in art history and theory textbooks. In particular, I endeavor to understand the changing institutional ideology and practice influencing the production of art history textbooks starting around the late 20th century. According to Turner (1996), the late 20th century saw textbook industries begin supporting a new generation of textbooks that chronologically and fully survey women's art or follow gender-balanced content and language guidelines. Today's textbooks continue to reflect this effort. In this essay, I highlight the feminist critique of the canonical norms in art, especially representations of women in



textbooks. Using two seminal but non-canonical-driven textbooks as models — *Women, Art, and Society* (Chadwick, 1990, 2012) and *Mixed Blessings in a Multicultural America* (Lippard, 1990) — I analyze the explicit feminist and intersectional feminist approaches these authors adopted to create the textbooks and counteract male dominance and, to an extent, ethnocentricity and Eurocentricity in art history. Lastly, I discuss the influences of these texts on my students' learning.

### **Women in Art History Texts**

The lack of female representation in art history textbooks was posited as a problem contributing to gender disparity in the art world. As “an art textbook (project) editor in a major textbook house and as an author for art textbook and trade book publishers” (p. 135), Turner (1996) recounted that in 1986, “no mainstream K-12 or higher education textbook [on] the market had remotely attempted to offer a gender-balanced approach. These texts taught students that art was created, for the most part, solely by white men” (p. 136). Chadwick (1990, 2012) noted that the standard and widely distributed art history textbook in U.S. colleges and universities, *H.W. Janson's History of Art* (Janson, 1962), contained not a single female artist at the time Nochlin (1971) raised the poignant question. Sterling (2010), director of the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington D.C., added that it was not until 1986 that said art history textbook started to introduce female artists; however, the number was minimal: Only 19 out of 2,300 artists were female. As expected, a large number of postsecondary art and art history students during the second half of the 20th century were unable to name a handful of female artists in the Western history of art. The lack of examples and study of female artists and their inspirations and artworks, as both Chadwick and Turner asserted, has led to a distrust of women's artistic

and intellectual abilities and discouraged women from pursuing artistic professions.

With concerns about the diminished representation of diverse race, gender, sexuality, and so forth in art history texts and art pedagogy, I attempted a “quantitative” exercise to recount the women artists I studied as an undergraduate. I took out my first copy of *H.W. Janson's History of Art* (Janson, 1991), which I still retain after countless moves from the West to East Coasts. I surveyed the entire text to sort out female and male artists, keeping an eye to the description of their race, sexual orientation, class status, and other identity markers. There were 30 female artists featured in the text. I was disappointed but not surprised to see that there were no female artists of color acknowledged in the text. In a far more systematic, comprehensive, and meticulous manner, Gustlin (2016) completed a doctoral dissertation in part focusing on a content analysis of female artists in six widely used college-level art history textbooks released from 2010 to 2015. The finding indicated that “overall, the ratio of male to female artists” in artist-identified plates and indexes “was roughly 4:1. There was also a much greater numerical reference to White European artists regardless of gender compared to artists of color, regardless of gender” (p. 65). As recently as 2019, White completed a master's thesis investigating gender representation in art pedagogy. Seventy-one students in her research reported that they valued a gender-balanced art curriculum, yet spent a vast majority of class time (an average of 72%) learning about male artists. Some students expressed that they were able to learn more about women artists only through their art professors' dedicated efforts in providing additional narratives of women artist to the curriculum.

To narrow the gender gap in the art world and empower female students and artists, art educators (Clarke, Folgo, & Pichette, 2005; Gustlin, 2016)

suggested that more female artists from history need to be acknowledged in educational materials and taught in the classroom. However, it was a daunting undertaking to (re)write a history of art encompassing sufficient precedents from female artists and a new system or theory of art that judges and gives meaning to women's work on their own terms (Garrard, 1991; Mathews, 1991). Consequently, even though the appeal for a new type of women-centered or gender-balanced textbook was noticeable, especially among K-16 art educators (Turner, 1996), a minuscule number of new, scholarly, comprehensive, and women's art history textbooks were produced since the late 20th century. Chadwick had just published the first edition of her iconic and voluminous text *Women, Art, and Society* in 1990, a scholarly work fully dedicated to surveying female artists and the gender issues the artists have encountered throughout history. This women-centered text corresponded with the then feminist movement; indeed, it contains several hundred women artists from periods ranging from the Middle Ages to the late 20th century. Moreover, it also highlights feminist theories and a feminist critique of Western art canons.

At the same time, Lippard (1990), coming from a critical cultural studies standpoint, published the first edition of her critically acclaimed scholarly text, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America*. Included in the text are hundreds of narratives of contemporary artists and artworks from a wide range of women artists intersected with diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and sexuality backgrounds. Lippard applied critical and intersectionality theories such as race theory, feminist theory, and multiculturalism to analyze the artworks, the contemporary art canons, and the interconnected issues of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual identification, power, and privilege that influence the artists' lives and artworks. Chadwick's text no doubt mobilized female artists from a marginalized

existence to a center position in the history of art. Going further, Lippard's text furnished samples of and supports for underrepresented artists: female, non-white, non-European influenced, and non-heterosexual.

Scholars affirmed that Chadwick's and Lippard's texts went beyond the "just add women and minorities and stir" tactic and had the potential to transgress and even reform the art history and art education canons (Garrard, 1991; Larsen, 1991; Mathews, 1991; Parks, 1995). Employing a radical feminist framework, Chadwick attempted to disrupt the male canonical gaze by theorizing, locating, and valuing artistic characteristics manifested in women's artworks. Historically, male and female artists' works were dichotomously attributed as grand/miniature, historical/domestic, political/personal, masculine/feminine, and strong/weak (e.g., color, brushstroke, and texture). Privileging the former over the latter led to the belief that artworks created by women were inferior and lacked long-term social, historical, or monetary significance. Applying art theory, feminist theory, and a feminist critique of the patriarchal system of art, Chadwick, along with other scholars (Broude & Garrard, 2005), identified femininity, domesticity, and personalness as distinctive traits, context, or the subject matter in numerous women's artworks. They presented these aspects as positive inspirations and important elements contributing to aesthetic theories and quality art. Lippard intended to destabilize European white canonical traditions by devoting the entire text to illuminating new works created by women artists and artists of color. Using a critical multicultural and race theory, she examined sexism and racism and other identity issues in the contemporary art world and society as a whole. Reflecting a theory of intersectional feminism, Lippard (1990) wrote with "the relational, unfixed feminist models of art" (p. 4), exploring

a transitional space and an in-between time shaping the lives and works of women artists and artists of color.

Chadwick's and Lippard's texts evidenced that despite the myriad obstacles female and other marginalized artists encountered, they have created magnificent artwork along with their male or white contemporaries during different historical periods and art movements. Their endeavors not only helped to ontologically legitimize the creativity and achievements of women and people of color in the art world but also to epistemologically broaden aesthetic theories and the philosophy of art. Labels such as feminist art, women's art, or identity-based art (e.g., Native American art, LGBT art) appeared in Chadwick's and Lippard's texts and in the titles of visual culture magazines, academic journals, art exhibitions, and professional associations. Subsequently, an increasing body of art exhibitions began accepting, requesting, or focusing on artwork produced by women across various identity groups. Such a paradigm change in the art world and in art education during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century allowed art students to access new, or previously ignored, knowledge.

Chadwick's and Lippard's achievement was monumental in terms of the sheer volume of new knowledge covered in their texts and the new questions and debates that emerged from their texts that sustained a classic dialogue about what art is and sparked a new dialogue about identity-based art in the age of identity politics. Fields (2012) noted that their texts provoked feminist art historians and artists to continue wrestling with what constitutes "women's" experience, "feminist" art, and "feminist" or "feminine" signifiers from the standpoints of essentialism and anti-essentialism. Historians and artists also deliberated on the need for feminist art or women's art, or for that matter, Chicana art or Asian American queer art. While the female label may have created a safe space or niche market for women artists, they inadvertently reproduced

*"These questions must be pondered to tear away the deep-rooted ideology of male dominance, ethnocentricity, and Eurocentricity in defining great artists and art, value in art, and legitimate art curricula."*

a category limiting or stereotyping women artists' understanding of self, misguiding viewers' interpretation of art, and alienating artists who did not subscribe to a particular category. For example, as scholars (Broude & Garrard, 2005; Chadwick, 1990, 2012) cautioned, although female artists had increased freedom to create their own work and opportunities to exhibit their work in the wake of the feminist art movement, Georgia O'Keeffe constantly objected to her flower paintings being labeled as feminine, erotic, or feminist art, and other female artists were frustrated by the women-centric art categories that, intentionally or unintentionally, separated their creativity from the mainstream aesthetics.

Art educators (Rosenberg & Thurber, 2007; Turner, 1996) concerned about gender issues in art institutions have generated and applied gender-balanced and gender-inclusive guidelines to design or select textbooks. Their guidelines can be extended to evaluate the representations of gender, race, class (including the divisions of high art and low art) and other identity markers in the prospective texts. For example, an instructor may inspect content along with such questions as which women artists and artists of color are included in the materials, by whom and based on what criteria, how they are represented, as well as which and

whose art is worth teaching, exhibiting, or preserving for future generations. These questions must be pondered to tear away the deep-rooted ideology of male dominance, ethnocentricity, and Eurocentricity in defining great artists and art, value in art, and legitimate art curricula. Employing their guidelines to scrutinize Chadwick's text reveals that each edition of Chadwick's text contains overwhelmingly white, European-influenced, intellectually elite, middle-class and heterosexual women, suggesting that to some extent the selection of the female artists might have been grounded in canonical standards. Indeed, Mathews (1991) noticed that "where new research is unavailable to her, or when she tries to cover too much material, [Chadwick] tends to rely on Modernist assumptions of the artist as individual creator whose work can be interpreted through its relations to an established canon of male artists based on traditional categories such as style, influence, and artistic schools" (p. 336). Garrard (1991) further noted that while Chadwick was constantly attentive to the intersectionality of economic, social, and class issues, her analyses of race and homosexuality were scarce. This shortcoming, Garrard speculated, was due to the insufficient resources of artists of color and non-heterosexual artists available to Chadwick — another profound problem in the institutions of art. Lippard's text can be perceived as representing an "abridged" or "alternative" history of artists of color and multicultural art in the United States. The majority of the artworks presented in the text were created after the mid-20th century; hence, the text was not typically considered a comprehensive art history. Indeed, Lippard (1990) wrote, "I want to make it clear from the outset that this book is not a survey of art from a diverse range of ethnic communities" (p. 4). In addition, the limited duration spanned in the text could lead to a conception that "multiculturalism" was a short-lived art movement or cultural phenomenon

rather than an all-encompassing theory with which to analyze art of diverse forms, contexts, and periods.

### **Implications of the Textbooks**

In this last section, I exemplify the influences of Lippard's and Chadwick's texts on my undergraduate students' learning. Students' feedback on Lippard's text was mixed. Students were enlightened by the text to explore the intersected experiences and issues of gender, race, ethnicity, craft, and low art. While they generally supported racial and ethnic diversity in the American art world, curriculum materials directly interrogating racism expressed in the artworks appear to be "too political" or uncomfortable for a number of students. Other recurring complaints from them included the "incomprehensible" critical theory and critical language used in the text and difficulty relating to the artworks or finding "pleasure" in the aesthetics of contemporary artwork. Some students felt that the text promotes a sentiment of white guilt and thus perceived Lippard's interpretation of artworks as rather discriminatory. Conversely, many other students chose to focus on the historical and creative aspects of multicultural art. These students related the interconnected issues of power structure and identity politics to the shared gender, racial, ethnic, or national history and made an effort to explore the artistic elements women and other marginalized artists used to portray difficult social issues and experiences.

Several public events during the 2016 presidential campaign, the 2017 Women's March, and the #MeToo movement have significantly heightened my students' attention to gender, race, and class issues and their impacts on women's lives in the United States. For example, in Figure 1, Maria Rizzo, a female art student, responded to Trump winning the presidency by creating a watercolor depicting a woman covering her face with both hands sobbing on one corner of the drawing

while Trump utters his slogan, "Make America Great Again," on the opposite corner. A cracked hand-mirror with the word *society* written on its handle was placed in the center of the drawing separating the woman from Trump. Rizzo posted her artwork to the course's discussion forum and stated, "I am a professional painter; yet, I have never created art to express my political point of view or the social reality I live in ... this course gave me the courage to try something different" (M. Rizzo, personal communication, November 13, 2016). Recalling the gender discourse and examples of women artists learned from the textbook, she explained her choices of the medium and subject matter. The watercolor was canonically considered a soft, feminine medium. Political matters were traditionally considered masculine subjects; female artists, especially before the 18th century, were discouraged from creating historical and political paintings. Employing watercolors to depict a political subject was her way of disrupting gender norms and subverting the gender-biased conventions in the Western art canon. This approach simultaneously aligns with the objective and content of her watercolor; that is, to express her discontent of injustice



Figure 1: "Make America Great Again" by Student Maria Rizzo.

against women and minorities — with which she empathized — in the contemporary time. I speculate that the course reading *Women, Art, and Society*, by Chadwick, centering on female artists' lives and works and art history from a critical and gender perspective, evoked her to produce "political" art confronting gender oppression and discrimination, as she perceived it, throughout the presidential campaign. This case was not a rare display of a student being empowered and transformed by the curriculum materials. In fact, many students have found inspiration and encouragement from Chadwick's text and were able to engage in a feminist investigation of androcentrism and other gender-related issues in the art world and in society as a whole.

As I embarked on the present inquiry, I found persistent concerns about the representation of race, gender, class, sexuality, and so forth in art history texts and art pedagogy. Gustlin (2016) observed that most of her art history students on the first day of a new semester were able to name 10 male artists; however, it was difficult for them to name more than two female artists. It seems to me that the standard art history textbooks alone are not adequate enough to support a well-rounded study of art. I have purposefully chosen critically acclaimed yet non-mainstream texts for my art courses. With this recent inquiry, I believe that both Chadwick's and Lippard's texts can continue serving as critical resources to strengthen students' exposure to women artists and other underrepresented artists, as well as the intersected issues of gender, race, class, and many other identity categories impacting their artworks.

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# Getting Personal: How We Used Voice Feedback Tools to Connect with Students on their Writing Practice

Dan McCrea and Kjrsten Keane, Saratoga Springs

## Introduction

Technology can often be a double-edged sword in education, where benefit and cost are difficult to distinguish. New digital tools that allow educators to add voice feedback to student papers clearly illustrate this challenge. Websites for voice feedback tools promise great things: “A whole new document experience” awaits users (Adobe, n.d., para. 1). Students will “love to hear your voice” (Kaizena, n.d., para. 2). Feedback on written work will be “faster, better” than ever (Kaizena, n.d., para. 1). While intrigued by the catchy marketing phrases, our primary goal wasn’t to use trendy tools. Our research team came together and bonded with a goal to better meet the needs of our SUNY Empire State College (ESC) student population as they improved their writing skills, with a reasonable cost to benefit ratio.

Our research team includes Dan McCrea, Miriam Russell, and Kjrsten Keane. Dan McCrea works as a director of academic support, overseeing Academic Support for the Capital Region of New York. He also assists students in working on a variety of writing assignments. Now-retired colleague Miriam Russell taught writing courses and served as a writing coach for Academic Support. Kjrsten Keane teaches writing-intensive courses in news writing and reflective learning, and mentors students through their educational planning efforts. Over time, we crossed paths with students in common and found ourselves discussing a clear and consistent objective: to support these students through critical writing processes. Given the advertised promises of these voice feedback tools, we thought, why not explore some

technological applications to assist us in our efforts?

## Research Focus

ESC employs many faculty and staff who are using creative options to meet the needs of their diverse students, many of whom struggle academically, manage a disability or have learned English as a second language (ESL). While trendy tools come and go, the ability to engage students and help them sharpen their writing skills is a timeless educational endeavor. Our team is dedicated to exploring new methods toward that end, hopefully assisting both the students we work with directly, as well as a larger audience as our results are shared. So, we set out to find and experiment with some new methods. One such method is recorded voice feedback, which implements educational technology to help students discover their strengths and weaknesses. It has the added benefit of communicating tone of voice of the instructor and offers the student the chance to hear the feedback more than once.

After some investigation of voice feedback tools that would retool our methods, our research team decided to formalize our goals by asking: What do we want to know? The response that we brainstormed evolved into our primary

research question: “What is student perception of formative feedback when audio is added to traditional text?”

Our study was partly designed to address recommendations made by Delante (2017): “Another stimulating research direction to take is to do a comparative study between online written feedback and voice/video or chat feedback” (p. 799). We initiated the study with the assumption that all surveyed students had experienced written feedback at this point in their educational studies. Therefore, student opinion was solicited on their use of one of two types of recorded audio feedback for improving writing skills within college writing courses. Along with students in regular academic online classes, students at the college who sought writing assistance through the Academic Support were also asked to participate.

We collaborated, offering formative feedback to students between January 2016 and December 2017. We narrowed our technology use to one of two tools during the student writing process:



Kjrsten Keane and Dan McCrea

Photo credit: John Hughes



Kaizena voice comments or Adobe Acrobat Reader, in addition to text-based feedback.

**Defining Our Tools**

Our team regularly provides feedback to students on their written assignments, usually through using Microsoft Word’s “Review” and comment functions. We have often found that the limitations of text-only feedback include students *misperceiving* the tenor and purpose of what we are trying to communicate to them. This led us to look for alternatives that incorporated audio feedback. We found some promising research to back up our intuition that audio feedback could be a superior way to offer students suggestions on their writing practice. Of particular note, Merry and Orsmond (2008) noted that students

often had an easier time understanding audio feedback, and the depth of the feedback could be far greater than written feedback alone. The authentic and genuine meaning of the feedback was easier to perceive and was seen as a more personal communication as well, rather than cold and critical (pp. 9-10). In short, students in the Merry and Orsmond study perceived and implemented audio feedback in different and more meaningful ways than written feedback.

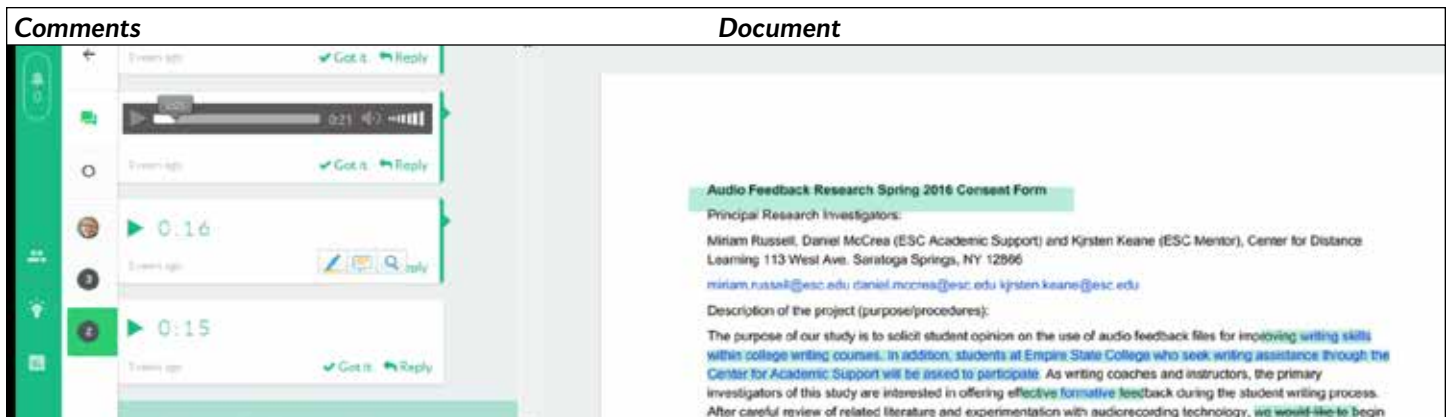
**Kaizena and Adobe Acrobat**

Kaizena is an educational technology company with a web application and add-on for Google Docs that embeds voice and/or text feedback on documents. The name is derived from *kaizen*, the Japanese term for

improvement. Using the Kaizena application, we are able to give and receive feedback on content through the use of voice and text comments. The feedback is visible to students either directly in a Google document, or within the document inside the Kaizena web application. The interface is similar to the Microsoft Word comment feature.

Key Features of Kaizena:

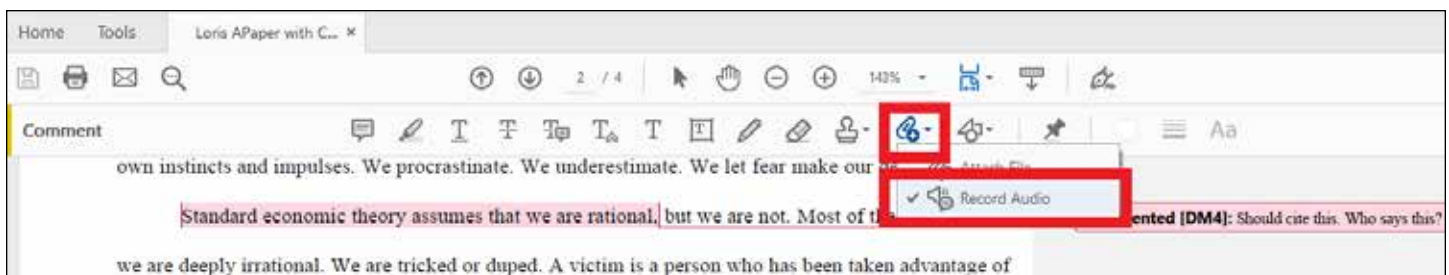
- Online access.
- Written and/or voice feedback.
- Library of resources can be embedded and shared.
- YouTube videos can be embedded into comments.
- Facilitates two-way conversation.



Bundled in Adobe Acrobat is another voice recording tool that most people don’t know about, but that offers another good option for making voice comments. With this tool, users add audio comments directly to PDF

documents through the Adobe Acrobat program. Using the “Comment” toolbar, click on the paperclip icon and then “Record Audio Comment.” This allows the easy addition of voice feedback to a document in a program many of us

already use. Students and colleagues who do not have access to the full Adobe program can download the free Adobe Reader option to record and/or listen to audio feedback (Adobe Creative Team, 2011).





## Describing Our Survey

After we found the tools and experimented with them, we were excited to incorporate voice feedback into our work with students and to get their feedback on them. This was a preliminary look at the use of voice feedback, so we were interested in what the students thought of the tools: Were they easy to use and access? Did they have a preference for voice or text feedback? We also wanted to see what kind of browser they ran to access the tools, in addition to any general qualitative comments. We worked with 125 students from January 2016 to December of 2017. As students completed the term in which they received audio feedback, they were sent a survey using Google Forms. A review of related literature, along with our experience of working with students, informed our survey questions. The results of all survey respondents (n=44) were compiled at the end of the research period. Close to 70% indicated a preference for voice feedback.

## Quantitative Results

Students responded to the questions below via our Google Form survey. A summary of the responses follows each question.

### How often have you received feedback from your instructor on writing assignments?

Ultimately, 22.2% of respondents accessed their voice comment tool once, 40% accessed the tool two to three times, and 37.8% accessed it four or more times. As access increased, some respondents became more familiar with the technology than did others. Students who received voice feedback more than once were also more likely to participate in the survey over students who received voice feedback only once.

### Do you know which program was used to deliver your voice feedback?

Of the 44 students who responded, 13.3% used Adobe Acrobat Reader sound files. A larger number (80%) of respondents accessed Kaizena voice comments. A small percentage (6.7%) could not identify the program utilized.

### How easily did you access the voice feedback?

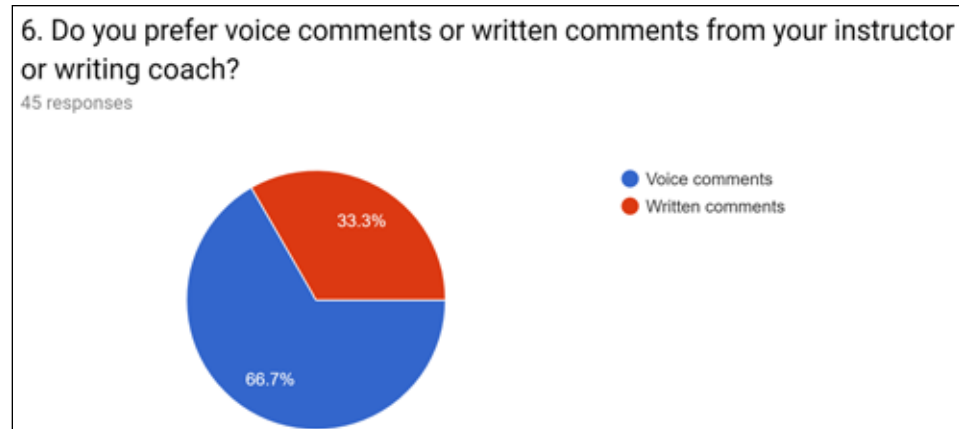
The majority of students accessing voice comments (55.6%) found the process easy or mostly easy. A much smaller percentage (13.3%) found the process difficult. As we teased out more detailed responses from the survey data, we found that 38 of the 44 respondents identified as Kaizena users, while six identified as Adobe Acrobat Reader users. While the Kaizena user experience was similar to the chart below, the smaller number of Adobe Acrobat Reader responses skews their experience when reported as percentages. Of the six Adobe Acrobat Reader users, three reported difficulty with the process.

### What browser did you use to access the feedback?

There may be incompatibility using the Chrome browser to open up the Adobe Acrobat Reader PDF containing voice comments, via certain online Learning Management Systems. Four of the Adobe Acrobat Reader users could not access their audio feedback via the LMS at all using Chrome. Saving the file and opening it outside the browser with the Adobe Acrobat program provided a workaround but increased the steps and complications for feedback access between these programs.

### Do you prefer voice comments or written comments from your instructor or writing coach?

A strong preference for personalized formative audio feedback specifically related to students' written work emerged in the responses. Of the 44 students who responded, 66.7% preferred audio feedback to accompany their text-based feedback, while 33% preferred written feedback alone.



### What device/technology did you use to access the feedback?

Most students who accessed the voice comments did so with a PC or Mac computer or laptop. A much smaller percentage used an alternative personal electronic device. The identified iPad user was not able to access Kaizena via the device.

## Qualitative Results

Our study included an optional written feedback section for comments. Examples of positive views found in the comment section of the survey:

- *"I thought it was great. I had a choice of recording or writing a comment. I was also able to see what specific areas you were referring to."*

- *"It's great. The fact that I can hear your voice makes online courses that much more interactive."*
- *"OK I just did it and it was a lot better than reading the comments on the side it worked well and I more fully understand the comments that you made!"*
- *"I loved working with the Kaizena app and hearing your remarks one-by-one was so useful when making corrections to my paper."*
- *"The voice message is understood better by me. English is my second language and the wording could be slightly difficult to understand."*
- *"Actually felt more like one-on-one learning."*

Three students offered less positive feedback focused on a preference for embedding voice comments directly into a document:

- *"I prefer written comments because it is easy to edit my work as I read through."*
- *"It is hard to edit my work while listening to voice comments."*
- *"Would prefer if voice appeared in the Google Doc."*

(Note: Since these results were compiled, the Kaizena capabilities have extended to include embedded voice comments.)

Several negative responses complained about the "glitches" or lack of clear audio:

- *"Some were difficult to understand."*
- *"Speakers can become muffled."*

Another student noted "glitches," as well as the following addition about providing both text and voice comments: "a bit cumbersome, but both are appreciated."

(Note: It can be expected that future advances in internet audio transmission would make the problem of "glitches" less troublesome.)

Our study supported Pearce and Ackley's (1995) finding that "students liked or were motivated better by taped feedback" (p. 32). In addition, they noted that audio feedback was more detailed than written. According to Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens (2012), "...high levels of interaction typically need to be present for learners to have a positive attitude and greater satisfaction" (p. 119). Henderson and Phillips (2015) identified themes in their data set, including student interpretation of recorded feedback as "individualized and personal," as well as "supportive: seen as caring and felt to be motivating" (p. 58). Students appreciated the degree of detail provided in terms of how their work was evaluated.

### Conclusion

Our team learned a lot over the course of our study. We also were able to improve our practice and, hopefully, better meet the educational needs of our students who can often get extremely discouraged from feedback on their writing. One of the primary aims we have as educators is to encourage students to improve and continue their work. Voice feedback is one tool in our toolbox we can use to help ensure that students feel connected and engaged as we help them become better writers. Research has shown one of the greatest challenges for learning institutions and instructors when designing and implementing online courses is to "provide a sense of community with constructive feedback and provide open forthcoming communications as well as recognizing membership and feelings of friendship, cohesion, and satisfaction among learners" (Desai, Hart, & Richards, 2008, p. 333). At Empire State College, this is doubly true for students who take studies that are either online, or that significantly differ from a traditional college lecture hall course, whether they are independent studies or smaller group studies, and even to some degree, residencies that may not meet face-to-face every week. While we

know, and our students know, that the great strength of these types of studies is the flexibility and independence they offer, the opportunities for engagement with other students are often challenging. That sense of community can be harder to build.

As Desai and colleagues (2008) pointed out: "Social presence is a strong communication component that reduces isolation between the distant learner and other learners and instructor. A lack of social presence might affect a learner's performance and outcomes during an instructional transaction. Social presence is the degree to which a person is perceived as a real person in a mediated situation" (p. 328). We believe our work has shown one possible tool for mentors to help increase the sense of engagement, personalization, and community, and also provide valuable feedback that will help students improve their writing.

As others continue their search for innovative and useful ways to reduce the "transactional distance" (Moore, 1997) between mentor and student, we hope that sharing our experiences using these tools proves constructive. Involving students in such experimentation makes for a more engaging educational experience, allowing them to sharpen both their writing practice and their online/digital communication skills.

### Note

Our research was formally published in *Open Praxis*, volume 10, issue 4, 2018.

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*"We need to think about keeping the connections, not just thinking about our students as minds at an institution, but also physically, emotionally, with families, and with all of these other influences on their lives. It is a great way to think about how we can support indigenous students and adult students."*

— Stephanie J. Waterman

*"A Holistic Approach to Support Adult Indigenous Students"*  
Explorations in Adult Higher Education, 2020, p. 76

## “On ‘My Bucket List’” Continued or “How We Have Grown”

Mary Zanfani, Staten Island

**M**y essay about the first term of a College Partnership program I created was published in the winter 2018 issue of *All About Mentoring*. This program gives SUNY Empire State College (ESC) students in our Staten Island location the opportunity to collaborate with a group of intellectually disabled adults (IDAs) from Lifestyles for the Disabled (“Lifestyles”).<sup>1</sup> This organization aims to give IDAs from Lifestyles the opportunity to experience as many real-life opportunities as the rest of us.

In the second term of this College Partnership,<sup>2</sup> the students continued to instruct and work with Lifestyles students on the composition of poetry. Our second term class focused on the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe. Louise Vallario, a special education teacher from Lifestyles and my collaborator in this program, agreed that the Lifestyles students would be able to tackle the sometimes complex narratives of Poe’s poems.

I introduced Poe’s work the same way I introduce any poet’s work in all my college classes — with a discussion of the poet’s life. I feel that if students know a poet’s biography, the decoding of the poetry will be easier. The students were thus enabled to make the connection between Poe’s life and his words. Students may also come to a deeper understanding of Poe’s meaning (which, in my opinion, can often be obscure) using this method. We focused on Poe’s poetry about women. Poe, unfortunately, experienced the loss (death) of many of the women in his life who were close to him. These included his mother, his foster mother, and his wife, Virginia. All died from the same illness, tuberculosis.



*Mary Zanfani (far right) and her students at Poe Cottage.*

Louise and I also decided to do something different in this new class: we included a field trip to the Bronx to visit Poe Cottage. I thought visiting the place where “Annabel Lee,” “Eureka,” “The Bells,” and “The Cask of Amontillado” were written would make the students understand the extreme poverty in which Poe lived and worked. I also thought this might inspire our budding poets to greater heights.

Louise and I worked out a way to co-teach that facilitates successful outcomes for all the learners involved. I would compose a lesson plan, find material and shoot my ideas out to Louise. We would then converse, in person or by phone, as to how the lesson could best be unfolded. Each Tuesday morning before a class, prior to arriving at ESC, Louise would review the

material with our Lifestyles participants. This gave the Lifestyles students an opportunity to grasp the material and incorporate it into their working memories so they would be able to participate fully in class and group discussions. To help with our focus on the women in Poe’s life, I created a PowerPoint about these women and the poetry they inspired. We also used audio files of famous people reading Poe’s poetry. Good readers of poetry bring a deeper understanding of a poem’s meaning. Poems are meant to be heard and not just read. If a student uses more than one sense to decode a poem, I think it leads to greater success in understanding the poet’s message.

Once we established this deeper understanding of Poe’s life, I looked around for an inspirational idea for a

lesson. April, which is National Poetry Month, was approaching and I wanted to do something special. I Googled "lesson plans" and "NY Times" and came across something interesting about a student contest involving found poetry.<sup>3</sup> As I began to read the rules, I became excited about the possibility of my Lifestyles students entering the contest. The idea from The Learning Network of the *Times* was perfect except for one thing. We did not qualify under the rules. Contestants had to be 13 to 19 years old. Almost all of our students were too old. We decided to tackle the assignment anyway. In the meantime, I wrote to the editor of The Learning Network, Kathleen Schulten, at *The New York Times*. Although I was upset about the contest rules, I thought to reach out was worth a try. Here is some of what I wrote to her:

*"Dear Ms. Schulten:*

*I am a professor of English at Empire State College on Staten Island. I am currently teaching a literature course to Intellectually Disabled Adults from "Lifestyles for the Disabled." My colleague, Louise Vallario, from Lifestyles and I are co-teaching this course on our campus. Our class consists of 15 students from Lifestyles and 15 college students from Empire. The Empire students help the Lifestyles ones overcome their disabilities with the written word and with their analysis of literature. This semester we are studying E.A. Poe.*

*We very much want to use the found poetry contest to motivate our students to write more poetry. We are using the article titled: "The Writer and Man, Evermore"<sup>4</sup> for our found poems. Our Lifestyles students are quite adept at composition when we use a structured framework and give them adequate supports. They are amazing in their use of the English language. I understand that the contest is only open to a certain age group. Would it be possible to consider opening up this contest to this deserving group of individuals? Perhaps you could create a new category later on*

*in the month of April. We feel that our students deserve to be challenged and motivated in this way.*

*Thank you for your consideration in this matter.*

*Kind regards,  
Mary Zanfini and Louise Vallario"*

To my surprise, Ms. Schulten replied almost immediately. She said she was unable to change the contest rules, but that if we wanted to complete the contest and write up our experience as a "Reader Idea," she would be happy to publish it along with some of our students' poetry. She told us that our idea sounded "wonderful" and wished us luck. Needless to say, when I shared her reply with our students, it generated a great deal of enthusiasm and happiness in our classroom.

The week after Ms. Schulten's reply, we visited Poe Cottage. We prepared for our trip to the Bronx by viewing the Poe Cottage website<sup>5</sup> and an extensive collection of photos I had taken on previous visits there. This preparation gave the students a heads up as to what to expect when they got there. It also got their creative juices flowing as to questions they might want to ask the Poe Cottage curator.

When we went to the cottage, we arrived in plenty of time to walk around the outside. This gave us all a feel for how small it was. We then met the curator at the cottage door. She invited us in and began to tell us about Poe's life. I immediately noticed that she had made a factual mistake about Poe's family. So did Donna, one of our Lifestyles participants. Donna raised her hand and politely said: "Excuse me, but Professor Mary taught us that Poe had two siblings." The curator had just told us Poe had no siblings. The curator looked to me for validation and I replied that "Donna is correct. Poe had two siblings." I was stunned to realize that my teaching, along with Louise's re-enforcement, helped the students

from Lifestyles retain the information in their memory banks! This boded well for our attempts to develop "found poetry" for publication.

Before our next class, we had the ESC students read the aforementioned *New York Times* article<sup>4</sup> on Poe for homework. These students were asked to think about the instructions they wanted to convey to Lifestyles students for composing a found poem. We did not ask the Lifestyles students to read the article for comprehension. Instead, we told them to "mine" the article for poetic ideas; we asked them to circle the words that spoke to them about Poe and cross out words they felt were not necessary for their composition. The words that were circled were brought to our next class. The ESC and Lifestyles students worked together in groups to discuss what words held the potential for a found poem. Each group was to compose one found poem. It was slow-going at first, but eventually, the students got the hang of it. The Lifestyles students were told to bring their initial efforts back to their classroom at Lifestyles to continue working on them. The ESC students were asked to prepare to help the Lifestyles students with the redrafting process in the next class.

In that next class, all the students worked together to polish their poems enough to get up and read what they had written. They tackled this task eagerly and were anxious to get up to read. In this class, we began to realize how eager the Lifestyles students were to get up in front of the class and share. This is something I always hesitated in pushing. I did not want the Lifestyles students to feel awkward or uncomfortable. So, for the future, we planned to do more reading out loud and have informal poetry slams where the Lifestyles students had the opportunity to read aloud with the help of their Empire State College partners. We built time into our next class to accommodate this new direction.

After the poetry was carefully edited, I wrote the article for *The New York Times* Learning Network. I gathered all of the poetry and sent it to Kathleen Schulten. She was delighted with the poetry and decided it would work well for the lesson plan site on Halloween. True to her word, she published<sup>6</sup> it on October 25, 2018, shortly before Halloween. Every poem was uploaded. I was excited by the opportunity to share our work with the outside world!

As had happened in the first term of this program, our second term Empire State College students extolled the virtues of our Lifestyles partners in their journals. Each week, these ESC students were required to write two to three pages in their journals about their in-classroom observations. Here is a comment from one student that I found to be typical of ESC student responses:

*"Dawn, (from Lifestyles) was in our group. Absolutely amazes me and brings me to tears every single week. She is so eager to learn and participate. I love that although her speech is impaired (by cerebral palsy) she doesn't let it get in her way. She is not afraid or embarrassed to speak in group or in front of the whole class. She*

*takes beautiful notes and takes her work seriously. And may I add that she is a very smart cookie."*

The Empire State College students wrote that they had learned a great deal about a group of people who have been marginalized and denied the opportunity to develop their strengths. They learned about their Lifestyles partners' lives, their likes and dislikes, and their daily challenges. Many of my ESC students felt that we, as a society, could do much better. For example, Lifestyles students "age out" of the formal education system at age 21 and are typically not afforded any college academic opportunities. The ESC students related that although our partnership with Lifestyles tries to address the inadequacies of our society, it was not enough. Who knows the potential of these individuals? What time

has been wasted? What opportunities have been lost? All of us felt that the Lifestyles students with whom we worked are differently-abled and face too many barriers to experience true fulfillment. What is the answer? Why not open the doors of the colleges, help them in and let us find out?

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Lifestyles for the Disabled website: <https://www.lfdsi.org/>.
- <sup>2</sup> About the College Partnerships: <https://www.lfdsi.org/college-partnerships>.
- <sup>3</sup> *The New York Times'* Ninth Annual Found Poem Student Contest: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/28/learning/our-ninth-annual-found-poem-student-contest.html>.
- <sup>4</sup> Exhibition Review of "The Writer and Man, Evermore": <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/04/books/edgar-allan-poe-exhibition-opens-at-the-morgan.html>.
- <sup>5</sup> Edgar Allen Poe Cottage website: <http://bronxhistoricalsociety.org/poe-cottage/>.
- <sup>6</sup> "Reader Idea: College Students and Disabled Adults Create Spooky Found Poetry Together": <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/learning/reader-idea-college-students-and-disabled-adults-create-spooky-found-poetry-together.html>.



<b>Student Poetry</b>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Edgar Allan Poe</b> <b>Nicole, Michele, Megan S. and Jennifer R.</b></p> <p>Edgar Allan Poe unluckiest, misunderstood writer</p> <p>His reputation, misfortunes were found morbid</p> <p>His mysterious soul was lost in death but he found redemption</p> <p>His respectable horror stories were found deranged</p> <p>Poe's sunken eyes, haunted look by Terror of the Soul</p> <p>His poem, The Raven, jet-black and red dark</p> <p>was seen with every shade of thought or emotion</p> <p>Poe suffered through poverty and drinking forever</p> <p>He was a deadbeat, drunkard and wooer of woman</p> <p>His Gothic imagination was exaggerated and obsessed</p> <p>He was a highly gifted person trapped in his own head</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Edgar Allan Poe</b> <b>Elisa L., Dawn S.,</b> <b>Michele, Julia and Vittoria</b></p> <p>Unluckiest, Misunderstood, Morbid, Damnation, Redemption, Mysterious, Death</p> <p>Soul Lost Beyond All Hope of Redemption</p> <p>Finally Respectable</p> <p>High minded, deranged and claustrophobia</p> <p>Terror of the soul</p> <p>The Raven</p> <p>Derailed train smashed a headstone</p> <p>Scattered, Haunted look, sunken eyes</p> <p>Large jet black lashes, iris dark steel-gray possessing transparency, jet black pupil</p> <p>Elusive, maddened and drinking</p> <p>Suffered and Died</p> <p>Hostility, Weird, Obsessed, gothic writing</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Edgar Allan Poe</b> <b>Kathryn P., Jestine and Donna W.</b></p> <p>Unluckiest</p> <p>Misunderstood</p> <p>Thoughtful</p> <p>Reputation</p> <p>Misfortunes</p> <p>Morbid</p> <p>Mysterious</p> <p>Victim</p> <p>Unshakable</p> <p>Horror stories</p> <p>Suspicion</p> <p>Deranged</p> <p>Death</p> <p>Grave</p>

## From the Personal to the Sociological: Why the Ramones Matter

Donna Gaines, Garden City

**T**here is a backstory here: In 1996, I walked into the editorial offices of the *Village Voice* to pick up my paycheck. The mighty Ramones were retiring, and a music editor asked if I wanted to interview the seminal punk band. She knew I was a fan from Rockaway Beach, Queens, a surf town made famous by the Ramones. I said yes, interviewed the band, the *Voice* published the story and here we are.

Once you got involved with the Ramones, you never got away.

Unlike so many heroes, the Ramones were exactly who they claimed to be: down to earth, hardworking, generous, brilliant, funny, loyal, and completely nuts. In time, I would write the band's induction essay into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, the liner notes for Rhino Records' reissue of the Ramones' first two albums, promote their solo projects, and list their shows in the *Village Voice*. I was profiled with Joey Ramone in a sociology textbook and I wrote their obituaries. Between 2001 and 2011, each of the original Ramones — Joey, Dee Dee, Tommy, and Johnny — departed this earthly plane, immortalized as perfect masters — the founding fathers of punk music.

Like the Ramones, four friends from Forest Hills, I too grew up in Queens, spent most of high school hanging out on street corners looking for adventure. Like them, I barely attended high school, was bored, irritable, restless, and discontented, I hated everyone and everything. Like millions of alienated kids around the world, then and now, in the Ramones, I had found a home. To date, I remain deeply immersed

in the post-Ramones Empire, a worldwide community of kindred souls, intergenerational, international.

In 2017, I was invited to contribute to a new "Music Matters" series published by the University of Texas Press. The assignment (and my book title) was to articulate why the Ramones matter. Part memoir, part eulogy, part encomium, I argued that the Ramones mattered socially, historically, politically, creatively, and personally. Since publication, I've done book readings at bars, churches, scholarly conferences, literary festivals, libraries, and record stores. I teach several courses dealing with youth and music studies, and the material in my book, *Why the Ramones Matter* (2018), resonates with themes of youth alienation, trauma, deviance theory, suburban studies, music therapy, oppositional music subculture, and popular culture. Since my courses at SUNY Empire State College are offered collegewide, I don't always get to meet my students in person. Invariably, my students are doing critical work in human services, sociology or the performing arts. My great pleasure has been to meet my students face-to-face while on tour, celebrating music we love, introducing them to my own mentors — editors, other music writers, and the musicians we admire.

Yes, we have our share of Ramones fans here at ESC, including members of staff, faculty, and administration. I've spent the year publically celebrating the Ramones' legacy. Here are some of the reasons the Ramones matter to me and to you.



Donna Gaines

By the late 1970s, the original punks had already tweaked the progressive imagination as the Sex Pistols puked up raw chaos, anarchy and nihilism in epic style; and the Sandinista combat rock of The Clash schooled us about power, position and resistance. Ironically, it is America's apolitical/anti-political Ramones who now emerge as the most subversive of all. Avoiding rhetoric, dogma, or sloganeering, the brilliantly goofy comic bubblegum fiends managed to overthrow the order of things.

The Ramones eponymous first album, now widely regarded as "the shot heard round the world" sparking punk's cultural rebellion established it as a distinctive new musical genre. Their aim was true: dethrone classic rock, displace the dinosaurs, seize the airwaves. Following the 1976 release of *Ramones*, kids around the world jumped in, smashing disco, starting bands, building home recording studios, forging independent labels, generating fanzines, chopping their hair, appropriating

seedy bars, fully embracing the band's DIY (do-it-yourself) ethic of self-sufficiency, arresting the means of music production.

The Ramones' mission was to save rock 'n' roll, to reclaim it for the greater glory of rock 'n' roll radio, to the people. They challenged kids to recognize and transform the available resources of everyday life, redefine identity, rethink norms of personal beauty and the meaning of musicianship itself. Authenticity displaced mastery, creativity replaced boredom. Shut out from disco's velvet ropes and arena rock's hefty ticket pricing, now the kids had something to do.

Over 22 years, 2,263 shows, and 37 albums including studio, live, and compilation, the Ramones sustained a withering assault on the societal institutions that impinged upon young people. The four founding Ramones were marginal, non-affluent outcasts on the streets of Forest Hills, Queens. They came of age as the American dream was running out of gas. Peace and love had wiped out on the last wave leaving broken promises, economic stagnation, drugs, busted families, joblessness, and psychic dislocation.

1-2-3-4! In *Lobotomy: Surviving the Ramones* (2000), Dee Dee's autobiography, the Ramones' original bass player described himself and his bandmates as "the obvious creeps of the neighborhood" (p. 54). Joey, the iconic lead singer, spent most of his late adolescence in and out of mental hospitals, reviled by his peers for being tall, gawky, and bespectacled. In Johnny's memoir, *Commando* (2012), the guitarist, a former heroin addict and thug, explained his younger years — "I was just bad, every minute of the day" (p. 29) — until a spiritual awakening changed his tune. Original mastermind/drummer/producer Tommy was mercilessly bullied for being small and "foreign," a Hungarian refugee whose extended family had been wiped out in the Holocaust. The Ramones identified

as social rejects, irritable, restless, and discontented, alienated at home, in school and on the streets. Outsiders, outside of everything.

Like Black Sabbath, Public Enemy, or Nirvana, the Ramones shared similar broken histories with their audiences, forging deep, unbreakable, visceral ties to their fan base. Years after the band retired and passed away, the Ramones' fans pray to them, lighting votive candles, asking for their guidance, reflecting, "What Would Joey Do?"

The Ramones' songs urge the fans to embrace their own weirdness — zits, farts, flab, flaws and all. They challenge us to make difference an asset, not a liability. In "Pinhead," the Ramones put forth a stunning social contract with their fans, gathering all the cretins, warhogs, and misfits in from the margins, creating safe space, new meaning and community, locally and globally. Borrowing the song's infamous chant, "Gabba Gabba," and their mascot, Zippy the Pinhead from Tod Browning's 1932 horror film, *Freaks*, the Ramones extended their invitation to all, proclaiming we accept you, one of us. Their spirituality of imperfection negated stigma by appropriating it and turning it into a vicious little pop tune. Instead of shame and rejection, the Ramones offered kids friendship and unconditional love. To this day, "Gabba Gabba Hey" is a universal greeting among Ramones fans in any language.

God gave rock 'n' roll to you and sent the Ramones to Earth to protect and defend it. The band made a point of playing in small towns and suburbs, in flyover states that most touring musicians overlooked, where kids rarely got to hear or dance to live music. Spreading the Good News about rock 'n' roll was the Ramones ministry; this music belongs to you, anyone can do it. In their populist utopia, all you needed to be part of it was a pair of old jeans, some sneakers, and a T-shirt, basic street clothes most kids already had. A black leather motorcycle jacket would

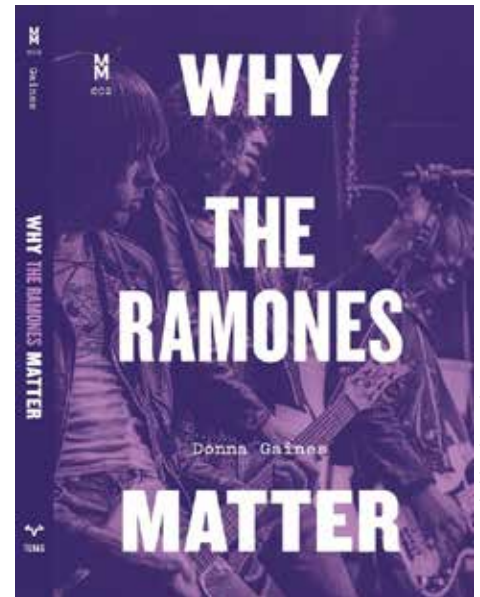


Image provided by the author.

likely be the only significant investment. You didn't need a perfect body or a perfect mind, you just showed up. The Ramones were accessible to their fans on punk principle. As Joey had said, and Marky too, they hated that whole rock star thing.

For the Ramones, organic intellectuals, the personal was the political, the social, the historical, and the cultural. As sons of World War II veterans, the Ramones were well-positioned to use popular culture in a critical way, to examine the scar tissue left behind by the parental generation, the unspeakable horror and carnage, the devastating impact war had on our damaged combat veteran dads, untreated — a residual trauma so deeply embedded in the fabric of American family life. The Ramones also made fun of the Nazis, rendering them frantic, impotent, cartoonish psychos. In time, with subtle wit and rueful tenderness, the Ramones took on most of the hidden injuries of youth — generational legacies, the fallout of family violence, incest, abandonment, war, addiction, immigration. They called out the lies and betrayals and stood up to injustice without ever getting in your face.

Like prayers and sacred mantras, the Ramones' music offered courage and a good laugh no matter what

the day brought. They had a song for everything. Trapped in a sick family, a punitive school system, remanded to psychotherapy? So what? You're laughing in your head, gone mental, a bad, bad brain, a teenage lobotomy, a time bomb, baby. In "Chinese Rocks" and later, in "Born to Die in Berlin," principle songwriter Dee Dee considered the pleasure and danger of heroin addiction — the progressive disease that ultimately killed him. The Ramones had fun with familial dysfunction, too — we're a happy family, a cretin family. Songs of resentment, I don't wanna walk around with you, I don't care. Songs of longing, I wanted everything, Danny said, I wanna be your boyfriend. But above all, the Ramones wanted you to have fun — to hitch a ride to Rockaway Beach, to believe in miracles, dance, howl at the moon, find lovely locket love, eat chicken vindaloo.

The Ramones had your back, from old Hanoi to East Berlin. Some 43 years later, they still do. Whether you were a misfit in 1964, 1994, or 2014, you knew the Ramones were talking to you. An ethic of inclusion is at the core of the Ramones ministry, as effective today as it was in the beginning — just ask the kids in Argentina. With latter-day Ramones Marky and C.J. keeping the flames high, touring and recording, the fan base now includes several generations of young people, worldwide. It's as if the Ramones never left the stage, or this Earth.

There's a long, rich legacy of critical literature dedicated to dismantling ideologies, waking people up from the trance states of their oppression, decoding the scripts of institutionalized racism, class and gender subordination, colonialism, patriarchy. Youth music, too, aims at truth-telling — in real life, parents hurt kids, teachers can be soul-killing monsters, the "good kids" can be



Donna Gaines with Joey Ramone.

brutally cruel, life can be meaningless, unfair, and boring. Love, terrifying and painful. The Ramones never promised us a rose garden, but they did hold the lamp of enlightenment bright and steady while we crawled through life's good, bad and ugly tunnels. Over time, they would address almost every cruelty the social order could inflict on the individual, and always with sarcasm, wit, and irony. Playing loud and past the speed of light, they wrapped the brutal truth in sweet, chewy bubblegum pop — otherwise we would have slit our wrists. And if you were happy, well-adjusted, all aboard for funtime, hey, you got that too.

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# The Complex Nature of Success in Human Services Students

Thalia MacMillan, Manhattan

## Introduction

"Complex" is a term that is used to characterize something that has multiple parts or represent a concept that is hard to analyze or solve. When it comes to student success, truly we have more questions than answers. One could postulate that "complex" adequately captures student success on the collegiate level.

Research has demonstrated that student success is an enigma; it is comprised of personal, cultural, and programmatic components (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016; HighPoint, 2017; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Personal components represent elements of self-efficacy, previous academic success, or motivation (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Kuh et al., 2006). Programmatic components may include the presence of supports, degree completion, or course completion (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016; Kuh et al., 2006). However, each of these components has been found to be complex as they work together to influence how one individual may define student success.

Depending on the methodology utilized, student success has been quantified as course-based, degree-based, personal, or a combination of all three (Ćukušić, Garača, & Jadrić, 2014; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Smith & White, 2015). While research has tended to focus solely on the undergraduate population (Almeida, Guisande, & Paisana, 2012; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Kuh et al., 2006; Petty, 2014), there is a dearth of research examining success in adult or nontraditional students and/or those interested in human services.

The nontraditional student population is unique in its interests, needs, and assumptions; given current trends, the nontraditional student could be considered the "new traditional" student on college campuses (Sisselman-Borgia & MacMillan, 2018). Unlike other areas, human services students are connected with the professional sector as coursework intersects theory with practical application. Adult students in professional areas, such as human services, are more likely to already be working in the field, be working in the field and wish to increase their responsibilities, or be individuals changing careers or those who are new to the job market (MacMillan, 2018). Such individuals are used to deadlines or managing expectations, hence they may be looking for a deeper connection with their studies than those who have never worked before. Coupling with being a nontraditional student, each of these four groups may have very different definitions of what it means to be successful; as a result, they may utilize resources in a very different manner.

Further, it has been noted that if students feel that the college (or department) understands how they view success, they may feel validated, wish to learn and achieve, and have higher self-efficacy in the degree completion process (Adney, 2012; Cuseo, 2016; Gipson, 2016; Lemmens, du Plessis, & Maree, 2011). This suggests that there is a need to understand a student's own definition of success, how being a nontraditional student impacts this, and how professional sector students, such as those in human services, may define it.



Thalia MacMillan

## The Research

A qualitative study was undertaken with human services studies in order to understand how they define the concept of student success. For this IRB-approved study, a nonprobability convenience sample of current and recently graduated human services students was utilized. Participants were recruited via several methods: information shared by their mentor, postings in human services online courses, and flyers posted around local centers. Students were given the name of the researcher to contact if they were willing to participate in the study.

Fifteen individuals were willing to take part in the qualitative interview. Each participant was interviewed at a time convenient for him/her over Zoom; the researcher conducted all interviews. Individuals were asked if the interview could be recorded for ease of transcribing; all individuals were emailed a copy of the consent form and gave consent prior to taking part in the

interview. All interviews lasted between 35 minutes to an hour. Students were debriefed at the end of each interview.

Grounded theory methodology was utilized to code all data garnered from the interviews. Three individuals, including two undergraduate research students and the researcher, coded the data. All three utilized sample data to practice coding patterns. This helped to gauge total agreement on all coding patterns that were seen in the data.

The qualitative questions asked about definitions of success, what has impacted success, what type of things would help an individual to be successful, the evolution of success over time, and the type of experience at SUNY Empire State College and how it relates to experiences at other colleges. A brief discussion of the overarching themes from the definition of success and evolution of success will be shared.

### **Emerging Themes**

With respect to defining success in college, several interesting themes emerged. Students highlighted that success meant a deeper connection to the school work, concepts, or instructor-student relationship. The themes included:

- Grasping the concepts.
- Applying the concepts.
- Engagement with the instructor.
- Producing quality work.
- Being able to overcome issues that arose in the course and in life.
- Achieving good grades.

Truly, success was more than just motivation or grade point average (GPA); it was an understanding of the material and a connection with the instructor.

As noted by one participant: *“I define success in 2 ways. I define success by the amount of work the student is willing to put into the course. I also define success by the instructor giving feedback — either positive or negative. I work very hard and love online courses. I do a lot of the work.*

*If an instructor is not giving me feedback or letting me know how I'm doing — then how do I know how to improve?”*

Another student indicated: *“Well I think you'd be surprised — at one point I'd say grades. At this point it doesn't really matter. Getting that piece of paper, I can move on to the next level. Right now a bachelor's degree means nothing. I am learning something that can be applicable to the real world.”*

Several themes also emerged with respect to the evolution of success, or how success has personally changed over time for them. Several students reported that in their previous schooling they may have defined it one way but now seen it differently. These themes included:

- Feeling good about what you are doing and yourself.
- Feeling content with what you are learning.
- Realizing who you are and how you can push yourself to succeed.
- Feeling confident in what you are doing.
- Being able to adjust.
- Feeling like you can grow as an individual.
- Thinking about all parts of your life while in school.
- Building a mentoring relationship.

These themes reflect more of a personal or intrinsic change in success, and that the individual has a personal connection to success.

*“Truly, success was more than more than just motivation or grade point average (GPA); it was an understanding of the material and a connection with the instructor.”*

As noted by one student: *“It's evolved over time as I've gotten older. Am back to school now and am working on my bachelor's and hopefully master's. When I was younger, I had a lot going on. Didn't take school as seriously as I do now. Didn't put the time in. Didn't get out of it what I should have. Now — I have a family, a job. Need to have goals for yourself. Just don't sign up for any course. Have an expectation for yourself and for the professor.”*

Another student noted: *“In the beginning of my college career, it was getting through the work. I didn't really understand the importance of being able to apply it to the real world. Applicability is definitely the major change.”*

### **Beyond the Grade**

The results of this qualitative study illustrate that success in college for human services students goes beyond the grade. The themes suggest that unlike previous research that has indicated GPA is a measure of student success (Palmer, Maramba, & Holmes, 2011), success for human services students is complex. Success represents an intersection of learning, application, engagement, quality, personal drive, sense of self, and an active partnership with the instructor/mentor.

Previous research has utilized mainly quantitative research designs (Kingston & Anderson, 2013; Palmer, Maramba, & Holmes, 2011; Smith & White, 2015). One limitation of this is that, even with multifactorial models, this type of design does not necessarily explain the complex nature of success as found in this study. Students did not mention just one factor being the key to their success, they mentioned several factors. Current definitions of success were influenced by the evolving nature of success, meaning the complex nature of one concept was influenced by personal factors and factors related to the course itself.



The atmosphere of the classroom is one that influenced success for the student in a multitude of ways. As a result of feeling connected to the material or to the instructor, the atmosphere has the potential to make a student feel like they are succeeding or not. As noted by several students, engagement with the instructor and/or mentor was a crucial part of their success. As the instructor or mentor could be seen as a window into the department or field of study, any type of feedback from or engagement with the instructor was welcomed; this included negative or positive feedback.

Given this, and how complex student success may be, one could postulate that we need to rethink factors about the course and/or academic support. Students may feel like they are succeeding if they can successfully engage with the coursework, activities, assignments, and/or resources. It could be that certain types of activities or assignments within a course may help an individual to feel more engaged and therefore more successful. Further professional development could be conducted with instructors to ensure quality engagement with students.

#### Note

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## An ESC Digest and Evaluation: When and Where I Entered

Robert Carey, Mentor Emeritus, Brooklyn

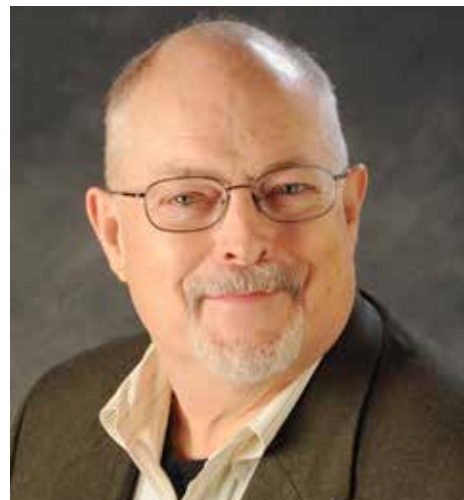
**M**y career at SUNY Empire State College started in the summer of 1973. I took a Greyhound bus to Saratoga from New York City to meet with Jim Hall, the president (I thought he was the chaplain — he had a charming smile and a lot of curly hair), Loren Baritz (whom I knew from Wesleyan University) and then, in turn, Bill Dodge, who would be my first dean and Virginia Lester, who would be my associate dean. I entered the college, to put it more programmatically, on page 60 of the 1972 *Master Plan* (Empire State College, 1973). On that page and the pages following was a description of the SUNY Urban Study Center. Located in New York City, it was to have no permanent faculty of its own, but was to draw on SUNY resources in providing visiting students from “State University campuses” the opportunity “to plan Programs of Study built upon the rich learning opportunities of the Metropolitan area” (p. 63) — a kind of study abroad opportunity for SUNY students. One of the sources students would be able to use was the Religion in the City Program, supported by a grant from the Edward W. Hazen Foundation. It was to admit its first students in the fall of 1973. I would be there to greet them.

That is how my career at ESC began. Over the course of 45 years, I would be a mentor in the Center for Statewide Programs, a mentor in the Metropolitan Regional Learning Center, an associate dean at the Metropolitan Regional Learning Center, a graduate dean, a mentor at the Metropolitan Center (again), an acting associate dean, a unit coordinator at the Staten Island Unit of

the Metropolitan Center and, finally, a unit coordinator at the Brooklyn Unit of the Metropolitan Center.

When I became a member of the faculty, the college (and SUNY) was fully supported by the state of New York. These were the Governor Nelson Rockefeller years. That would change dramatically during the Hugh Carey years — we went from being fully supported to beginning the long march toward being “kind of associated” with the state of New York. SUNY and its member campuses would have to learn a new kind of nimbleness in the coming years as state support for higher education began to wane, speeded along at times by governors and SUNY board members who were not supporters of public higher education.

The college was made up of regional centers, the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies and the Collegewide Division, which became the Center for Statewide Programs and the Center for New Careers, which became the Hudson Valley Center. The *Master Plan* anticipated the development of a graduate school: that got underway in the ‘80s. The college’s organizational chart would change time and again over the years, for budgetary or programmatic reasons. For a stretch, it would be two colleges. The Center for Distance Learning was a child of the internet and became the public regarding face of ESC — College Number 1; the regional centers (the earlier, analog version of the college) were now College Number 2. They met like tectonic plates in the reorganization work that marked the end of the centers. All of that lay ahead of us. In the meantime, the day-to-day work



Robert Carey

of being a mentor and working with students (and each other) was more than enough to pass the time.

Some early initiatives didn’t quite work out. The college had a “development faculty” early on; the idea was that they would develop “modules” — self-contained studies that mentors and students could use as a student planned a degree — our version of the British Open University materials. (Theirs were extraordinarily detailed; ours — not so much.) I remember that Kenneth Burke did one or two that I thought were very cool at the time. My favorite was “The Myth of St. Petersburg.” I am still waiting for a student to show up wanting to do that module. Each office had a bunch of these things, but over time, they got tossed or shredded.

### Who Showed Up?

One of the things that happened very shortly after the college opened its door was that the people who were supposed to show up and do interesting

things in the city, did not show up and, in all likelihood, would never show up. SUNY faculty who were supposed to participate were busy with their campuses and programs. So, who did show up? People, adults mostly, who wanted to finish degrees and who had heard that the college offered credit for life learning. My conversations with prospective students were not about religious studies but usually about what else they might be able to study — psychology, any pre-MSW studies, maybe some literature and how long it would take to get their degree. I did work with some students who wanted to finish a degree so they could go on to seminary. Most of them did not need “religion in the city” (many of them were pastors in storefront churches or congregations housed in former movie theaters) as much as a lot of liberal arts and skill development. So the Urban Study Center grew, just not in the way anticipated by the *Master Plan*.

One thing that attracted students was the idea of credit for experiential learning. One of the constants of being a mentor was explaining that process — what the college understood prior learning to mean, how college-level learning was determined, what means and measures were involved, and not least of all, how to caution against inflated notions of how many credits would be forthcoming in the process. One of the images I used again and again in talking with students and in doing information sessions for prospective students was the image of a pretzel twister.

It went along the lines of — *“OK, you want to get credits for what you have learned. You have been a pretzel twister for a long time — so there should be a lot of credit for all that learning — right? Well, no, actually. You learned to twist pretzels in one day — that is when the learning occurred. You have been doing the same thing again and again and again — not learning anything new, but repeating what you know. So you would get a bit of credit for what you learned — not for repetition.”*

ESC’s vocabulary — mentor, degree program, general learning, contract concentration, evaluation, individualization — recalled the known and familiar — teacher/advisor, degree requirements, a major, liberal arts requirements, grades, introductory/advanced, syllabus, course, teaching and learning. But our “lingo” had a gauzy quality to it, so working as a mentor meant detailed and seemingly endless explanations about what a student could or couldn’t do, what the college meant by “experiential learning” or “concentration,” what “individualization” meant and where and when it could happen.

In addition to translating the college’s language for students, working as a faculty member meant being party to what would become a permanent conversation about workload and count and student readiness — usually occasioned by assessment committee work and the review of student degree program rationales, a species of writing peculiar to Empire State and the source of various types of educational angst. The idea of the degree program, early on, was that the mentor and student would put it together — charting what the student would do to finish the degree. It would be approved and then serve as a guide. It sort of did that in many cases, but increasingly, over the years, it would not be uncommon to see a degree program needing review and approval so someone could graduate. Rather than serving as a guide, it increasingly was an exit activity for many students.

### **From Soft to Hard**

When I started at the college, the “month” was the unit of credit. If a student was doing 16 credits of work — a full-time student’s term load — the contract (the document describing the work) would have “4 months” listed in the space where credit was indicated. The “month,” as I recall was actually three weeks and change, but we counted a month as four weeks.

When you count a calendar year’s months as four weeks each, you end up with a year of 13 months. That extra month was the reading period from late-July to mid-August — not a vacation, mind you. A faculty member had to be “professionally available,” but had a no appointment period for evaluating student work, doing research, getting new material developed for studies. That was the idea. One of the things that it meant in practice is that I could create a contract that would cover two terms of work because of the way enrollment worked.

Enrollment could happen on any working day — except for reading period. It was a continuous enrollment process; a student was enrolled unless he/she dis-enrolled. We were orienting students on a monthly basis — starting up, always starting up. At some point, the college had to change this system, but in the meantime, a quickly developed mentoring skill involved engineering enrollment amendments that would prevent the student from being overcharged, or on the other hand, creating a document that covered two terms — the bespoke contract.

Any business day enrollment gave way to **Monday only** — not any weekday, just Monday. Then, another change as we slowly began to return to the mean. Enrollment terms changed from being a student’s enrollment term to being college terms — the familiar summer, fall, spring — with a fall 2 and a spring 2 tucked in. We had an enrollment form that allowed a student to enroll for 16 weeks as a full-time student. Then, a further turning of the dial; we had a standard calendar — there were enrollment periods. If a student missed one, he/she would wait for the next or ask to be shoehorned in as a late enrollee.

Another big change in the way we did things was the coming of SUNY General Education requirements. If you were to find a college “bulletin” (the precursor to the catalog) published before 1996,

you would find language that described a student's degree program as having "depth" and "breadth." In addition to having a robust concentration, the expectation was that students would do studies outside of their "major" and thus have "breadth" in the degree program. That was the idea. It was not framed as a requirement but as something to be considered as the degree program was being formed. Degree programs tended to favor the concentration, the bigger the better, so "breadth" as a reliable design feature was a sometime thing. Very often the "breadth" that we could see was in the concentration, a polite way of saying that the concentration was large. A constant reason for that design discussion — and often a tug of war between a mentor and a student, or an assessment committee that wanted a degree that had two columns — was the student's voiced opinion that he/she did not want to take anything that was extraneous or, from their point of view, beside the point. The assumption that shaped that conversation went something like this: "If I have a lot of studies in my major (concentration) — I will get the job, the promotion, get into graduate school." A kind of course/content magic.

The breadth issue was "solved" in 1996 when the board of trustees of SUNY mandated 10 areas of General Studies requirements for the SUNY system. A group of us went to Asheville, North Carolina for a workshop on developing General Education programs and approaches; we acquired another acronym — GEAR (General Education Assessment Review). The Historical Studies faculty of the college was a big winner. Historical Studies was not a major degree area at ESC — nothing like Community and Human Services, or Business, Management and Economics, the big enrollment drivers, with Human Development as a close third. GEAR had an American History requirement along with a Western Civilization and Other World Civilization as three of the 10 required areas. Some adjustment

was made to the GEAR requirements after a while, going to seven. Degree plan design began to become more routinized.

Degree program planning embraced two things. The first was a student's history — What were they bringing to the college? What was usable? Where did it fit in the scheme of things? This was the top part of the degree plan where transcript credits were listed along with other transcribed learning. Some of them would be in general learning, some would be listed as part of the concentration. Just below that would be a place for credit by evaluation for the concentration or for general learning. The bottom third of the degree program form was for the titles of the contract studies that would complete the degree — satisfying concentration guidelines and/or general learning requirements. The typed degree program and related/relevant documentation and the rationale went to a faculty assessment committee for review — and that is where the discussion of the rationale and student writing would take root and climb like ivy up the walls and over the transom of a center's assessment committee meeting room.

Very early on, assessment committee meetings involved meeting the student whose degree was being reviewed and discussing (and evaluating) their presentation of their experiential learning. One such meeting lingers — the student burst into tears and ran from the room. Documentation and evaluators' reports became the norm as the college gained more experience in sorting out experience and learning. Degree program planning had a way of becoming the land of the undead. Several things contributed to the creation of this twilight zone. A committee would approve a degree program conditionally, requesting the student to revisit his/her rationale and correct some sentences that didn't really work or to clarify what the student hoped to accomplish with the particular

proposed concentration and — in more recent actions — how the concentration satisfied the area of study guidelines. These, it should be noted, had become more specific and department-like over the years. If the student didn't respond to the committee with the necessary revisions, the degree program would sit in limbo until the student realized that they had not gotten a degree and called to ask why.

Or, there were the other "undead." A student got credit for degree program planning; the evaluation was in the file, the credits had been awarded — but nothing had happened. The student had done some exercises and gotten credit but had not submitted a degree program or rationale for review. Another chapter in "forensic" mentoring — meeting with the student, putting the degree program together, getting it evaluated, closing the file, waving goodbye at the door.

The call I dreaded getting as an associate dean or unit coordinator usually began something like this: "Hi, my mentor said I was all finished, but I haven't received my degree and I don't know why." That is when I would put on my "forensic mentoring" scrubs and get started in sorting things out.

*"Hi, my mentor said I was all finished, but I haven't received my degree and I don't know why."*

### **Analog and Digital**

Central to my experience of the college as an institution was that it was always in motion. A center shifted its locations, a program that was started here ended up over there. A good deal of this had to do with growth. The college added centers, centers added faculty, leases

ran out and new offices had to be found. Some of it had to do with budget. After the Rockefeller fat years, Hugh Carey became governor and the lean years began as budgets got leaner — and meaner from SUNY perspectives. It also didn't help that some governors and SUNY trustees weren't big fans of SUNY. So, Empire adjusted and moved administrative furniture — associate deans disappeared. Regional center deans became super deans charged with handling two regional centers rather than one. Faculty chairs didn't take the place of associate deans, really, but they served governance purposes. I was Metro's first faculty chair. At the time, the position was considered radioactive. Associate deans would return as would center deans only to disappear again as reorganization took another turn, and College 1 and 2 morphed into the currently slow to be born, College 3.

The biggest change in many ways was the coming of the internet. Empire started when the "technology" that we had was typewriters — I thought that the IBM Selectric II was as good as things could get — and the Xerox machine. Both of these were considered good technology. We were swimming in paper; everything needed to be typed, vetted, signed, processed and sent to Saratoga. Student files bulged with copies or unprocessed originals. We spent a lot of money on Wite-Out and some documents were lumpy with it.

Our transcript consisted of evaluations. Contracts were followed by digest and evaluations — a transcript document with a vaguely medical-sounding name. D&Es, as they were called, could run for several pages. The original idea was that the evaluations would provide the student with information about how well they were doing and what they might improve. But given the amount of typing and processing of paper involved, the D&E arrived too late to be current news. And, early on, students began to ask for grades. Yikes — we were the non-grading, student-centered,

consultative college that worked to shape intellectual growth. Grades?? Yes, grades — employers wanted them, other registrars wanted them (What is this transcript anyway? Why all this clotted prose?), and students, most of all, wanted them. Grades were what you got from a college. When we moved from paper to an online records system, grades followed as the night followed the day. While I was an associate dean and had to assign grades, I discovered that we (the faculty) had routinized a grading vocabulary. Excellent was, of course, an A; Very good or solid and engaging, was A-and B+ respectively. It took the college a while to use F. The idea of failing didn't figure in the early design. No Credit filled that spot — not exactly an F, more like a redacting of a past event. It sort of hadn't happened. When the college adopted grades, it marked the end of Empire State College for some. At least the first chapter was over.

The computer/internet age arrived. We had computers on our desks and MS-DOS disks in the top right door of our desks. Floppy disks would very quickly give way to hard disks, and dot matrix printers and that buzzing noise they made would be replaced by Hewlett-Packard desktop printers.

Suddenly, a lot of behaviors were out of date. In the analog college, information was something in print. You might need *Books in Print* when you were developing a contract, each regional center had a huge reference binder with information about sources that might be used in developing learning activities. I am not sure that that resource guide was ever used a lot. I know *Books in Print* was essential as was getting on the phone and talking to colleagues.

Student files were fat with drafts, amendments, memos to the file and somewhere along the way, a copy of approved degree plans or copies of degree plans that had been reviewed but didn't pass muster for some reason — usually the rationale was a mess —

and nothing had happened after that. The student hadn't revised, the mentor possibly forgot it, but there it sat. Then we went digital and had to move from a lot of paper to less paper. The behavior didn't change. I still got calls — as a unit coordinator, or as a faculty chair about the same stuff. Only now I could sit at my computer and use Notes DP, the Contract Library and DP Planner to see where things had stopped. We shredded a lot of files.

### **Face-to-Face Good; CDL Bad.**

A major change that followed on the heels of computerizing things was the coming of distance learning. I was on a committee that looked at how the college was going to address the use of computer technology and distance learning (it was not yet "online" learning). If the IBM Selectric and the Xerox had been "good technology," the computer was, as I recall discussions about online/distance/computer-assisted learning, a bad thing. But there was no turning of the tide that was coming our way. Some things changed; others, not so much. The first direct experience of change that I found myself coping with was course design. Not contract, but course work. There would be a contract for the student, but it now arrived as a term-length course, with a number of modules, assignments, requirements for online discussions. The earlier contract style had been a kind of "come on down, we'll have a talk and see what you want to do." Online changed that — this is the course you signed up for — 4 credits, liberal arts, advanced level. No waiting for the contract to be typed and Xeroxed and sent to the student.

The computer helped us do away with a lot of paper, do slightly better on record keeping, even though all of our different academic records systems didn't talk to each other. Still, information retrieval and problem-solving were a good deal crisper. What the computer did most strikingly, I think, was to sharpen the core questions of our work and give them a new urgency.



How should the work of teaching and learning and interacting with students now proceed as they, like us, grappled with mastering the computer and its possibilities? How best to design, to engage, to coach and to coax? Was there an app for that? Not really. All those things were and are at the heart of the enterprise of mastering something, of demonstrating comprehension.

At the dead center of things was a question that I used in the Perspectives on Interdisciplinary Study course in the M.A.L.S. (Master of Arts in Liberal Studies) program: How many questions do you have to answer in order to answer the question you want to answer? Next to that, a companion idea really, was my critical reading contract — a study I offered every term after first putting it together when I was an associate dean and was working with a student who was struggling with a reading assignment. She was very bright, but reading was a struggle. She

was, as I would later learn, aliterate. She knew the words but couldn't "see" the meaning, couldn't hear what the author was up to. We were covering "content" but to what end? By the end of the term and a lot of deconstructing articles and some introductory texts, she began, finally, to "see" what a text was about.

What I am left with, after all the changes and moving about, is that moment — and all that is involved in the exchange between reader and text. The final irony is that reading and writing were the crucial "technologies" along with math that our ancestors invented to cope with the world. Every generation has to learn those technologies — the greater the level of comprehension and performance, the better.

Working for that — "I get it," "I see it," "Oh, that's what it means" — is what we are all about. That, for me, was the unchanging task, the dead center of what working with students involved.

It had its moments, as in: "Do I have to read the whole book? Both articles? Do I really have to rewrite this paper or see a writing coach? The college got underway, I think, with an idea of the student as being pretty much at the graduate level — at home with research and writing, able to move easily in the back and forth of analyzing someone's claims. It took a while to realize that those students do enroll from time to time and did some great work — every center had its wall of the best and brightest. But the day in and day out work of mentoring was in fostering insight, coaching, working on comprehension. I loved that.

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# Moments in the Human Condition

## David Fullard, Manhattan

Over the years, I've drawn inspiration from many different photographers, including Gordon Parks, Roy DeCarava, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans, Eugene Smith, Diane Arbus, and Eli Reed. Each of these artists has a unique perspective of the world, and while they seem to be objectively documenting individuals, situations, and conditions, we can see their points of view in the finished product. They bring insight, depth, and an editorial opinion to what they see. Viewing their photographs is akin to having a conversation with them — cheerful banter perhaps, thoughtful discussion, or the occasional heated argument.

As we study and engage with the work of other photographers, oftentimes we become an amalgam of their techniques and their spirit. I believe it is important to honor those sources of inspiration and to identify just how they influence us. Then, as we move on in time, we begin to develop our own vision, our own spirit, our own way of seeing the world.

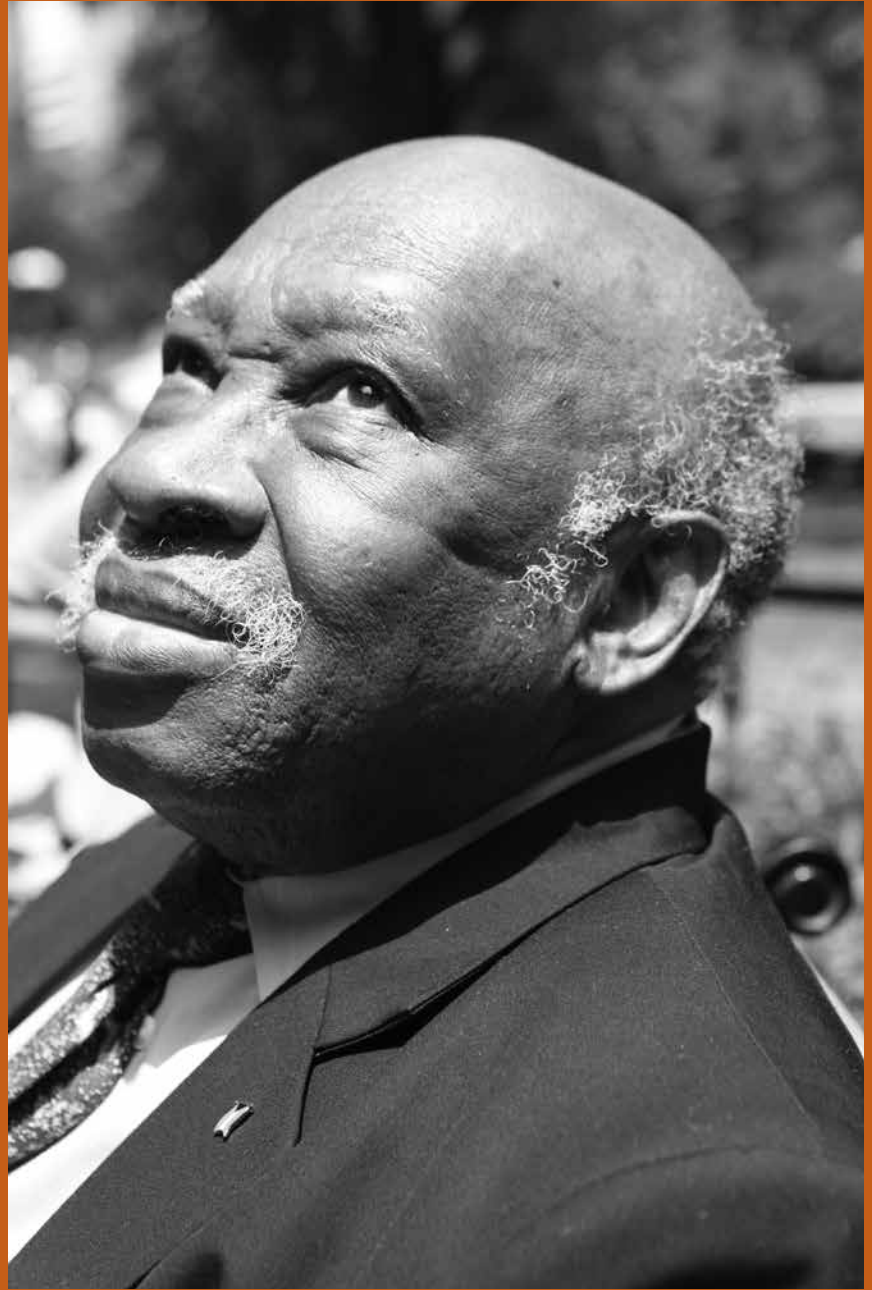
For me, photo reportage, or street photography, is a meditative process. When I select an area of New York City to explore, I become lost in the culture and character of the neighborhood and most importantly, the people who inhabit that neighborhood. My travels expose me to moments that are happy, sad, placid, peaceful, passionate, funny, tragic, and moments that make you go "hmm." In these quasi-contemplative flashes, my eyes take over, and I feel moved by an unseen force that drives what my mind may not immediately grasp. I've learned to trust in that process.

The same force that commands my vision also informs me to either remain behind the lens or interact with the people or scenes I am photographing — which brings me to one of the most magical elements of a photograph: "chemistry," if you're lucky enough to find it.

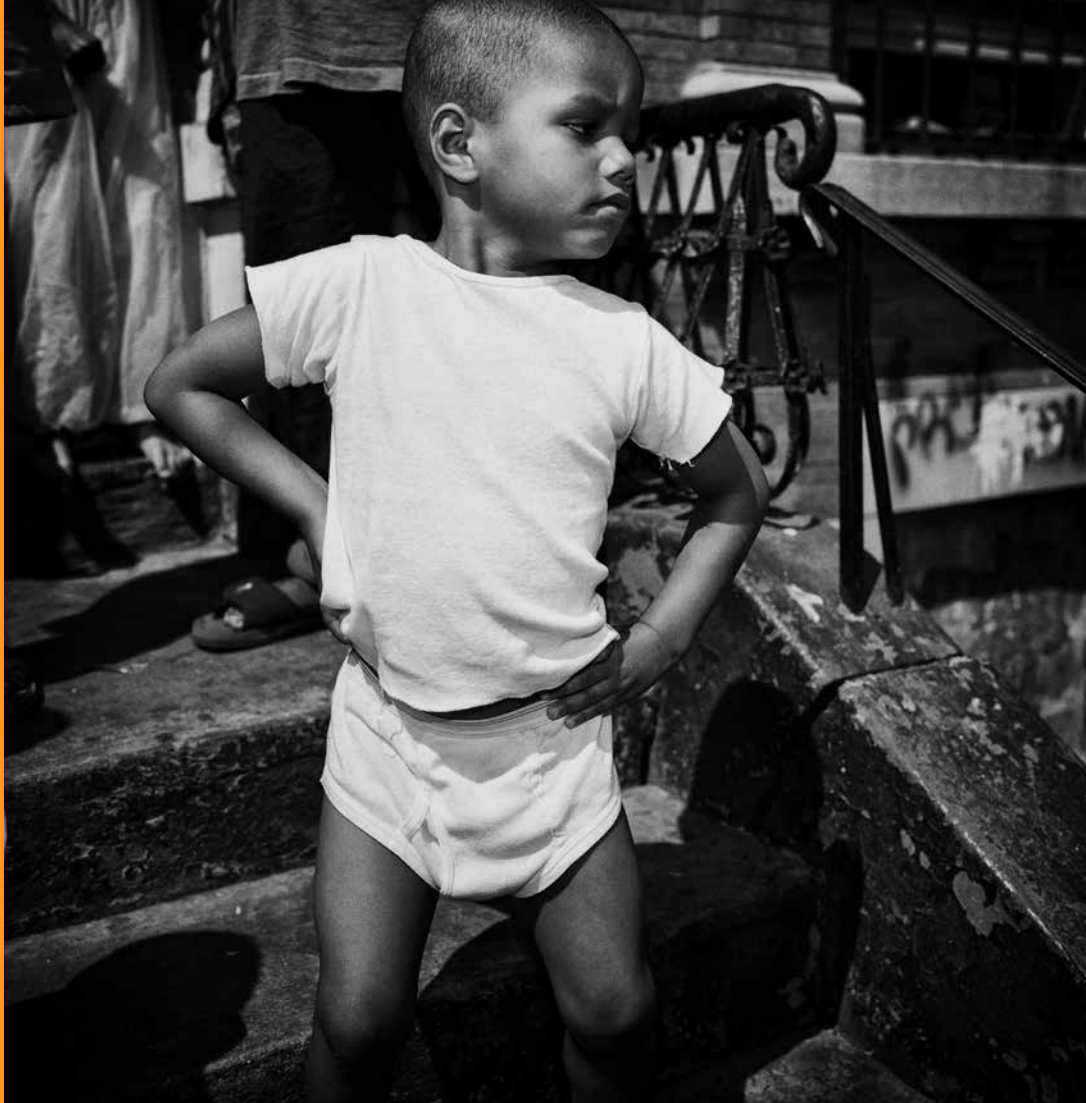
People typically talk about chemistry as it applies to the "feel-good" quality of a new relationship. While this concept of chemistry isn't fully defined, I believe it involves the ebb and flow of any fleeting moment in time. Since that moment usually presents itself as unbidden, it's not something to which I give a massive amount of premeditation. It's instinctual. It's "chemistry." And even one precious moment of connectedness makes my day.

When the visual representation, the experience and the chemistry collide, the output is extraordinary. But typically, it is only after the photo is taken, the moment is gone, and I am alone with my photograph — or see other people's reactions to the final print — that it becomes clear to me just how significant a particular image can be.

A good photographer's work is more than mere reportage; it's a visceral connection to the essence of humanity. This is what I seek to find as I travel through the city. My goal, my hope, my vision is to welcome the viewer to take a virtual walk by my side, join me on my journey to observe and experience the depth of these "Moments in the Human Condition."



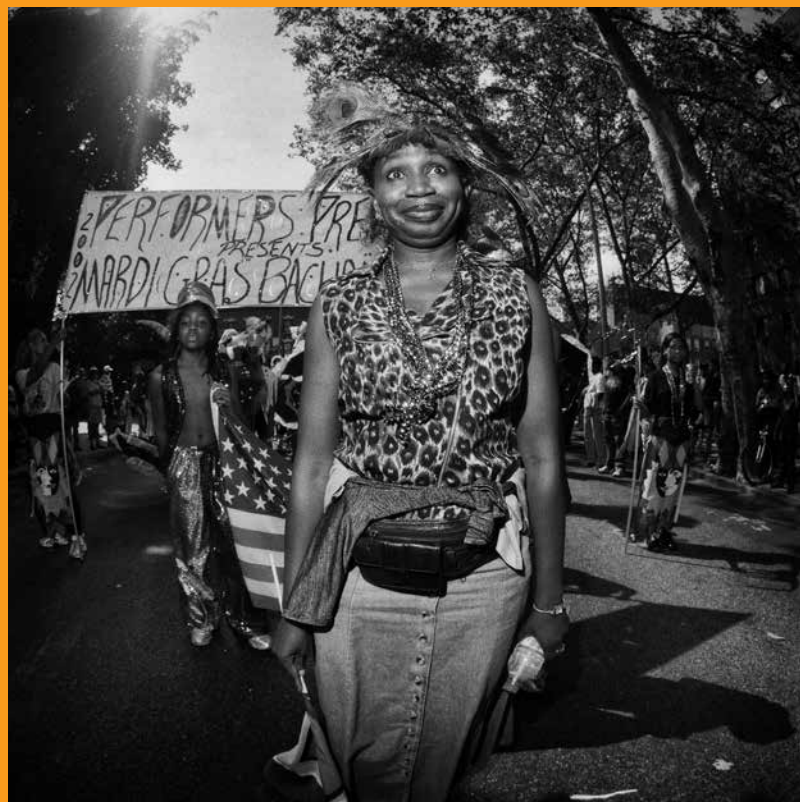
*Emil Moxey*



*I'm Grown*

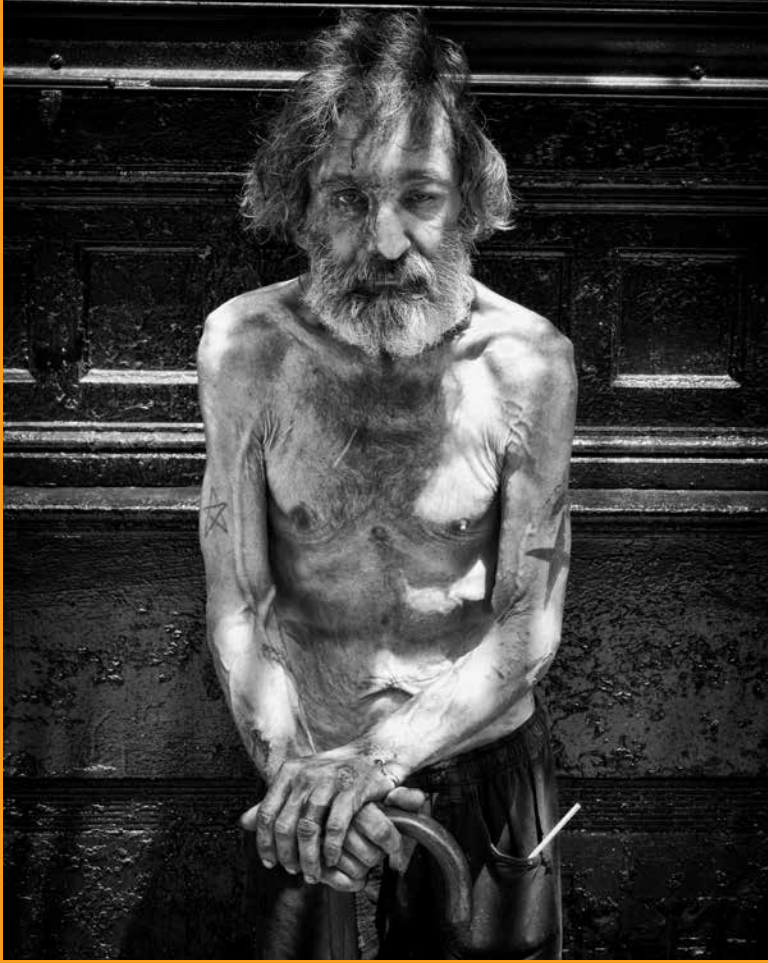


*Happy People*

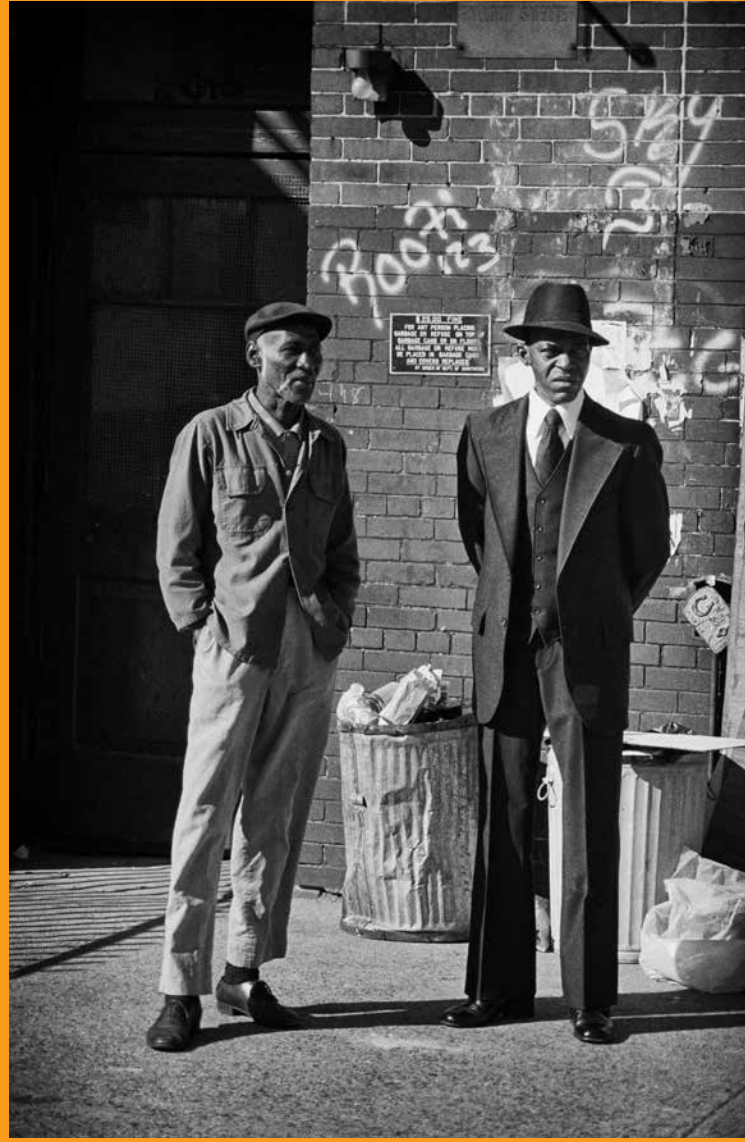


*Overjoyed*





Untitled



Waiting



Invisible



The Artist

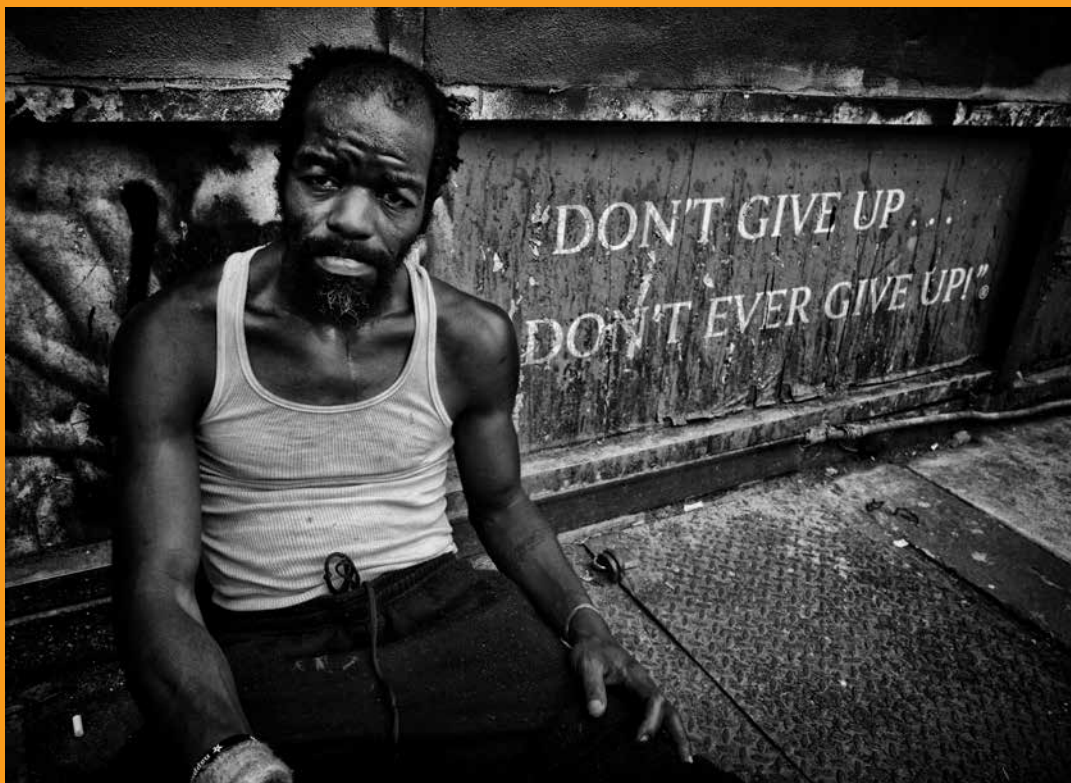


*I Got Soul and I'm Superbad*

“Then, as we move on in time, we start to develop our own vision, our own spirit, our own way of seeing the world.”



*Untitled*



*The Words of the Prophets are Written on the Walls*



# Thoughts by a Pilgrim on EcoPilgrimage

Karyn Pilgrim, Brooklyn

**F**rom my journal, spring 2018:

*A pilgrimage route is so much more than its geography, historical memory, monuments, and ruins. The route has shifted or been buried again and again in the layered sediment of human projects, used, neglected, abandoned, razed, begun again. It houses thousands of species, great and small, but mostly small and microscopic, tucked into its fissures and overflows and tufts of wild, and beneath its settlements, villages, towns. It pulses with electrical impulses, speeding cars, the sonic tremble of passing jets and planes, the buzz and hum of buried cables and pipes, the heartbeats of animals peering out from the foliage, the weary pant and tread of pedestrians. Energy of light and sound, of beings surfacing and intersecting, momentarily snaring one another in their objective-subjective frames. The energy of the dead decaying and the living metabolizing, the fields and machines and fireplaces burning, everything throbbing, seething, decomposing, self-organizing, changing, growing, dying: a pilgrimage route encompasses a massive, shifting site of space and time.*

During my sabbatical year in 2018, I had the opportunity to stay for some months in the Lot Valley of South-Central France. The town, Entraygues-sur-Truyère, nestles in the confluence of two rivers, the Lot and the Truyère, which over thousands of years carved steep gorges between the rolling hills. Its economy today is much like it was in 1000 A.D., a mix of tourism, cattle farming, and gastronomic specialties like blue cheese, beef, and wine. Although overshadowed by the far more popular Dordogne region next door, the Lot has had its fair share of international tourists who pass

through on foot or horseback as they follow Le Chemin de St. Jacques (The Way of St. James), a pilgrimage route of many strands, which passes through France en route to the Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Every afternoon, accompanied by my stalwart yet stubborn Shih Tzu companion, Chevalier, I followed one of the many hiking trails out of town. Soon, I noticed the presence of seashells posted on trees, painted on walls, and plastered on shrines. These shells serve as trail markers along the routes of St. Jacques. As I walked, I thought about the millions of feet, human and nonhuman, that had tread the same ground over the centuries. Some of the trees rustling overhead may have witnessed the first pilgrims heading for Santiago, while most were the antecedents of earlier forests that had grown, thrived, and been felled, even clear cut, many times. I thought about the trail by day, serene and mostly empty, and the trail by night, which four-legged travelers made use of. I thought about how the nature of villages slowly, but sometimes quickly, changed to accommodate the appetites and needs of the strangers passing through. In 2017 alone, the number of pilgrims who completed the journey to Santiago de Compostela exceeded 300,000, while around 2.5 million people visited the city. These numbers don't include those who only walked part of the route. Now think about the many, many sites of pilgrimage and tourist destinations around the world. In today's astonishingly mobile global economy, whole towns are flooded by tides of visitors and then virtually abandoned, according to the season.

The route that I followed had changed, its economies transitioned, populations swelled and shrunk, its habitats altered;



Karyn Pilgrim with her dog, Chevalier.

even so, the route has persisted for 1,200 years, across shifting, fluxing, dissolving, recurring, constantly changing environments. I began to think about pilgrims as tourists, and tourists as pilgrims, and being both a pilgrim (pun intended!) and a tourist, how tourism's ancient roots in pilgrimage may still be a factor shaping our conception of travel today. Because I am both an active participant in and concerned about the scope and shaping power of the global tourist industry, I wondered if the pilgrim's notion of travel as a means to connect with the sacred might be deployed to shape the tourist industry more broadly.

One way of thinking about the nature of the sacred is to consider our culturally constructed boundaries between humans, nonhumans, and inanimate things. While all cultures contain contradictions and multiple ways of considering these boundaries, I find some of the theories emerging recently out of the posthumanities interesting in that they point the way toward non-binary, less anthropocentric ways of





*Details from the doorway of the Abbey Church of Sainte-Foy, Conques.*

imagining ourselves as embedded in the world of things. Perhaps drawing on new ontologies, pilgrimages, and travel more broadly, can provide a means for meditating on, and experiencing, the world in more ecologically vibrant and sustaining ways.

In her book, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Jane Bennett (2010) attempted to locate an agency inherent to all matter. She described this as thing-power, the “strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness” (p. xvi). To illustrate this concept, Bennett offered the example of edible matter, which serves as an “actant operating inside and alongside humankind” (p. xvii) that influences our biophysical reactions, moods, energy and activities, cultural practices, economic systems, labor divisions, and so on. As Bennett explained in Chapter 2 of her book, she was influenced by the concepts of assemblages proposed by Gilles Deleuze. Just as individual things have this register of intensity, so do *assemblages*: groupings of objects that, taken together, exhibit a vitality apart from the sum of their parts. She cited

the 2003 blackout in North America as an assemblage: the blackout’s occurrence was distributed across a vast spectrum of participants in the assemblage, including power lines, power companies, computer programs, hot weather, lifestyles, politicians selling out to privatization, legal documents, a will to master nature, and so on. The grid took on a life of its own, acting unpredictably, with a mysterious agency that caused the electrical current to suddenly reverse course and begin flowing counterclockwise, causing a chain reaction of power outages.

Pilgrimage routes are assemblages, too, of heterogeneous elements and quivering intensities. The routes seethe with organisms and networks of distribution and delivery and are traversed by all manner of traffic, energy flows, rituals, semiotic systems, histories, and lifecycles. Some places along pilgrimage routes have greater intensity, bigger crowds, more traffic, and greater historical and spiritual resonance, demonstrating these “throbbing confederations” that Bennett (2010, p. 23) referred to. As well, the various

sacred objects to which pilgrims travel form their own “throbbing confederacy.” Consider the Reliquary of Sainte-Foy at Conques, a day’s journey by foot from Entraigues. As the story goes, when the monks founded the monastery in 866, they were so jealous of the nearby monastery in Agen, which was blessed with a thriving tourist industry thanks to their possession of the Reliquary of Sainte-Foy, that they sent a monk to join the monastery in Agen. Eventually, he was appointed keeper of the treasury, at which point he stole the reliquary and brought it to Conques, thereby diverting the pilgrimage route. The relic’s power of affectivity came not only from stories and beliefs surrounding it but in other ways intrinsic to its thingness: a bone, a material in transition from being embedded in flesh to being exposed in its boneness, existing as a canvas for precious minerals, a house for microscopic creatures who break it down — an object undergoing transition, perpetually emergent, all the while serving as a magnet for millions of pilgrims and impacting and reshaping the ecology of the two towns.



*Deciduous forests in Aveyron department, Occitanie.*

Like Bennett, ecocritical scholar Stacy Alaimo (2010), in her book *Bodily Natures*, described an environmental justice ethic that extends beyond the human, to incorporate all the bodies within ecologies, and not just or primarily humans. Her ecological ethic is reciprocal: there is no longer an *out there*, she argued because it is already *in here*. Nonhuman subjectivities should be included in the scope of our ethical responsibility and concern. She wrote, "Casting racism as environmental exposes how sociopolitical forces generate landscapes that infiltrate human bodies" (p. 28) while simultaneously excluding consideration for those lower on the social-hierarchical chain. Concerned by the immateriality of postmodern theory — this almost exclusive focus on the world as text, as culturally constructed — she highlighted our ecological embeddedness in a material world, the porosity of life and the absence of discrete boundaries between things. Alaimo called this *transcorporeality*. Transcorporeality reconceptualizes the human body — and all bodies — as intermingling, interconnected, and permeable with others.

In reimagining our ecological relationships, we recognize that what we have labeled as insensate, non-sentient, and lifeless, is in fact pulsing with requiring and desiring lives. This recognition forces us to come to terms with the effects of our actions and understand that we are not separate from the waste we create or the toxic hazards we spread. Rather, we are composed by them. As Alaimo (2010) explained, "By underscoring that trans indicates movement across different sites, trans-corporeality also opens up a mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (p. 2). She traced her theory through several subject areas: toxins released into the environment and bodily responses

as they must act as repositories for the emissions of industrial and postindustrial waste; food, to which she attributed an agency similar to vital materialism; and labor power, caught up in a metabolic economy and ecology. Toxins, for example, blow apart our notion of environmental activism by preservation, because they spread insidiously along waterways, windborne, in the soil, in our blood. "[The] ethical space of trans-corporeality is never an elsewhere but is always already here, in whatever compromised, ever-catalyzing form" (p. 18).

Alaimo urged practical forms of resistance to the dangers of contamination wrought by the Anthropocene, such as citizen science, a ground-up form of gathering data and shaping science based on community experiences and needs, rather than relying on profit-driven research. With a heightened consciousness, citizen scientists can act with a transcorporeal sensitivity and responsibility toward the life systems within their localities, including nonhuman ones, embracing them as a part of the more-than-human community that must be nurtured. Likewise, she encouraged material memoirs that transcribe the experiences of bodies coping with cancer and other diseases with known links to the toxic chemicals that are spread widely across the environment. We live within risk culture, in which the threats to human bodies, and sometimes to ecological environments, are assessed for the threshold between harmless and hazardous. Material memoirs challenge the quantification of harm with their very subjectivity. They bring into focus the other side of the equation of what it means to embrace acceptable risks while illuminating the transcorporeality of bodies.

As an example of embracing risk, Alaimo cited ecologist Sandra Steingraber's idea of an imaginary pilgrimage involving human and nonhuman animals, by which "people with cancer [travel] to various bodies of water known to

be inhabited by animals with cancer" to undertake "an assembly on the banks and shores of these waters and a collective consideration of our intertwined lives" (as cited in Alaimo, 2010, p. 112). Another posthumanities scholar, Timothy Morton, described something similar: Global Earth Exchanges, a Buddhist practice, by which people seek environmentally damaged sites for the purpose of "giving them something beautiful" (p. 127). These examples lead me to wonder what pilgrims could do to give something beautiful to damaged and toxic places they experience in their travels.

Alaimo and Bennett would argue that the concept of the sacred must be dispersed across the terrain. Applying Bennett's theory of vital materialism, we would reject the notion of hierarchies between things, and focus on the vitality of all matter. In going somewhere to seek out the authentic, the untrammelled, the holy, even in a specified and set-apart place, we risk viewing the world with blinders, effectively carving out angles of an experience to manufacture pocket-size landscapes that reflect preconceptions. In fact, everything we find on our two-week vacation or pilgrimage journey is authentic and pulsing with significance, including the Styrofoam packaging piling up in the garbage dump alongside the historical and spiritual sites we have traveled so far to see.

What this means, practically, for travel and pilgrimage, is that we can interrogate deeply, and differently, the possibilities for what we experience and learn when we travel. Thinking about pilgrimage through the lenses of vital materiality and transcorporeality opens vast territory for agency and action. Pilgrims who travel along pilgrimage routes, and people who live there, might initiate ecological knowledge based on their lived experiences, both as inhabitants and observer-participants passing through. All along pilgrimage routes and at key sites, information beyond the historical narratives and



Along Le Chemin de St. Jacques, Lot Valley.

religious rituals could be developed and shared about the dark side of risk society: economic and social inequalities, ecological devastations, the impact of tourism itself, local manifestations of environmentally exacerbated disease, along with activities to make pilgrims aware of nonhumans within the local community. Labor theory and environmental justice awareness,

for example, could be integrated into the route and trailheads, along with awareness practices, and methods for really noticing the animals and microorganisms along the path. Food, too: who makes it, where it is sourced from, how the pilgrim's choice of food contributes to certain chains of action and socioeconomic structures and how it impacts local communities and is

implicated in vast extra-local systems and structures: this knowledge and its attenuating sensitivity must not be separated from the pilgrim, as spiritual seeker or tourist.

The pilgrimage route and the economy of cultural heritage should not cut itself off from the root. The Way of St. James has persisted for over 1,000 years, and so it seems fitting to urge contemporary pilgrims to tend more deeply to its collective continuity. Perhaps another way of saying this is that we cannot afford the illusion that cultural heritage and travel exist in a transcendent state, separate and impermeable to the world of things, and especially not separate from a thing-world caught up in a cycle of harm and risk.

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# Pay It Forward with Mentoring

Teresa A. Smith, Saratoga Springs

This is a life story about mentoring. It is not a scholarly article steeped in research or the impressive (and massive) literature-based evidence that exists about mentoring. It is a story born out of purposeful self-reflection on the mentoring moments of a 40-year professional history, many for which I was in the role of mentee. Purposeful self-reflection is a phrase that evokes not only thinking about and remembering significant events but also connecting those events to life in a meaningful way. The accumulation of mentoring moments has helped me to build a repertoire of skills for future use in mentoring others, nurses, students, and colleagues alike. With that in mind, I hope you will continue to read this narrative, engage in your own purposeful self-reflection, and share your mentoring story. Within your repertoire, I believe you will find the skills and talents to pay it forward with mentoring.

## The Early Years

Faculty teach students to tell their stories, for that is where we all live. In nursing, the requisite science and technology of health care are intimately interwoven with the art of caring for others, and stories help us to understand this intersection. At my very core, I am a registered nurse and have been for 40 years. After five years of nursing school, three in a diploma program and two in an RN to BSN program, my working career began in the intensive care unit (ICU) providing patient care “at the bedside,” a term generally used to denote being a staff nurse in a hospital setting. In 1982, the hiring of graduate (e.g., inexperienced) nurses into an ICU was not preferred,

but due to a nationwide shortage of critical care nurses, it became the practice. A “robust” six-week orientation with a preceptor was provided, and I was soon the charge nurse on the night shift. An early “aha” moment with mentoring occurred at this time ... a preceptor and mentor are not (necessarily) the same thing.

My assigned preceptor was very good; she was knowledgeable, experienced, efficient, respected, and wise. However, we did not “connect,” and I was unaware of the value of that connection until finding my mentors on the night shift. “Finding” is an interesting word to use because in hindsight I was drawn, magnetically it seemed, to four part-time, expert nurses who shaped my knowledge and experience as a professional nurse. Please humor me as I share with you their names: Bonnie, Marge, Patty, and Wendy. I am unable to tell you (without a Google search) the name of the person who won the Masters Tournament in 1982, the Nobel Prize, or the Best Actor Oscar, all noteworthy accomplishments in their own right, but Wendy, Patty, Marge, and Bonnie are forever in my memory, and I am forever grateful. Naturally, the teaching required to become competent as an ICU nurse continued, but they also modeled traits such as respect for the diversity of each person, the importance of individualized care (even when diagnoses were the same), and the goal of working with patients toward their best possible outcomes. What distinguished these nurses as mentors versus preceptors? They were invested in my success as a person and a professional, not solely to my orientation in the role.



Teresa A. Smith

## A Journey Into Teaching

Within the first few years of staff nursing, my passion for education was apparent, having seen the transformational power of patient/family teaching on both self-care and self-determination. For about a year, I served as the patient and family education coordinator for the hospital, providing primarily cardiac rehabilitation programs and diabetes education. Then, staff development called to me as an “exponential opportunity” to teach many patients by teaching nurses (another “aha” moment); what seemed to be my natural desire to mentor others was identified. For the next six years, I coordinated the hospital orientation processes for all new nursing staff, established a preceptor training program, and in 1992 created the Graduate Nurse Internship (GNI) Program as a means to “grow our own” nurses. That same year, I was appointed as the director of education but maintained the coordination of the new graduates for several years.

Many mentoring opportunities presented through the GNI program, especially in the forum of a weekly support group, where new nurses gathered to discuss their achievements and challenges of the previous week. The group, in this confidential setting, celebrated accomplishments, shared ideas for problem-solving, practiced scripting for conflict resolution, and disclosed those haunting personal doubts that we all carry. With rich past experiences, I was able to pay it forward to these new nurses and also learned as much from them (“aha”) as they did from me. My mentoring repertoire grew in depth and breadth.

### **Welcome to SUNY Empire State College — The Journey Continues**

Fast forward to March 2009, when I joined the faculty in the School of Nursing (now the School of Nursing and Allied Health), and a brand new RN to BSN program housed within the former Center for Distance Learning (CDL). The program had just entered its first students (40) in the fall of 2008, and all of the faculty were new to the program, new to online learning, new to the college, and new to ESC mentoring. We relied heavily on the knowledge and ESC experience of our staff and professionals, and of course on our faculty colleagues in CDL.

As new nursing faculty and staff joined the School of Nursing, it seemed natural to offer assistance in their orientation and socialization to the college. Somewhat incidentally, the role of “buddy mentor” became comfortable to me. So many of my old mentoring moments flashed back to mind, and the connections with the ESC mentoring model were so clear. Embrace the diversity of people, respect everyone as an individual, and invest in the success of others.

So, who are our mentees? The clear answer is that they are the students assigned to us in our mentoring role. But, they are also the students we teach

in our classes, the students who “find” us as a role model, our coworkers who need assistance or seek growth, and our new faculty and staff yet unfamiliar with the ways of Empire State College. Your repertoire of mentoring skills houses the ability to be that mentor, not only to students but to coworkers and new employees who seek personal and professional development in a variety of ways.

### **Lessons Learned**

Below are just a few examples of lessons I learned from my mentors, and how I pay it forward with mentoring.

As a second-year nursing student, I approached a faculty member for clarification on a test answer marked as incorrect. After hearing my rationale for the selection, she acknowledged that it could be correct in an alternate scenario and modified my grade. Lessons learned: Tests do not always have absolute answers. Listen to students and consider their perspectives; it helps to develop critical thinking. (An important side note: This faculty member later became the executive secretary for the New York State Board of Nursing and subsequently was the driving force behind the 2019 “BSN in Ten” law for nurses.)

As a staff nurse, I was caring for an ICU patient with chronic renal failure, and his laboratory values reflected a potassium level noted in the texts as “incompatible with life.” We treated him aggressively and he ultimately returned home. Lessons learned: The textbook is not always right. Evaluate each person and his situation individually and holistically. Work hard toward seemingly impossible outcomes.

As a nurse educator, I provided education and guidance to graduate nurses and new hospital staff on how to manage conflict by promptly addressing issues and “bringing the mail to the right mailbox.” Lessons learned: It is easier to provide others with direction on conflict resolution than it is to deal

with it personally. Working relationships improve when conflict is approached with humility and compassion.

As a faculty mentor for SUNY Empire State College, I sought out mentors who would be my role models and support system during the early years of adapting to a new environment. Lessons learned: Offer to be a buddy mentor to new faculty and staff. With a good experience, they too will pay it forward with mentoring.

*“Offer to be a buddy mentor to new faculty and staff. With a good experience, they too will pay it forward with mentoring.”*

### **Paying it Forward**

In the current system, most of my mentees are assigned to me and most of our relationships are mutually gratifying; a few are difficult, and a few are just fabulous. I am not always sure how to understand these differences, but I believe the latter category is about “clicking” with another person. Recently, a current M.S. student needed a placement for her capstone course in administration, and I reached out to a former student and (fabulous) mentee (RN to BSN and then M.S. program), and she was delighted to provide the practicum experience for her future fellow alumna. That is paying it forward. Two ESC nursing graduates (M.S. in education) now teach in our RN to BSN program. That is paying it forward. When our most recent faculty member was hired two years ago, I was prepared to offer myself as her buddy mentor. But a colleague, who I had mentored in the past, stepped forward and took the role, stating that it was her turn to pay it forward.



# Individualized Transitional Support for Career-Change Employees

Susan J. Sylvia, Grand Canyon University

## The Career-Change Process

I remember when my father began to plan his retirement; he talked about it with much more excitement than he ever spoke about his job. After 30 years of employment with the same company as a machine repairman, he had enough of the anxiety-provoking workplace changes, including shifting performance expectations and high turnover in supervising staff. He also complained of boredom after performing many of the same tasks every day for so many years. Once he finalized his commitment to retire, I asked him why he never invested in his own small business, which was his “secret” dream; he confessed that he had been scared to abandon the security that his retirement plan offered to him at the close of 30 years in one company.

It is rare to see my father’s level of single-career commitment in modern society. In the last decade, *job-hoppers* (“those who frequently jump from one job to another in a short period of time during their employment” [Jules, Ghazali, & Othman, 2017, p. 572]), those who *recareer* (people who consider changes in career mid-life [Boveda & Metz, 2016]), and those who engage in an *encore career* (people who reenter the workforce after retirement from a first career [Alboher, 2012]) have fast become the new norm. Unlike my dad, many people now seem willing to risk financial setbacks or to invest the necessary time to train for a new career in exchange for a more compatible and, hopefully, a more enjoyable profession. In fact, job-hopping has become so popular that it surpasses other forms of employment change, such as

advancement within an organization and transferring to the same career with a new company.

I would venture that most people have at least a single moment in time when they dream about the excitement of a new career and leaving behind a job that they know all too well. So, why do some people who devote years of their life to a career decide to pursue a different career while others opt to remain in one long-term position? To begin to understand the answer to this question, it is important to first review the stages of the career-change process.

Barclay, Stoltz and Chung (2011) identified four stages in the career-change process that most people traverse. The first stage, *contemplation/growth*, is the acknowledgment of dissatisfaction with the current career choice. As people experience situations/events at work that are unpleasant, challenging, or difficult, they experience an awakening about their job dissatisfaction. Peake and McDowall (2012) clarified this notion by saying that a “period of disenchantment” (p. 405) with the career occurs that sparks an interest in a career change. The next stage, *preparation/exploration*, centers on the consideration of new career choices. At this point, people begin to reflect on what potential careers might suit them. During this exploration period, it is important to seek out “like-minded individuals for support, such as individuals who had similar career-changing aspirations, shared the individual’s dream, or had already made similar career switches” (Tan, 2012, p. 96). This support can prove inspirational to those considering a change and it might validate the person’s desire to change careers as well. The third



Susan J. Sylvia

stage, *action/establishment*, is the pursuit of the career (Barclay et al., 2011). This phase is the engagement in the steps needed to make a career change, including specialized training and the application to available jobs. It is during this stage that the scope of the impending change, which may affect a person’s living conditions and/or personal responsibility levels, might ignite fear related to an unfamiliar work environment, new co-workers, and undefined expectations. Some people may resign themselves to stay in their current careers instead of accepting a new position because of resulting apprehension. The final career-change stage is *maintenance/maintenance*, which is established at the conclusion of career training and career transition. If the career-changer selected a new profession that better aligns with his/her values, beliefs, and interests then job satisfaction will likely result. However, “just as there are different reasons for changing careers, there are also different results. Not everyone experiences a seamless transition

from one career to another, even if the second career is something that the career changer has always dreamed about doing” (Lee, 2011, p. 2).

According to Schein and Van Maanen (2013), people do not select a compatible career from the onset because making a long-lasting selection at a young age is not possible. They posit that “new challenges can reveal latent or hidden talents and introduce a motivation that simply had not had an opportunity to appear earlier” (p. 8); this discovery period takes at least 10 years. As a result, people find that their initial career choice no longer holds the same level of appeal as it originally did for them. Conversely, some people may decide mid-career that they simply wish to pursue their *calling*, which is defined as “a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427). People who seek their *career calling* (a career that a person believes will provide them with personal meaningfulness and that will contribute to the betterment of society) anticipate that they will be met with job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and self-congruence while working in that field.

### **Individualized Support Planning**

Once a person transitions to a new career, their *professional identity* (a professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences [Schein, 1978]) undergoes a transition from the existing one that was developed during the previous career to one that will more closely align to the new profession. This dynamic process occurs over time and is influenced by an individual's social, cultural, and political experiences. Every situation that a person encounters, including collegial

interactions and workplace events, influences how he/she responds to new or future experiences.

Identity development is specific to an individual since no two people traverse an identical set of life and work experiences. A person's existing professional identity, work history, and *transferable skills* (defined as “the most basic unit — the atoms” [Bolles, 2016, p. 145] needed to succeed in a career), as well as additional fundamentals such as the person's expectations for the new career and their motivation for changing careers, must be considered by employers when developing a transitional support program for new hires.

In consideration of how people's skills are applicable to a career setting, Whitaker (1998) identified 76 transferable skills that a person may accumulate during a career. He classified these skills into nine categories: communication skills, research and investigation skills, critical thinking skills, personal and career developmental skills, information management skills, human relations and interpersonal skills, design and planning skills, management and administrative skills, and valuing skills. Whitaker stated that when people self-identify their transferable skills, they are better able to adapt these skills to the workplace setting. He developed a “Transferable Skills Assessment” that can be easily followed to help people identify their categorical skills.

It is critical that employers engage in focused discussions with their new and potential employees about the career changer's existing identity, interests, and transferable skills so they can collectively identify how these areas will be an asset to the company, how they may pose a challenge in the new employment setting, and to assist in establishing reasonable workplace expectations, preferably prior to appointment to the new position. Employers who encourage the new employee's self-identification

process could also benefit from the assessment results since their support/mentor programs can include these areas as a focus for individuals entering their work setting. In essence, the new hire's transferable skills become the foundation for the employee to build upon, which would provide assurance that the transition is manageable and appropriate. Additionally, as stated, this process would also identify what job tasks may present a challenge to new hires. This knowledge is critical for mentors/supervisors to know immediately upon employing new staff because it provides insight into where the new hire needs the most transitional support to be successful in the new setting. While the act of transitioning from one career to another can be a complicated, time-consuming, and anxiety-provoking for most people who make that commitment, successful career-change transitions will result from employers who understand that each new hire must have individualized support because of their varied backgrounds.

*“... each new hire must have individualized support because of their varied backgrounds.”*

### **First-Career vs. Second-Career Employees**

Now that we have considered a career-change employees' individual support needs in the workplace setting, let's contemplate how first- and second-career employees differ in areas of needed support in a work setting. I will use the teaching profession to demonstrate some differences.

A first-career teacher often enters the teaching profession at the close of their college career, during which time they engaged in courses that focus on

content-area instruction, pedagogical strategies, and classroom management basics. These teachers' identities are a result of their historical, social, and cultural experiences, including exposure to college course curricula and limited interaction in a professional career setting. Comparatively, the expanded set of historical, social, cultural, and work experiences that a second-career teacher has accumulated are vastly different. Not only do career-change teachers accumulate more experiences over a longer period of time, the practical application of these experiences in a career setting translates to bringing more "to the table" than the first-career teacher can offer. In fact, a second-career teacher may be

considered to have a distinct advantage over those entering into teaching after their college graduation at a traditional age (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Crow, Levine, & Nager, 1990; Freidus, 1994; Mayotte, 2003; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Schein & Van Maanen, 2013) because they possess "authentic life experiences" (Williams & Forgasz, 2009, p. 98) that can be shared with their students, as well as greater maturity than their novice counterparts (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Bullough Jr. & Knowles, 1990; Fry & Anderson, 2011). This level of experience influences their adaptation to the school community and setting. Having access to prior career experiences and additional personal experiences also greatly assists a teacher in the

classroom because it lends credibility to their lessons (Anthony & Ord, 2008), such as enlivened discussions about real-world scenarios that support the curriculum. Bullough Jr. & Knowles (1990) added that second-career teachers are often better educated and more dedicated to teaching than their first-career counterparts, and previously acquired experiences may develop a person's trade-related perspectives and communication abilities, which could be an advantage in the classroom (Freidus & Krasnow, 1991; Mayotte, 2003; Novak & Knowles, 1992).

Consider the differences in the following teacher profiles that represent varied backgrounds of those entering the field:

<p><b>Teacher M</b></p> <p>A 45-year-old male who accepts a plumbing teaching position in a vocational-technical (VT) school setting after earning his master plumber credentials and opening and maintaining a plumbing business for 10 years. His private business employed three additional plumbers that he supervised.</p>	<p><b>Teacher N</b></p> <p>A 30-year-old woman who attends and graduates from a VT high school cosmetology program followed by graduation from a cosmetology postsecondary school. She is employed by two salons over the five-year period before accepting a cosmetology teaching position in a comprehensive high school that offers VT programs.</p>	<p><b>Teacher O</b></p> <p>A 23-year-old woman who graduates from a state university with a B.A. in English and a master's degree in teaching/education. At the close of the program's fifth year, which included one semester of student teaching, the teacher accepts an English teaching position in a VT high school.</p>
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These examples demonstrate the basic premise of how different the career-specific trainings, education, and work experiences are of those entering into teaching. Some of the differences between Teachers M, N, and O would be their time management, interpersonal, communication and critical thinking skills, and each person's mastery level of each skill set would vary in their ability to adapt to the expectations of the new career. In fact, even if we duplicated Teacher M's exact career history, his independent historical, social, and cultural experiences would set him apart from other people with the same career history. In light of this, we can

assume that every new teacher brings individualized characteristics, skills, and interests to the classroom setting and school community.

This does not mean, however, that a second-career teacher is immune to challenges during the transition to teaching. In fact, they are likely to need help with classroom management, implementing pedagogical strategies, lesson planning, navigating the licensure process, and social networking if the prior career setting did not include a collaborative work environment. In many cases, career-change teachers find the school setting to be an isolating, resulting in job stress and fatigue,

contributing to a regretful transition and ultimate desire to leave the profession. Attempting to find a balance among the new school-based expectations, family, and other external obligations might also contribute to stress and fatigue.

**A Career-Change Scenario**

Let's examine the tradesperson's transition to teaching as a sample career-change scenario. Those who enter into teaching often envision that the career will be similar to the experiences they encountered when they were a student (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Furlong, 2013; Stenberg, Karlsson, Pitkaniemi, & Maaranen, 2014;

Tigchelaar, Vermunt, & Brouwer, 2012), similar to the experiences that the teachers they interact with have shared with them (Castro & Bauml, 2009), and/or similar to a teaching experience that they had while working in their trade area (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Powers, 2002), but these expectations are not realistic. There is a considerable difference between the perspective that a student has about their teachers and school experience compared with a teacher's experience in the classroom that is qualified by the time spent learning content, delivering instruction, developing lesson plans and curriculum, and managing a classroom (pacing, timing, and discipline). Often, those who meet with the realities of a profession that do not align with their expectations experience regret, remorse, or disappointment with the new career selection.

"Michael," referred to as "Teacher B" in the study I conducted about what motivates tradespeople to transition to VT teaching (Sylvia, 2017), was in his fourth year of teaching when we met. He indicated during our interview that he had been in the HVAC (heating, ventilating, and air conditioning) field for over 20 years prior to transitioning to teaching and that he had contemplated a teaching career for at least five years prior to making the transition. He discovered by chance that he could teach HVAC in the high school setting and, as a result, believed that he had found his niche to impart his content knowledge on young adults training to enter his field.

Michael admitted to me that he was unhappy with the career change during the first two years of teaching because he did not "get along" with his HVAC counterpart and his expectation for their relationship and teaching were not the reality that he experienced. He struggled with satisfying state licensure requirements, classroom planning, course preparation, and content delivery. Overall, he questioned if teaching was the "right" profession

for him. In fact, he admitted to battling persistent thoughts of returning to his previous HVAC work setting, which was comfortable and familiar. Michael summarized his transitional journey by saying that "all the things that in your mind [teaching] is, it's nothing like that" (Sylvia, 2017, p. 149). When I inquired about the support that he received from the school community when he transitioned, he replied that his immediate supervisor was supportive and helped to make his first two years bearable, which helped him to get to the point of balance between the workplace expectation and his own work performance. However, while his supervisor was aware of his struggles, he/she did not develop an individualized support plan to help him in the areas that he was personally struggling with during his transition to teaching. If Michael's school leader had discussed his previous work environment, his transferable skills, and his expectations for the classroom and school setting, they would have realized that he needed preparation for the differences he would encounter between the classroom and work setting as well as intensive support to prepare him for class instruction. Michael's transitional experience is not unusual. While the school did assign a mentor to work with him who was helpful to Michael in many ways, an intentional plan to address these topics would have made his first two years more enjoyable and would have increased his classroom productivity.

### **Conclusion**

Many organizations are willing to help their new employees acclimate to the job setting, but they heavily embed workplace logistics, such as protocols, procedures, and overviews of organizational goals as support for new hires. While these areas are necessary to include in the workplace introduction, most employees, particularly second-career employees, require additional support to help them successfully navigate the transition from one career

to the next. In addition to individualized support plans for new hires, it is advisable for employers to conduct their own research to determine if any existing studies have been conducted that identify skill sets most associated with their career setting. With regard to teaching, Williams & Forgasz (2009) conducted a study that identified compassion, patience, and imagination as critical to the teaching environment, while Anthony & Ord (2008) conducted a study that identified presentation skills, administrative work, and working on a team as critical to the school-community setting. Companies that are interested in hiring the most compatible person for a vacant position should also consider using this discussion process as a tool to increase their awareness about job candidates who apply for the position. An internal audit of current staff and their transitional experiences could also be helpful to determine what areas existing employees struggled with upon entering the organization.

Effective and compassionate organizational leaders cannot assume that all new employees will seamlessly adapt to the new setting or that they will seek out the necessary help they need when questions arise. Some people will "suffer in silence" rather than appear incapable of managing the job and its related tasks, while others are unsure who to trust or who to ask for help. Organizational leaders who devote the time to developing individualized programs of support for career-change employees will benefit from the new hire's increased workplace performance and productivity, which may even manifest into a long-lasting career relationship despite job-hopping trends.

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# Life After Empire: The Learning Collaborative

Miriam Tatzel, Mentor Emerita, Hudson Valley

I retired from SUNY Empire State College in February 2015. During my first year out, I did catch up on the deferred projects I would get to “when I retired.” I organized my files, painted the basement, and so on. In the second year, I taught a course — more on that later. In the third year, I became a student. That’s where I am now.

## Hmm. What Shall I Take?

Meet me when I get the Learning Collaborative (LC) catalog for spring 2019. I am looking at the options for two six-week sessions, and I want to take three courses in each. What shall I take for the first six weeks?

For the first period of Session 1, there are seven options and I select Joy Through Improvisation, which falls a good deal outside my comfort zone, but I’ve taken this course once before and I believe I’ve benefited from the demands to stay in the moment and to allow myself to be silly.

For the second period, I have a conflict. A course on China is given by a new instructor with impressive China credentials. But I choose Euripides on the Trojan War. I have taken courses with this very good instructor before (Chekhov stories, *The Winter’s Tale*), but I’m not sure I’ll like the reading. (However, I really got into it.)

For the third period, too much to choose from. A course on First Chapters (reading the beginnings from fiction and nonfiction books) is given by an instructor with whom I had a terrific class in which we read *Less* by Andrew Sean Greer and Nabokov’s *Pnin*. Then there’s a course on Math Delicacies and Tidbits, which appeals to me too. But I take Printmaking for the second time. I especially want to do studio art and

there are few options. This instructor is wonderful. The word that comes to mind about him is “generous”; he gives so much to how he organizes the course and materials, and so much support to us.

Between the second and third periods comes the lunch hour, which is a social time. There’s also an option to use the time for a discussion group, a visiting presenter, or a TED talk, but I choose to chat with my old buddies from Empire State College (mentors and tutors) and my new acquaintances. There are coffee and tea available throughout the day, and cookies at lunchtime. The classes are 75 minutes, with 15 minutes in between and the day runs from 10:00 - 3:00.

## A Little History

I knew about the Learning Collaborative pretty much since its inception in 2007. Retired mentors Diana Worby and Leontine Temsky were among those who started it and they were part of the first group of instructors, along with Thelma Jurgrau, and Mayra Bloom who had also retired from Empire. Nancy Low Hogan, then a provost at Long Island University (LIU) in Rockland County (and now a Rockland County legislator), supported the project, and LIU offered space, tech support, refreshments, and handled finances (registration, paying instructors) (Buchbinder, 2018).

The academic program is run by a board of directors, which selects the courses, creates the catalog, and evaluates the outcomes; Diana Worby was on the board for the first 10 years, and her special purview was recruiting instructors (a skill that was surely honed during a career of working with tutors



Miriam Tatzel

and evaluators).<sup>1</sup> The members of the board are also at times students and instructors. The Learning Collaborative is a financially lean institution. Tuition is modest: taking six courses over 12 weeks (three courses in each six-week session) cost me \$370. The instructors, likewise, are paid modestly. When I gave a course in 2016, I got \$325.

LIU eventually moved from that location, and the Learning Collaborative found a new home at the New City Jewish Center (NCJC), beginning with the fall 2016 term. My experience as a student has been at NCJC. It’s a large, rambling place with lots of small classrooms and larger spaces that accommodate courses with high enrollments.

## The Teachers

A surprise for me was how much I learned about teaching by being a student. I was very interested in how they did it, and I was much in awe: the command, the ease, the ability to speak at length about complex topics without

using notes, the pleasant back-and-forth with the class. And it looks like the instructors are having fun doing it.

When I started taking courses, I was most interested in literature and art. These were loves from my youth that had languished during my working years. But what if I can't find a course that particularly appeals to me? Then comes serendipity. Thus, I reluctantly took Twelve Legal Topics Everyone Needs to Understand thinking it's something I *ought* to know about, and I found the course not just informative, but more philosophical than I expected, and delightfully presented. I took Great Gardens of the War Years (the two world wars), and I found a mesmerizing instructor to whom I could listen all day. When the following year she offered Great Cultural Traditions of Landscape Design, I signed right up. Her book had just come out (Chisholm, 2018) and she drew from; it was landscape as art history.

I would hear about instructors from other students, and on their recommendation, I took courses I might not have otherwise. Thus, with an instructor who is a U.S. political history buff, I took First Ladies. What a great teaching method! So prepared with an agenda, charts, excerpts from books, handouts and occasional quizzes, all well-paced and yet with allowance for digressions and questions to be followed up on. Now hooked, I took his next course, The United States Congress — history, current events, and the Constitution. Intense.

A special treat was to take a course with my Empire colleague and friend, Thelma Jurgrau. This was a course on Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, a challenging read that I would not have gotten through on my own. I was in with a group of 10 serious literature students, most of whom had taken courses with Thelma before. She had done much preparation for this course — context and biography. We did a close reading as a group; I read and reread. I knew Thelma from our

center meetings, from her work with my students, and as a friend. Now I got to know her as a teacher! (I am sad to say that Thelma Jurgrau passed away in January 2019.)

I see that the instructors use these courses to delve into their interests, much as I did as a mentor in my study groups and learning contracts. Before I became a student at the LC, and a year after I retired, I led a course on The Psychology of Ideology. I built it out of learning contracts I offered at Empire, drawing on Political Psychology, Positive Psychology, and Consumer Psychology. It was a lot of work, there was much student participation, and it was overall satisfying, but not really fun. But now, having observed other teachers, could I pull off some of what they do — be easygoing, able to talk at length, relate pleasantly with the students, and have fun doing it? I haven't yet mentioned that there are a few times when the Collaborative offers single, one-shot classes, and I picked this opportunity for my experiment. I offered Wanting and Spending: Consumers and Their Happiness. It went well, and it was an "up."

### **Old People**

Just about everyone I meet at the Learning Collaborative is retired. This goes for the instructors as well as the students, although some instructors have ongoing careers. A program for the elderly may not sound so attractive, but I do find something attractive about being with people of my generation (some younger, some older than my 75 years). I would say that my experience at the Collaborative has dramatically altered my view of the elderly, going from never-thought-much-about-it to positively positive. The epiphany came with, "These are the same people who were young when I was young." There's a sense of shared history, knowledge, and experience. These are retired professionals for the most part, and so we share a similar educational background as well. In this company

of well-traveled and theater- and concert-going people, I am the one who is a laggard. Just as I may find the instructors scintillating, so may I find the students. My feeling toward old people generalizes: I see them not as depleted, but as enriched.

"Old age" conjures up frailty, disease, senility, and death. Even in the best case, you are not what you once were. But there is the plus side that comes with freedom, contentment, and pleasure. I've changed my attitude about being old. I find myself saying, "Old age is the dessert of life."

*"But now, having observed other teachers, could I pull off some of what they do — be easygoing, able to talk at length, relate pleasantly with the students, and have fun doing it?"*

### **A "Free School"**

The Learning Collaborative reminds me of the Free School movement of the late '60s and early '70s, a movement I was quite keen on and dabbled in. I participated in "relearning" groups. I attended a gathering of alternative schools where I was much taken with John Holt, who I followed around and listened to. I researched alternative approaches to primary education by visiting schools around the country and interviewing teachers and directors (Maccoby & Zellner [Tatzel], 1970).

*Freedom to learn.* The student directs the learning process. I, as a student, can be as focused or capricious as I wish. There is indeed a great variety of choices. For example, in the time slot when I took Improvisation there were six other options: Israeli Artists; Old Time Radio;

Pastry Tips (and tasting); The First Amendment; Latin American Art; and The U. S. Congress. Whether I know a lot about the subject or nothing, am an expert or a novice, I can proceed. Being engaged is what matters.

*Freedom to create the program.* This is an independent school. There is no external institutional oversight. It's a grassroots phenomenon, arising from the ideas of the founders, aided by an institution (Long Island University, and now the New City Jewish Center) that provides the venue and material supports. The success of the program and its offerings are in the hands of the students, who evaluate the courses and the overall program, and the board of directors who assemble the offerings. It

seems to me that much of the success is due to the vision and choices made by the board.

I don't know if there was an intention to create a community of learners, but in effect, this is what has happened. One time when I was describing the courses I took, I was asked, "Is this online?" Not at all! Being there, being with others, and being part of the immediacy of what transpires are what you're there for. You soon start to recognize and connect with the people who take the same courses you do. It's a friendly place.

It should come as no surprise that back in 1974 when I joined Empire State College, I was attracted to the new experiment of a college committed to student-centered learning.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> Diana Worby passed away in November 2019, after this was written.

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*"... [D]espite the progress we have seen, it is not enough: adult learners are themselves a diverse group of individuals with distinct experiences and circumstances, and we need to understand how our institutions and programs should be responding to this diversity. The underrepresented adults and under-focused-on adults could include people with disabilities, the formerly incarcerated, low-income students and people of color. We do not know enough about these students' experiences in higher education and we likely have not been doing enough to help them access postsecondary learning opportunities, much less succeed in them."*

— Becky Klein-Collins

*"Considering the Adult Learner at Hispanic-Serving Institutions"*  
Explorations in Adult Higher Education, 2020, p. 24

# Engaging Students in Hands-On Science Learning Experiences at a Distance

Audeliz Matias, Saratoga Springs

## Introduction

For the 14th year in a row, distance education enrollments have increased nationwide. As the most recent Babson Survey Research Group study shows, close to 32% of students (undergraduate and graduate) enrolled in higher education were taking at least one fully online course, and nearly 15% of them were doing exclusively online courses (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018). The flexibility online learning brings to students also continues to be one of the major draws of this teaching modality, and the majority (84%) considers their online education worth its cost (Clinefelter, Aslanian, & Magda, 2019). As a result, the availability of online courses nationally and globally have expanded rapidly. The quality of courses is also improving as new technology affords us more possibilities.

Nonetheless, the perceived value of distance learning in science education continues to suffer a negative stereotype. Academics in the natural sciences who have engaged in distance teaching and learning share one common challenge: the need to prove that science can be taught at a distance. Scientific reasoning includes the thinking skills involved in inquiry, experimentation, evidence evaluation, and argumentation. Thus, scientific reasoning draws its foundation on constructing new understandings by "doing." Teaching, however, is more than the content we should cover in a day or a week. The "how" and the "why" of teaching are vital to what we do in the classroom.

In the sciences, teaching methods tend to be traditional. The norm is for faculty to stand in front of the classroom or

laboratory and teach! We teach and students are supposed to learn. But, how often do we question whether our teaching methods are appropriate? When designing and developing curriculum, we begin with a goal in mind about what students should know and be able to do at the end of the course. This goal can be broken down into learning outcomes, which will drive the selection of assessments and course design. Any learning outcome that could be achieved in a classroom should be achievable outside also. Thus, the question is *not* if teaching science online can be done, but how best to do it.

Teaching and learning of science concepts and practice have traditionally been an interactive process. Then we must ask: Is it possible that the online experience can be as good as the in-classroom science experience? How we can engage students as producers of content? What skills should students gain in our courses? How we can accommodate the need for experiences that are usually undertaken in a laboratory or in the field? What is the real value of the online science course?

Students today are rarely satisfied with a one-size-fits-all educational experience. Keeping pace with students' needs is a continuing challenge. They demand new experiences in learning that involve exposure to real-world problems within and outside their communities. For students, activating engagement is crucial not only to satisfactorily complete any single course but also to develop as independent scholars beyond the course. When designing courses and learning activities, our goal should be to have a positive effect on students' lives and futures. In addition, to face the new needs of a multicultural



Audeliz Matias

society, if we want to develop mindful global citizens, as educators we need to rethink current models of teaching driven by subject content alone, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

Further, in today's global society, our teaching must enable learners to become active participants in the shaping of an emerging social and economic global order. When developing material for distance and asynchronous courses, a student-centered approach using hands-on learning activities helps students not only to be aware of concepts but also to develop skills they can apply to their professional and personal development. As demonstrated by multiple studies, students are more likely to succeed in online courses that are highly interactive (Fulford & Zhang, 1993), allow them to be active participants (de Verneil & Berge, 2000; Prensky, 2005), and promote collaborative learning (Miller & Miller, 1999).

Then, the key question again is: Can we teach science online? Although the published research in this area is still lacking, several authors (e.g., Harlen and Doubler, 2004; Lundsford, 2008; Annetta, Klesath, & Meyer, 2009; Lyall & Patti, 2010; Mawn, Carrico, Charuk, Stote, & Lawrence, 2011) have demonstrated that hands-on and field-based learning experiences *can* be successfully integrated with science content in an online learning environment. Further, in their essay, "Accessible Elements: Teaching Science Online and at a Distance," Kennepohl & Shaw (2010) presented a survey of current practices that provides some ideas and guidance to anyone involved in teaching science at a distance. The next part of this essay provides examples of how to engage students in hands-on and field experiences using different approaches, which allow students both to be immersed in the subject matter and to gain skills useful in the work environment.

### **Facilitating Creative and Hands-On Learning Through Discussions**

As we know, to fully engage students in the online environment, the materials should be as interactive as possible. Interaction with the material has to go beyond simply reading the textbook or writing a paper. Further, the engagement of students with others in online courses is especially important because learning at a distance tends to be more self-directed, which creates feelings of isolation. Discussion boards are the heart of an online course, as they can create a sense of community and a social learning network. Unfortunately, according to the 2019 report on "online college students," only 66% of students surveyed during the study said that discussion forums are engaging (Clinefelter et al., 2019). Developing discussions that focus on the students' community and the environment helps students gain critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are essential in earth and environmental sciences. Work by Bliss and Lawrence

(2009) demonstrated that discussion boards have a role in teaching critical thinking skills, which is important for scientific inquiry. Discussion boards also provide a more intimate experience to learn science, which can help in overcoming fears of science (Jeschofnig & Jeschofnig, 2011). Additionally, encouraging students to take ownership of the learning process creates a space for self-initiated learning, which has become increasingly important (e.g., Park, 2003).

*"... encouraging students to take ownership of the learning process creates a space for self-initiated learning, which has become increasingly important ..."*

For my courses, I tend to use the discussion forums as constructivist activities where students construct much of what they learn through experiences. For instance, in the GEOL-1200 Introduction to Geology course, I created an assignment that requires students to collect a rock to study throughout the course. The students present their "pet" rocks to one another and identify what type of rock it is based on its characteristics and readings from the textbook. Students then present their pet rocks to the rest of the class in the discussion forum to learn more about each other's rocks. A series of questions about the environment and rock composition guide them through the discussion. The hands-on experience continues throughout the term, as they learn more about the processes that could have formed their pet rocks. During the last course module, students are then asked to write a short story explaining the history

of their chosen rocks based on all the geologic processes they have learned about during the course. Students are free to use their imagination with the caveat that the "short story" should be based on real geologic processes. I have been extremely pleased with the stories submitted by the students. As demonstrated by students' comments in the course reflection during the last module, the pet rock activity continues to be well received.

Another example of creating hands-on opportunities for students to work on their critical and problem-solving skills at a distance is the use of data analysis. Data analysis in discussion forums can be achieved in different ways. Perhaps the most common way in the sciences is through students producing their own data through experimentation such as the pet rock example. In other courses, such as ENSC-1002 Energy: The Issues and the Sciences, students are asked to research news media to discuss how the science and technology behind energy issues are communicated by the popular media. Courses in more field-related areas benefit from having students collect data pertinent to their community, such as water samples and data used by scientists for risk assessment of natural disasters.

We can also engage students using data available from public-funded monitoring and researchers such as data obtained by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), or the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Many of our science online courses utilize resources from these and other government agencies. In PHYS-1100 Introductory Astronomy, for example, students are asked to analyze a possible landing area for the exploration of Mars. As part of a written assignment, they are assigned a particular area based on their last name and asked to download and analyze data from two different missions (NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter and the Mars Odyssey Mission). After they are



done with their analyses, students are asked to share their results with their classmates through a presentation. For the presentation, they are tasked with creating a commercial to convince NASA that their site is the most appropriate place to land their next robotic mission (and perhaps human mission) to conduct experiments on Mars. The presentation is expected to include the data and information generated by students from their written assignments. With this approach, students are able to engage with scientific data, as well as to gain critical and communication skills they can use beyond the course.

### **Creating Opportunities Through Residencies**

Motivated students in science concentrations with demanding schedules should have the opportunity to learn about scientific research while acquiring professional development. In the summer of 2019, we welcomed the seventh cohort of students to the course ENSC-4006 Ecology and Earth Systems Field Research. This unique summer residency study was created in 2013 as part of my collaboration with faculty mentor Dr. Kevin Woo and Dr. Nathan Whitley-Grassi (associate director of educational technologies), and the support of Lori McCaffrey (collegewide residency coordinator). Unlike other residency opportunities at SUNY Empire State College, Ecology and Earth Systems Field Research is only one course taught by the three of us.

The course consists of two parts: an online component and a field trip/residency component. Students work collaboratively with the three instructors on a scientific problem of their choice in the areas of ecology, biology, environmental science, earth science, and/or geology to design a research project, collect data and perform analysis, interpret results and prepare a written scientific paper on the work. The three-day residency focuses on work at and around the SUNY Oneonta Biological Field Station and their Upland



*Field Residency group, 2019.*

Interpretive Center in Cooperstown, New York. This approach allows us to offer students from across the college the opportunity to participate in scientific field-based research. We have continued to have 10-12 students every summer (with close to 20 in 2016!).

During the residency portion of the course, students learn about field research methods in ecology, biology, environmental sciences, and geology through a series of activities. In order to allow students ample time to develop their research projects, we start the conversation about possible research topics in the online environment and schedule the residency early in the term. The field weekend then begins with a series of lectures on scientific research and the big picture — the geology of New York state and of the area. During the rest of the time, each of us as instructors teaches different field methods according to our particular area of expertise. My work with the students primarily focuses on three areas: the use of rocks to decipher the geologic history of an area, the study of stream morphology and flow, and water quality. Every year the cohort of students brings new challenges and opportunities. Students' research areas of interest, as well as their skills, vary. However, it is not a surprise that many students are very interested in learning about water quality issues and monitoring techniques.

Although the course involves a lot of preparation and the days are packed with activities from early morning to the late evening, students' reactions to the hands-on field component continue to exceed our expectations. Further, students appreciate the one-on-one interaction with three instructors and, for some of them, the residency is their first experience camping. Learning opportunities such as the ones offered through this residency course truthfully reflect the definition of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching as well as the mission of SUNY Empire State College (n.d.) to give "access to innovative, flexible and quality academic programs" (para. 1). This enriched learning experience helps students develop the necessary skills to undertake similar projects in their career field or future graduate school. As such, several residency alumni have used research conducted during the course as part of their graduate school applications, and others have presented their research project at the college's Student Academic Conference.

### **Engaging in an International Collaboration**

When thinking about how we can provide students with hands-on learning experiences, it is also important to consider the opportunity to engage students beyond our institutional boundaries. In 2014, I was presented with an unusual opportunity to engage students in real-world problem-solving



through an international collaboration. The SUNY Center for Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) received funds to create a Latin America Academy, which allowed faculty and student interaction with peers from higher education institutions in Mexico through co-taught multicultural online and blended courses. What made this opportunity unusual and unique was that there were no science educators among the group of faculty from Mexico. Fortunately, the team leaders were aware of a faculty member in the area of information technology who was happy to accept the challenge of such interdisciplinary collaboration.

In spring 2015, students enrolled in GEOL-1200 Introduction to Geology (then called Geology and the Environment) were able to actively engage in a series of learning activities with students working in an advanced mobile development course with Dr. Alberto Aguilar-González from the Tecnológico de Monterrey-Chihuahua Campus (ITESM-Chihuahua, from its name in Spanish). We united to develop a unique opportunity for undergraduate students at our respective institutions, thousands of miles away from each other. The work needed to create a meaningful experience for our students was not easy. The subject matter was different. The courses were offered in two different modalities, online and face-to-face. Our student population is primarily composed of working adults; students at ITESM-Chihuahua are more what we consider traditional in age, with the students enrolling right after high school. Then, there were the time and language differences. But, we were determined to connect students with their surrounding communities and bring about awareness of the links between science, technology, and society.

Earth and sustainability issues do not occur in isolation: We are part of a global planet. Mexico's rich culture, geological history, and environmental challenges presented a great

opportunity for students from both countries to engage in discussions around the topics in the course. Thus, this collaboration presented an excellent possibility to integrate cultural issues into our lower-level geology course as well as interdisciplinary collaboration in this advanced-level programming course. Our cohort of participants consisted of 25 students; 10 from ESC and 15 from ITESM-Chihuahua. However, from the ESC students, only seven actively participated in the learning activities (Matias & Aguilar-González, 2017). Because the subject matter of our courses was so different, we decided to use the online geology course as the platform for the collaborative experience. Learning activities that incorporated students' cultural and geographical backgrounds were created for the first (introduction) and the third (earthquakes and volcanoes) content modules of the online course.

Students from both institutions learned about each other and about environmental issues affecting their communities during the icebreaker discussion. They then worked together in a group project, scaffolded over a series of activities and weeks. Five teams integrating two to three students from ESC and three to four from ITESM-Chihuahua were formed. Students were asked to assume one of four different roles within the team: project manager, science leader, technology leader, or presenter. Each group was tasked with providing support to the citizens of a city through the creation of a mobile application (or app) for iPhones around the topic(s) of earthquake or volcanic hazards. After brainstorming their team's approach, students shared their proposal with the other teams for peer review. Then, the ITESM-Chihuahua students built prototypes of the apps and shared with the class, which voted for the best app.

Our partnership represented not only an interdisciplinary collaboration but also an intercultural and intergenerational

one. The ability to understand and manage cross-cultural contexts is essential for success in today's global society. Some would argue that because science is the study of natural phenomena that this type of learning experience — one involving cross-cultural contexts — is not important. But culture itself also influences science. Culture shapes our values, beliefs, expectations, and goals as citizens and as scientists. Such personal views can influence not only how science is done but also how society responds to scientific endeavors and discoveries. At the end of the geology course, students reported that the collaborative learning activities had the greatest influence on their knowledge of geological hazards and how they impact other countries, as well as on their own communities and Mexico. Both cohorts of students showed overall satisfaction with the experiential learning activities.

Overall, the collaboration was a success (Matias & Aguilar-González, 2017). The students were involved in problems that were practical, social, and personal as part of an experiential team activity. The richness of the experience certainly challenged students' global perceptions. As a geology student noted: "Relying on people thousands of miles away to do their work could be, at times, disconcerting. Ultimately though I think it was a great exercise, and certainly one of the most engaging." A student from Mexico added: "*Lo que me parece positivo es que se nos permite observar un panorama muy diferente a el cual estamos acostumbrados como ingenieros en tecnologías y así comprender como existe mucho más además de la elaboración o desarrollo de el producto.* (What I find positive is that we are allowed to see a very different picture from the one we are used to as technologies engineers, and to understand how there is so much more besides elaboration or development of a product)."

Building global partnerships characterized by clear mutual benefits, cultural respect, and shared leadership

is crucial to the development of mindful global citizens through collaborations such as the one presented here. As educators, this experience also proved significant for our professional development.

### **Using Laboratory Kits**

Lastly, what can be done about laboratory experiences when teaching at a distance? There is an ongoing debate regarding the role of laboratory work in science education, which dates back several decades. Traditionally, laboratory experiences provide students with the opportunity to directly interact with equipment and materials to engage in scientific inquiry. Laboratory activities go back to the idea that students learn best by doing. Emerging technologies now afford us more flexibility through simulations and virtual labs, as well as through the use of remote access labs. However, for the online educator, recreating the laboratory environment can be difficult, and the lack of knowledge of what “online” labs consist of has caused many individuals to question the quality associated with them.

As a result of the expansion of Open SUNY and the SUNY Seamless Transfer Initiative, the SUNY Faculty Advisory Council on Teaching and Technology (FACT2) convened a task group in 2016 to explore the options, challenges, and opportunities presented by virtual and alternative laboratory activities in the online teaching modality. The task group’s efforts included a daylong symposium where faculty, instructional designers and technologists, and administrators participated in the conversation about the value and assessment of virtual and alternative labs for science courses.

In their essay, “Teaching Lab Science Courses Online: Resources for Best Practices, Tools, and Technology,” Jeschofnig & Jeschofnig (2011) presented alternatives to the traditional science laboratory, including simulations and virtual labs, remote access labs, hybrid

labs, kitchen science labs, instructor-assembled labs, and commercially-assembled lab kits. Many of our fully online science courses incorporate virtual and alternative laboratory activities. A discussion of these options as alternatives to the traditional laboratory environment while working with students at a distance could be explored in more detail on its own. As such, for the purpose of this essay, I will briefly discuss only the incorporation of commercially-assembled laboratory kits.

Hands-on labs designed and assembled by commercial companies are not new. In the last decade, companies dedicated to assembling science laboratory kits for students to use at home have proliferated. The lower-level sequences for biology, chemistry, physics, and anatomy and physiology, as well as one of the lower-level geology courses, make use of lab kits to provide students with hands-on experiments in the respective content areas. One of the primary outcomes we expect from students when participating in laboratory activities is to learn to observe, measure, record, convert, and analyze data. In a campus-based laboratory, students are provided with science materials and equipment to perform a scientific experiment as per the instructions of a laboratory teaching assistant. Well-designed lab kits are aligned to specific course objectives. Then, the use of commercially-assembled lab kits allows for student engagement in scientific experiments with access to materials but without the need for a laboratory teaching assistant.

Of course, one may argue that instructors could also put together their own lab kits. An advantage of commercially-assembled kits over instructor-assembled kits is that the company supplies all materials needed to conduct the experiments and the safety training. For example, in the recently developed online GEOL-2200 Historical Geology with Lab, students are required to post photos of their lab kit materials in a discussion forum



*Audi Matias with Field Residency students, 2019.*

during the first week of the term to ensure they have the correct kit and to gain familiarity with the materials. There is also a general discussion board (not graded) for laboratory-related questions only. Although the companies also provide online resources for the students, sometimes they need more practical information. The discussion board creates a pressure-free space to ask questions when they encounter an issue during lab time. In my course, students have used the board when they are struggling with a particular part of the lab activity, such as the identification of fossils and questions about which mold/tray to use to simulate depositional environments with clay.

Lab kits, then, provide students with no time constraints to thoroughly explore scientific concepts and enjoy discovery learning experiences. Students in the historical geology course did express concerns about the lab kits as some information was missing from the manual, which was frustrating. As instructors, we need to make sure students have all of the information necessary to complete the experiments. Another concern is the knowledge level of the laboratory activities, something over which we don’t have much control when using a commercially-assembled kit. Overall, the experience with the lab kit for historical geology was positive, but students must invest more time and active engagement in doing the lab activities.

## Conclusions

In this essay, I presented only a few examples of how we can engage students in hands-on learning at a distance. Although the examples are from science courses, you can easily replicate them in any other field. Students taking online courses in areas such as Community and Human Services could engage in data collection and discussion in online discussion forums and other assignments. We have a range of residency opportunities in different areas and could create new ones to benefit students. The SUNY COIL center continues to create opportunities for faculty across SUNY — and the world — to collaborate and provide students with a study abroad-type opportunity without leaving their homes. And, virtual and alternative laboratory experiences could augment courses in health sciences, nursing, and even business, among others.

To teach online as an instructor, regardless of the subject matter, we must have a vision for the course as a whole. Only then can we find the appropriate approach for the learning activities. We need to experiment and try new pedagogical approaches. We also need to be patient. It may take a term or two (or three!) to find the right balance of engagement and teaching approaches for the students. Thus, we need to be prepared to adjust as needed. If something does not work out, do not panic. Assure your students that you are there for them and you can work with them to correct the situation. Every one of the examples presented had a “Plan A” and a “Plan B” (sometimes even a “Plan E”). In the end, the goal is to achieve a balance with our teaching methods to help students achieve the desired learning outcomes and their educational goals.

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# Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning Project Summaries

## The 2018-2019 IMTL Fellows

*Over the last eight years, the Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning (IMTL) has offered faculty and academic professionals an opportunity to pursue a wide range of projects relevant to their academic and professional work — particularly their work with students. Each year, colleagues gather in Saratoga for a three-day retreat that serves as the foundation for their yearlong effort to focus on topics, problems, research, course development, and creative endeavors. The annual cohort (typically about 25 colleagues) is supported in an ongoing way by an IMTL planning group and by one another.*

*Here, we include short descriptions of some of the projects that were part of IMTL 2018-2019. Other participants included: Diana Centanni, Kelly Mollica, Dana Brown, Sara Farmer, Karen Garner, Donna Mahar, Jelia Domingo, Lynette Nickleberry, and Ajay Das.*

*We thank everyone who has been a part of IMTL. We very much look forward to future IMTL activities that we will communicate to the community.*

### **Rebecca Eliseo-Arras** **Development of a Cyberbullying and Suicide Risk Certificate Program**

Cyberbullying is a pervasive problem in our society, and while our curriculum does include a course for how to help children and adolescents cope with bullying, there was still a significant gap in what we could offer our students. This project involved the development of a certificate aimed at creating four courses that, together, will enable undergraduate students to become proficient in identifying and understanding the impact of cyberbullying on an individual's well-being. The first course, launched in fall

2019, is now in the course catalog; the second course is under review, and the remaining two courses are under development. The concept paper and the draft of the first manuscript, which will discuss the creation of a certificate program, will also be developed soon. Thank you to my IMTL colleagues and the CMLAI staff for your continuous encouragement and support throughout this project.

### **Michele Forte, Debra Kram-Fernandez, Jessica Kindred, Tom McElroy, Marie Pennucci, Pat Pillsworth, Susan Oaks, Bhuwan Onta, Margaret Sithole, and Nan Travers** **Degree Planning and PLA Resource Exchange**

Our IMTL team has visited groups of faculty and staff at different SUNY Empire State College geo-locations to share outcomes of our past two Innovative Instruction Technology Grants (IITG) and our identification of a need for an online repository to house the 14 iPLA (individualized prior learning assessment) guides developed through IITG. We have been eliciting feedback, and faculty and staff needs for this resource exchange. As part of this IMTL work, we invited willing participants to share their resources and tips for the resource exchange. We have held this presentation at the All College Conference and three geo-locations thus far. We look forward to continuing this work.

### **Himanee Gupta-Carlson** **A Hip-Hop of Food**

Since 2010, I have been involved with farmers markets and a food pantry in and around Saratoga Springs. From the outset, I saw this work as an outgrowth

of community-based research I had begun earlier in Seattle on hip-hop as a force for social change. Through the support of IMTL, I have been developing a book on how community-based hip-hop and small-scale farming serve as practices grounded in philosophies of uplifting and educating people to improve their lives and help the communities around them. Since 2014, IMTL projects have helped me deepen my involvement in farming and food security projects while also allowing me to explore connections between this work and the community-building practices formed through hip-hop worldwide. My 2018-2019 IMTL work was dedicated first to applying for a one-year sabbatical, and then to developing a bibliography, writing research grant proposals, and organizing the materials I have gathered for this project through interviews, ethnographic styles of observation, and active participation. The year also led to learning more about zoning codes, Right-to-Farm laws, property rights, and agricultural history in the small town just north of Saratoga where my husband and I live and farm.

### **Thomas Kerr** **The Threshold Learning Project**

This project incorporates an individualized prior learning assessment (iPLA) request modeling method that supports students' identification and understanding of their experiential learning and college-level learning. I work with labor leaders who actively practice the topics they request as iPLA credits, and who continue to use their skills as they additionally engage in an assessment of their present work and responsibilities. Through their growing understanding of college-level competencies, students come to

recognize the arc of their past, present, and future skills. Thus a “threshold” can be crossed back and forth, informing discovery — new insights — about adult learning.

**JoAnn Kingsley**  
**Grassroots.cares**

I continued my efforts to understand and respond to the needs of a local festival community by working to build organizational capacity and support for *grassroots.cares* (Community Awareness Resource Engagement Service), a community-based volunteer effort at the Finger Lakes Grassroots Festival of Music and Dance in Trumansburg, New York. Tompkins County-based community organizations, such as Suicide Prevention and Crisis Services, Advocacy Center, Family and Children’s Services of Ithaca, friends of the Grassroots Festival, and other concerned citizens share in the responsibility to help inform, raise awareness of healthy choices and protect vulnerable populations during this four-day festival. One of the goals of these activities is opening communications and sharing in what is very challenging work. Supporting each other is an important way that we can work together to change our society for the better. My involvement with ITML has given me access to supportive feedback, collaboration and a sense of community-building during the college’s recent reorganization. In co-creating the concept of *grassroots.cares*, I borrowed vocabulary words from the Balanced Scorecard approach to strategic planning as a way of demonstrating the overlap between my volunteer work in my community and my service to the college.

**Seana Logsdon and Dan McCrea**  
**Increasing Access to and Engagement in Tools and Strategies for Academic Success Course**

The goal of increasing access to and engagement in the Tools and Strategies for Academic Success course has

involved moving a 4-credit independent study to a fully online study. In addition to increasing access by offering an online format, the other goal of this IMTL project was to convert this to an OER (open educational resources) course, meaning 51% or more of the course uses OERs. The project has been successful in terms of the transition to a fully online mode, but achieving the 51% mark for OERs has proved challenging in terms of finding content in this area that is focused on the adult student and still maintains the level of quality found in nationally recognized textbooks. This course was offered in the fall 2019 term.

**Michael Nastacio**  
**Quantitative Reasoning**

Inspired by a grant received by SUNY Math Pathways, the course, Quantitative Reasoning, was developed as a new math study group for our Empire State College students and a viable option to fulfill the SUNY General Educational requirement in mathematics without the need for any of the common anxiety and stress that come with some college mathematics studies. This was also a perfect match for our Staten Island mathematics students. Part of the curriculum is based on what the Carnegie Math Pathways refers to as “Productive Struggle”; that is, as the students work in groups, they expand their efforts to make sense of mathematics and figure something out that is not immediately apparent. To date, registered students have found the course topics to be quite refreshing, interesting and, importantly, relevant to their everyday lives. A second offering took place in the fall of 2019.

**Jennifer Nettleton, Jacqueline Michaels, Kim Stote, and Lynn McNall**  
**SONAH Online Faculty Repository**

The SONAH Online Faculty Repository provides nursing faculty with information and access to pertinent college policies and resources. It was presented at the 2018 Fall Academic Conference and the 2019 All College

Conference. In these sessions, project development and ways in which IMTL provides opportunities to produce creative and innovative projects were shared. The repository went live in May 2019. An IRB (Institutional Review Board)-approved survey will evaluate the effectiveness of the repository. The collection of data began after the spring 2019 term. The findings of the survey will continue to be disseminated at relevant conferences and in peer-reviewed scholarly publications.

**Diane Perilli and Carolina Kim**  
**Enriching Independent Studies Using Technology**

Mentor Diane Perilli and Lead Educational Technologist Carolina Kim continued the project of enriching Diane’s independent study in accounting using educational technology. The first stage was implemented in the first project year where synchronous technology was added to the independent study. In the second stage, asynchronous resources were added, namely, recorded tutorials and Moodle. With Carolina’s help, Diane recorded brief tutorials. With the use of Moodle, information was easily relayed to the students including the posting of resources such as the tutorial videos and recordings of the group synchronous meetings. We are continuing to evaluate the effectiveness of this independent study enrichment through student surveys and analysis of study completion rates.

**Bernard Smith, Leslie Ellis, Nan Travers, and Amanda Treadwell**  
**Mentors Mentoring Mentees: iPLA and Cross-Disciplinary Mentoring**

We surveyed both mentors (n=76) and active, concurred mentees (n=73) regarding individualized prior learning assessment (iPLA). Although we are still analyzing the results, we know that faculty mentor students in degree planning *within* their fields and assumed that was the prevailing practice; however, our research found cross-



discipline mentoring more dominant. The extent to which faculty still mentor across disciplines was counterintuitive now that the college is organized by “schools.” This cross-discipline mentoring pattern was also reflected in assisting students in preparing iPLA requests. Again, the data suggest more faculty mentor iPLA students cross-disciplinarily. On the student side, the majority indicated their mentor as being the most useful resource in preparing iPLA requests. iPLA is a cornerstone of the institution and linked to increased completion rates; mentors are fundamental to its success. The cross-disciplinary nature of mentoring in general, and specifically iPLA, regardless of institutional structure, raises questions around how well faculty are prepared for cross-disciplinary and iPLA mentoring. Further research exploring institutional data would determine the full extent of cross-disciplinary mentoring, but, regardless, focused faculty support is needed.

**Betty Wilde-Biasiny**  
***Digital Humanities Research***  
***and Course Design***

Digital Humanities is a developing field that interests me in terms of applying scholarship to tangible resources for students at Empire State College; most specifically, to identify ways to update course materials using a sophisticated level of technology in both research and course delivery. IMTL provided the concentrated time and collegial support for me to research content, write course content lecture pages, learn supportive technology, and work with an instructional designer to create a form/design, grading tools, and relevant ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance. Group activities facilitated additional learning from others in terms of organizing research and using media, OERs (open educational resources), and repositories of information in course design. My course, Issues in Contemporary Art, has been updated from an informal course template to a robust online study group learning management system that includes personally written narratives for each thematic module, augmented resource materials and historical annotations for

those overviews, design of assignments and assessments for each module, and a template for two other courses in need of upgrades — Museum/Curatorial Studies and American Art: A New Look.

**Mary Zanfini**  
***Using a Comfort Dog in the Writing***  
***Classroom to Combat Anxiety***

Each term, at least one of my students suffers from “writer’s anxiety.” I understand the fear and am accepting of all the difficulties that this specific fear entails. If students cannot even begin a writing assignment, how will they ever be able to finish one for credit? I began to wonder if a “therapy dog” could assist my work with my students and mentees. I received a Mother’s Day gift: a small rescue puppy. I wondered if I could somehow work out a way to bring “Seamus” to campus. His temperament seemed ideal for he was friendly, loved people and was ready to go anywhere with you. I will be looking for a therapy group that will provide training and insurance for his “work-life” here at Empire State College’s Staten Island location. I hope that I can bring the “graduate” of the training to campus, so I can work “miracles” with my own students!

# The Return

Robert Congemi, Latham

## Scene One

*The Promenade in Brooklyn, New York, which overlooks the Hudson River and the enormous buildings of Lower Manhattan. Evening is beginning. A few tourists and neighborhood people walk up and down the Promenade. A few children play games. From stage left, a very old man with a cane, accompanied by a youth who helps him to walk, makes his way with difficulty to a bench at stage center. Finally, the old man is seated and seems as if he has finished a long journey. He watches the children with some intensity.*

Grandson: *(solicitously, tenderly)* So. We made it grandfather. I told you we could do it. I'll make whatever you want happen.

*Grandfather continues to watch children but speaks to his grandson.*

Grandfather: Christopher, leave me for a few minutes. Now that I'm here, at last, I want to think about this neighborhood where I first lived and take it all in. The Promenade and the neighborhood are interesting places to discover.

Grandson: *(still solicitous)* You're certain?

*Grandfather nods, and rather reluctantly, his grandson backs away and then, after some time, exits stage left.*

Grandfather: Has anything changed? *(looking around)* Nothing has changed.

*Suddenly, a ball that the children have been playing with rolls toward him and one of the boys chases after it. The grandfather stops it at his feet and gives it to the boy.*

Grandfather: Here you go, Charlie. You always had to go get the ball.

*The boy is confused but does not back away from the grandfather. The boy can see there is nothing threatening in the old man's manner.*

The Boy: *(holding the ball)* My name is not Charlie, sir. It's Peter.

*The grandfather stares at him.*

Grandfather: Oh, yes, of course. Sorry. You look just like Charlie, Peter. Is your father's name Charlie?

The Boy *(shaking his head)*: Nope. His name is George.

*The grandfather shakes his head, acknowledging his mistake.*

Grandfather: Yes. Nothing's changed. The same games. The same houses. Almost the same children. Actually, the same children.

*The boy's friends call out to him.*

Friends: Peter, come on, will you? It's getting dark.

*The boy runs back to his friends and gradually they disappear from the stage. The grandfather begins to think aloud. He points to the façade of one of the buildings immediately behind the Promenade.*

Grandfather: Charlie, it's Franklin. Ah, we had some fun in that house, huh? Even if my family only rented the top floor. *(sadly)* Charlie, where are you now? Did things go well for you? And Rosalie? And Phil? All of you?

## Scene Two

*The stage darkens and the lights come up on another location — a Long Island suburb of New York City. A young man, the grandfather at 17 or 18, is sitting on the front stoop of a tract house. He is very involved in studying, a textbook in one hand while holding a notebook in his other hand.*

Grandfather as Adolescent: They're all lawyers, the presidents. That must be the ticket. *(he goes back to studying)* Ah, yes, torts.



Robert Congemi

*After a bit of time, several other young people enter stage right, carrying books, but very different in dress and manner from grandfather as an adolescent. They are hippies or dressed as hippies from the 1960s — long hair, colored hair, the young women in long old-fashioned dresses, flowers in their hair. One of the young men looks more like a beatnik than a hippy, dressed all in black. Another young man, apparently the leader of the group, wears a buckskin jacket, jeans and hiking boots. He is nice enough, but indeed the leader. He stops the group dramatically, holding out his hands, as they reach Grandfather as Adolescent.*

Hippy Student Leader: Ah, there he is. *(friendly but bossy)* Franklin, stop studying for once, will you?

Beat Student: Yeah, like you're too square, man. Like I told you a thousand times, you got to drop out and turn on.

*The young women in the group giggle and even succeed in taking away Grandfather as Adolescent's textbook and notebook. He's not happy about that, but can't bring himself to protest.*

One of the Young Women: Do something fun for a change, Franklin. If you get any stiffer. ...

*She's interrupted by Hippy Student Leader.*

Hippy Student Leader: Look, we're on our way to this great rock concert. In Woodstock, New York. You have to come with us. Don't miss this, man. This is the start of the Age of Aquarius. Everything's changing from here on in.

Another Boy: Life is *ours*. We are the future. Freedom, love, happiness. A whole new ballgame.

Girl: Franklin, listen, not only the greatest music, but there'll be thousands of women. No bras. Stoned. Willing!

*Grandfather as Adolescent grins, shakes his head. Wanting them to understand.*

Grandfather as Adolescent: I can't. I really can't. *(looking to get his book and notebook back)*

Other Boy: *(mocking explanation to the others)* He's got to *prepare*, man. Pass the tests. Get a career.

Grandfather as Adolescent: *(trying to reason)* Even if I wanted to, look at me.

Girl: You mean you look like the squarest guy on earth?

Hippy Student Leader: No problem. *(taking off his buckskin jacket)* Here, take my jacket. Don't say anything. Do what we do. You'll pass. Everyone will be out of their minds anyway.

Grandfather as Adolescent: *(trying to resist to no avail. They take off his jacket, take away his tie, pull his shirt out of his pants, mess up his hair)* No. Come on. No.

*They succeed, lead him off stage. Lights go out and then on again briefly. Franklin is seen sitting on the ground smoking dope, two girls by his side, folk and rock music blaring.*

### Scene Three

*Lights go down and then, after a bit of time, come back up on a small living room in an old house in a small town. There is a table filled with papers center stage. The grandfather as a 30-year-old is watching television by changing the channels repeatedly. He is very agitated.*

Grandfather at 30: *(Almost crying out)* Where the hell is she?

*Indeed he makes so much noise that finally a child of about 10 enters from stage right, obviously having been awakened, the child much upset.*

Child: Daddy, I woke up. I was scared. *(rubbing his eyes and whimpering, he looks around)* Where's Mommy?

Grandfather at 30: *(speaking with a mixture of repeating himself and not sure of what he's saying)* Your mother's not here.

Child: *(as if this is his usual question)* Why?

Grandfather at 30: She has to work late tonight.

Child: She *always* has to work late.

*Child continues to whimper. The whimpering continues and grows in strength, the lights dim, and Grandfather at 30 stands downstage, speaking out to the audience.*

Grandfather at 30: Where are you, Susan? Yes, yes, he's right. You *always* have to work late. Do you think I'm fooled? Do you even think he's fooled? In some instinctive way, he knows. Even the banality of it is disgusting. Where are *you*? Have I really been *that* much of a failure? To legitimize in some evil way you're just having sex some other guy? Your boss? I don't think you even care if I know. All right, I am not the greatest lawyer who has even been, and this town is not the capital of the United States. But it is something, isn't it? No

less than what most people have? Damn you, Susan. To betray your child as well as your husband. Advocate for yourself, you tell me. Well, I'll advocate for myself. Watch this.

*The lights dim and when they come up, Grandfather at 30 is at a house party. He is now at stage center by himself and is somewhat drunk. A few couples to each side of him are talking, having a drink, etc. Finally, The Boss approaches him.*

The Boss: *(not particularly offensive)* Franklin, get a hold of yourself. This is not good. *(Tries to take Franklin by the arm, but Franklin breaks away. Almost whispers)* Get a hold. ...

Franklin: *(very combative)* Leave me alone. What gives you the right to tell me what to do? Because I happen to work for you?

Boss: Franklin, don't do this.

Franklin: But I will! This is what I must do. You don't understand. I must change my life. *(strengthens himself)* I must quit your ugly firm. I must quit this town. I must have the courage to change my life. You think I want to live like this for the rest of my one life! What will come of working for you? Nothing will come of it. Nothing has already come of it. Nothing of any accomplishment is gained by settling to be ordinary. All the greats of the world have been risk-takers. They've struck out on their own. Taken chances that have led to changing their lives and often changing the lives of the rest of the world. Their daring was scorned at first, but they were right to strike out. *(secretive himself)* It's as if they had a secret that everyone else should know. Actually, they do know, but don't admit it to themselves. *(back to normal, straightens up)* This night is just what I needed. Tiny things make great changes. That's also overlooked. The old Franklin is gone as of this minute. I'm glad all this is happening. If I don't do this, I'll blow my brains out.

*He points a finger at his head and backs up a little. Darkness descends. Franklin is alone on a dark stage. He has a revolver in his hand. Stands for some time with it pointed at his head. In the end he doesn't use the revolver. Stage lights come up again and the previous scene is resumed.*

Franklin: Finally I have the courage to do something first-rate, meaningful, something I can be proud of and not silently embarrassed by my life. I may even do great things.

#### Scene Four

*The lights come up on a demonstration by low wage earners in front of a government building. Grandfather enters stage left in cheap suit, carrying an old attaché case, returning home from his job. He is a low-level city worker now in his 60s. The demonstration stops him and he listens intently off to the side. A short, stocky, strong-looking man with a bull horn is stirring up the crowd of workers.*

Man with Bullhorn: What do we want? *(waits for answer)*

Crowd: *(tentative at first, but growing stronger)* Fair wages.

Man with Bullhorn: I can't hear you. What do we want?

Crowd: Fair wages!

Man with Bullhorn: What?

Crowd: Fair wages!!

*The man with the bullhorn smiles, finally content, and the crowd starts to cheer, cheering that gets louder and louder.*

Man with Bullhorn: *That's* more like it. *That's* the way to demonstrate. Now, who is going to come up here and take this bullhorn out of my hand and make a testimonial?

*Nobody responds to his request at first.*

Man with Bullhorn: Come on now. Who's got the courage to speak out the truth before everyone?

*He waits. Finally, a brash young woman exits from the crowd, gets next to the man, to the cheers of the crowd.*

Man with Bullhorn: O-K. Here we go. I should have known Cindy would lead the crowd.

*Cindy takes the bullhorn from him; the crowd continues to cheer for her, calls of encouragement. She nods her head, acknowledging she is going to do this public thing.*

Cindy: Yes, I'll do it. I'm not afraid. Not afraid to speak out against the conditions I have lived with for seven years now. Just like lots of you people. Even worse. Do you know how much I make an hour? After working seven years for this food chain? Eight dollars an hour! And, like I said, that's after seven years. It was even worse when I started. They called it entry-level pay. Learning-the-job pay. Why I couldn't live on that salary and I still can't live on my salary. I have to beg for as many hours as they'll give me, if they decide they will. They don't have to, you know. And they have more ways to commit wage theft against you than you can imagine. How can this happen in our country? How can this happen in this world?

*Crowd noise supports her more and more. Then it returns to chanting "fair wages, fair wages!"*

*On stage opposite Grandfather, lights go up on a reporter and a company spokesman. Other officials are silent but their presence is felt.*

Reporter: *(putting the microphone in the spokesman's face)* So what do you say to this? What do you say to these accusations? Indeed, not accusations, but apparently facts.

Spokesman: *(trying at first to take the microphone out of the reporter's hand)* Look, the first thing I want to say is that these people have every right to demonstrate. We knew this demonstration was coming along, but

we did nothing to stop or hinder it. That's their right. Their First Amendment right to freedom of speech.

Reporter: OK, OK. But what about what these people are being paid?

Spokesman: They are being paid a competitive wage. They are being taught the business and then seasoned. Now they have skills they can take anywhere.

Reporter: Yeah, and get the same shamefully low pay.

Spokesman: *(Ignoring this)* We provide jobs for people. Hundreds of thousands of jobs that wouldn't be there if it weren't for us. We keep the food inexpensive for the public. We invent the business, we take all the risks, we go under if things don't go well. We keep the economy going.

Reporter: That's not what the research says.

Spokesman: And we are committed as a company to make working conditions better and better. Right now we are negotiating with the unions.

*The reporter seems to lose heart. Grandfather is listening intently. The man with the bullhorn regains it from Cindy and moves on with the demonstration.*

Man with Bullhorn: Now. Who wants to testify next? Who wants to speak out? Come on. Don't be shy. What do you have to lose? Cindy showed us how to do it. Cindy showed us the way.

*For some time, nobody comes forth from the crowd until a woman of color is urged to leave the crowd, mount the stage and take the bullhorn. She is gently being urged on physically, but she resists. She is clearly a very shy individual. Finally, she gets to where the man with the bullhorn is. People cheer. With various remarks called out to her, they really urge her on.*

Crowd: Yeah, Marjorie. Yeah, Marjorie. Go to it, girl. You can do it. Yeah, Marjorie. Tell it like it is. Witness for our cause.

*Slowly, trying to gain confidence, she begins to speak. This probably is the biggest public speech of her life.*

Marjorie: *(meekly, but becoming a bit more energized as she goes along)* Yes, I want to speak out, too. I want to tell you what it's like when you work all the time and you're still at the level of poverty. Don't get me wrong. I don't want to make trouble. For anybody. I just don't want things to be so hard. And hard all the time. Give me a little more money, and I won't take advantage, I'll work harder than ever before. Not for myself. That's gone. Long ago. But for my kids. You see I got kids. Same as everybody else — a daughter and a son. Just at that age. The girl, she likes to have a chance like all the other daughters. You know, proms in pretty dresses, feel like something? *(pause)* Not like nothing. She sashays around like she's something but inside she feels like nothing. *(pause)* You know what she said to me the other day? She said, Momma, I don't want to be nothing. *(another pause)* And the same for my son, too. I don't want him to get the wrong ideas. We got some very bad people in the neighborhood who are really angry and want to stir up things and they tell him that he's got nothing to lose. Don't be a loser. Get what other people got. Make some big money selling drugs. That's right. Make some big money selling drugs. People at him all the time. Really simple, they tell him. Lots of people doing it. Don't be stupid. *(again a pause)* So he decides to do it and pretty soon ends up in jail, and that's the end. Now he can't get a job, no way. So what's he do? Back to selling drugs until he's back in jail again. By that time it's *all* over. Totally. Don't let anybody tell you different. You know, sometimes I look at my children and I say to myself, I just want to take you in my arms forever, cause I know what's coming for you.

*Grandfather has continued to listen intently to all of this, and when the woman has finished, he slumps his head down. He*

*is very sad. For a long time, he just sits, not moving, feeling very sad. Finally the lights darken slowly, a period of time passes, and when the lights come up again, far downstage, a trio of men in suits are apparently in a television studio doing a news show story. Two of the men represent point and counterpoint, or more exactly, a guest on the show and a second studio man, Mr. Blanc, acting as commentator. The third man works for the television network also and is the moderator.*

The Moderator: Good evening, everyone, welcome to tonight's edition of "The News Behind the News." Tonight we are interviewing Dr. Sherwin Adams, who has written a new book called *The Last Days*. It is a very controversial book. Indeed, Dr. Adams is a very controversial man. We here at Channel 42 have long considered inviting him to speak to us, and being that we are committed to getting at the truth behind the truth, we have invited him here today. Let me tell you at the outset that Dr. Adams' ideas are indeed *very* controversial, even upsetting. So take that as a heads up. To comment on Dr. Adams' book and ideas is our Senior Analyst Ray Hammond. *(turning to the doctor)* Good evening, Dr. Adams.

Dr. Adams: Good evening.

The Moderator: Dr. Adams, as I've just stated, your book is quite a thing.

Dr. Adams: It wasn't meant to be. It was meant to tell the truth.

The Moderator: *(going through his notes)* I had a chance to read most of it before the show and I must say your assertion that we have passed the tipping point because of global warming when it comes to the Earth's future, that the planet is doomed because of a theory you have about the world's two great oceans is ... well ... doctor, can you explain this assertion? It's one of the main reasons we've invited you here this evening. It's a new one for me.

Dr. Adams: As I said in my book, the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean are gradually moving into synch with each other regarding their movements, and when that fully occurs, the heated ocean resulting from the synchronization will not only further obliterate the ice caps but, even more terrifyingly, heat the ocean bed. When that happens, unimaginable amounts of methane will be released from the thawing ocean beds, and *then* the planet will heat up until it is uninhabitable and explodes.

Commentator: Well, wait just a minute, doctor. I, too, have read your book and did some research on this very issue. First, it turns out that the theory didn't even originate with you. And, as always in these cases, this prediction is based on man-fed computer mathematical problems that are merely guesses in the end.

Dr. Adams: This is not a guess. This is reality.

Commentator: Sir, no disrespect intended, but that is only what you say.

Dr. Adams: I have studied this ocean event for several years now. ...

Commentator: So have others.

Dr. Adams: And together with the rising particles per trillion of methane in the air and the simply unstoppable use by mankind of fossil fuels, and god knows what else ... this is the truth of the matter.

Commentator: Hmm. Arguments that all can be refuted. May I tell you about many other so-called predictions that didn't turn out — that now look like failed doomsday predictions? Dates of the Earth's climate tipping point that were supposed to have happened and didn't happen? Particle levels that were supposed to bring on catastrophe that have been reached and even surpassed and nothing happened?



Dr. Adams: But all this is simply irrelevant. Terrible changes are occurring, ice caps are melting, the Earth is rising in temperature, nothing is being done about fossil fuels, the two great oceans are coming together, and these are indisputable facts, facts, facts.

Commentator: That is what people always say.

Dr. Adams: All right. Put this issue aside for a moment. Let's grant everything that people say about global warming around the world is absolutely wrong. Let's say that the world will continue to be most habitable. That catastrophic global warming is totally disproved. Let's talk about my other main point. Even if I am wrong on the first point, which I'm not, allow me to give you the facts on the *global slavery* that is coming.

Moderator: Yes, gentlemen. That's the other issue I wanted to discuss with the good doctor.

Commentator: (*shaking his head at Dr. Adams in disbelief*) Fine.

Dr. Adams: Well then, how are these facts for you? No matter which study you use, the studies all say — they all agree! — that the top 1% of the population in this country own about 40% of all the wealth in this country. Surely, you'll agree that is incontrovertible. And astounding. Doesn't that impress you? My god! And before you talk about new job creation, do you know what kind of new jobs? Jobs that pay next to nothing, jobs that don't allow you to feed your family, buy clothes, educate your children. Jobs that don't give you any dignity. Is that what America is all about? Is that what countless people over the last 350 years have fought and died for? For a few people to own everything? And how about the people who have no jobs at all, can't find jobs, however wretched, and will *never* find jobs? Don't you know what all the rioting in the streets these days is about? Violent rioting all

over America? People who are nothing, with nothing to lose, and the riots are spreading from city to city, state to state. And it's far worse in other countries. People making less than a dollar a day, selling themselves, living in filth. Slavery. Worldwide slavery, which if it isn't worldwide will soon be. Nothing is going to get better. It will only get worse and worse.

Moderator: Well, Mr. Blanc, what do you make of this?

Commentator: I don't make much of it at all. Haven't you heard that you can use statistics to do whatever you want? He chooses his statistics. Haven't you heard that our economy is much better since the crash? All right, I'll admit the economy is slow, but it is *growing*. People are doing better actually. Fewer people are out of work. Month after month. We are adding thousands and thousands of jobs every month. And our median level of living is greater than any other in the world. Sure, we need more progress, but we look very good based on our recent past financial history and on the rest of the world, where the recovery is very sluggish. Also, there are all kinds of new government programs in the pipeline. And if you want to continue to talk worldwide, there is actually a decrease in income inequality in other countries. Believe it or not, there is a rising middle class in other countries. Look at India, look at Russia, look at China. I could go on and on.

Dr. Adams (*getting more and more distraught by the commentator's remarks*) Stop it! This is all sleight of hand! It's all a cover-up for reality! The gains are smoke and mirrors. Smoke and mirrors. Can't you see that?

Commentator: That's what you say.

Dr. Adams: Sir, you are evil. You are just a mouthpiece for those who control this terrible situation. This inexcusably unjust world.

Commentator: I beg your pardon.

Dr. Adams: It is people like you and your bosses who are responsible for so much hardship, heartbreak, brutality, hideous degradation.

*Grandfather has been listening with more and more agitation. His head sinks lower and lower toward his lap. Suddenly, he lifts up his head and starts to scream. His screams are loud, long, shocking. He can bear the dialogue no longer. Finally, he starts to sob and slowly the lights on stage begin to dim.*

### Scene Five

*Back to Grandfather in his old Promenade neighborhood. He seems shaken by his recollections, breathing deeply. In time, his grandson returns.*

Grandson: (*noticing his grandfather's agitation*) Grandfather? Grandfather, are you all right?

Grandfather: (*trying to get a hold of himself, to hide his agitation from his grandson*) Yes, yes, I'm just fine, dear.

Grandson: Coming back here emotional?

Grandfather: (*sardonic laugh*) Yes, you could say that.

Grandson: Anything I can do?

Grandfather: No. Just give me a few moments.

*Grandson gives Grandfather some room and time, and then spies a pretty young girl on the Promenade, switching his attention to her.*

Grandfather: *mumbles to himself: What the hell is it all about?* Not only is it terrible as you go through life, but it is also even more terrible at death! Far more terrible. Unimaginably more terrible! A steady decline in everything about you. A terrible illness. If you're unlucky, the horror is kept going with all the medicines. Until there's nothing left of you or you spend your last moments figuring out how to be released from the horrid situation.

Grandson: *(for the moment, pulling himself away from the sight of the girl)* Grandfather, we should get going shortly. You have to take your medicines. Especially your heart medicine.

Grandfather: Oh, to hell with the medicine. *(thinking)* Hmm. The heart medicine? That's probably the best way out. Great pain briefly, and then it's all over. Forever. Hmm.

Grandson: *(he's heard this before, so he is not completely shocked)* Come on, you have to take your medicines. You want to live, don't you?

Grandfather: Do I?

*The boy turns back to the girl, leaving his grandfather to meditate. The boy and girl come together.*

Grandson: You're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. Do you mind my saying that?

Girl: I was thinking that you are the most handsome guy I've ever seen. Do you mind my saying that?

Grandson: *(happy)* Not at all. I'm lucky you feel that way. I have to take care of my grandfather right now, but may I see you again?

Girl: Of course.

*They smile at each other and then take each other's hand. Grandfather continues to think.*

*"It is just flat out uncomfortable to reflect on yourself. I do not know if you all experience difficulties, but I struggled. It is hard to put that mirror up and be honest with yourself and be honest with the fact that you are not as strong as you would like to be or you are not as developed as you would like to be, or even that you have accomplished things that you do not believe you have. But if you do not experience that discomfort, if you do not embrace the bother, you are doing a disservice to your adult learners."*

— Geleana Alston  
*"Adult Educators Must Be Learners, Too"*  
 Explorations in Adult Higher Education, 2020, p. 110

# Reflections on Gamification in Mentoring and Teaching

Anamaria Iosif Ross, Utica

This short essay aims to bring forth a few possible applications of “gamification” to our professional activities of mentoring and teaching adult students. Having increased tremendously in popularity over the past two decades, the term pertains to the introduction of game-like elements into an activity for the purpose of boosting enjoyment and motivation in learning experiences or other tasks. Game activities include a wide range of endeavors and purposes: icebreakers, creative brainstorming, organizing and sorting information, Q & A (i.e., *Jeopardy!* and *Trivial Pursuit*), and collaboration.

Why play, you say? Yes, that should be the title of a Dr. Seuss book. One is never too old to play, as noted on countless board games that say “for ages 9 to 99.” A more detailed answer can take many forms. For one, play is the first and most fundamental form of learning among social animals, including most birds and mammals. It entails communication, cooperation, and (often) friendly competitiveness. It is associated with increased emotional intelligence. It builds many different skills (cognitive, emotional, physical, and social). It fosters positive relationships and trust among peers and frequently across groups, for example, the Olympic Games. Gaming allows and empowers one to be vulnerable and to take risks, which are attitudes essential to innovative thinking. It can improve attention, coordination, and focus. Animals that hunt and animals that may serve as prey both must play to practice needed survival skills.

Founding scholars of developmental psychology devoted their lives to studying children’s play, which fulfills many important functions for emotional,

cognitive and social development, as well as healing. Whether playing ball or playing piano, the notion of play suggests dynamic engagement with the world around us. For adult humans, the difference between play and work can be arbitrary, at times. Some humans rebuild boat engines, restore classic cars, or assemble computers for fun, others garden, and yet others play card games, word games, or gamble. What characterizes or defines the playfulness aspect of an endeavor? Often, it is a high level of attentional or professional engagement. A high level of satisfaction blurs the line between play and work for adults, as illustrated in the experience of “flow.” When one is absorbed in a game and playing well, it is easy to lose track of time. It creates fulfillment.

Two years ago, my colleague Nadine Fernandez and I encountered each other at a SUNY Empire State College roundtable session on gamification, which took place during the Fall Academic Conference. We agreed that we would like to further explore the possibilities of gamification for use in Educational Planning (“Ed Planning”) studies. We hoped to find innovative ways to increase engagement and improve retention of new students in Ed Planning by developing new methods/ techniques that included game elements and narrative elements to frame, mark, and reward a student’s progress through the often tenuous journey that is the process of educational planning. We thought game elements could help to engage some of the younger generations of students, millennials in particular, who desire interactive or prestructured forms of instruction. That is, we thought game elements could bring more clarity and diversity to the planning process.



Anamaria Iosif Ross

That initial conversation blossomed into a project supported by the college’s Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning, and was followed by months of brainstorming, discussions, and readings. Our initial enthusiasm waned as we were forced to the pragmatic conclusion that ESC did yet not have the necessary IT (information technology) resources to create the interactive, “gamified” Ed Planning portal we envisioned. However, we still benefitted from enriching conversations with supportive IT staff and experimented with several kinds of software, such as a shareable virtual progress board (timeline) based on Scrum<sup>1</sup> methodology used in software development, and the text-based game tool, Twine.<sup>2</sup> More valuable insights and possibilities have been emerging from that effort, while it has been lying fallow. Immediate outcomes seemed esoteric and soft while foreshadowing a distant promise of new engagement methods, interactive platforms, and digital learning tools that make innovative use of game features.

Good games tend to be exciting, interactive, and rewarding. They provide rapid feedback, hot incentives, and new experiences. They allow second chances and offer the opportunity to progress along a narrative journey or a timeline. Interactions that create friendly competition between opposing groups or collaboration within teams work by bringing “fun” game elements into everyday learning activities.

The nature of the educational planning process is amenable to gamification as an approach in a multitude of ways. The quest for the degree can be imagined as a kind of “magical journey to the pot of gold.” The ed planning trek is peppered with trials, prizes, setbacks, tribulations, and rewards. The hero’s first challenge is to identify and visualize her/his own educational goals and break up progress into smaller bites or steps, sometimes called chunking. There are many choices and decision points in the hero’s journey. Opportunities emerge from her/his curiosity and engagement, the willingness to query, explore and risk. There are some setbacks, like in Chutes and Ladders or Monopoly, but every setback bears gifts. Through educational planning, students have the opportunity to collect credits for their life experiences and “level up” educationally and professionally. They also build confidence, as they learn to advocate and speak about their experiences and transferable skills in ways that can change hurdles into portals.

A book that I enjoyed and found useful for thinking about educational planning is *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers* by Dave Gray, Sunni Brown, and James Macanufo (2010). The book seems intended to foster creative teamwork in the business world by drawing upon games and game theories. These authors described game worlds as alternative spaces governed by their own rules, which players must agree to follow. A fruitful concept they mentioned is that of “fuzzy goals.” Like a player at the start of a game, students

embarking on their ed planning journey need to imagine a future that is not fully conceived or manifested yet, “a world we can see only dimly, as if through a fog.” The authors added: “In knowledge work, we need our goals to be fuzzy” (p. 5). They noted that fuzzy goals have emotional, sensory and progressive characteristics, and the movement toward a goal is a learning process that involves *successive approximation* (p. 8). Recognizing this basic truth can foster a mindful, positive, and resilient relationship between student and mentor.

*“The ed planning trek is peppered with trials, prizes, setbacks, tribulations, and rewards.”*

Student and mentor may feel that they want to “solve” the educational planning puzzle, reach a quick answer and a path laid out — nice and clear. Instead, the path emerges as you put one foot in front of the other throughout the planning process. The notion of successive approximation recalls the idea of “baby steps,” with the critical difference that it does not dismiss or minimize the challenge and potential impact of choices and incremental changes of perspective. And whereas babies may take some steps just for the sake of walking and may not even care where they end up as long as they are free and safe, the adult student charting an educational life-course has much at stake, both financially and personally. To reassure Ed Planning students, it is helpful to acknowledge the importance of their decision to take part in the process and the interactive nature of it. Their degree is a work-in-progress that they are in charge of designing and redesigning, and “every great journey starts with a single step.”

In my native Romania, I was acculturated to classic European teaching paradigms, which entailed students listening to lengthy expert lectures, sitting quietly, and raising one’s hand to speak. Around age 10, I outgrew being a hyperactive tomboy and learned to hyper-focus by writing extensive notes. My favorite subject was math because I was fortunate to have an extraordinary teacher, Dorin Moraru, whom the students called Morris. He was famous for getting his students to Olympiads, with a dynamic teaching style that was ironic, playful, and witty. He teased his pupils, encouraged us to try different things, and gave us nicknames. Morris used humor to explain when something worked and when it did not. If an idea fell flat, he would often say: “That was about as helpful as rubbing down a peg-leg!” When one of us nailed an answer or came up with a particularly clever solution, he knew how to make us feel delighted, by showing his delight. Morris was adored by all his students, both the ones who struggled and the ones who shined in math. There was a kind of magic that he made happen, filled with as many “aha” moments as with math flops. He motivated us to question and made it safe to fumble or blurt a wrong answer.

Creative exploration involves randomness, reversal and reframing, improvisation, and selection, among other features, according to the authors of *Gamestorming* (Gray et al., pp. 23-26). Games such as Card Sort can help organize information into categories for area of study guidelines or PLAs (prior learning assessments); Forced Ranking offers a tool for making difficult decisions among competing priorities, and; Graphic Gameplan creates a timeline of achievable tasks. Certainly not least, a key ingredient is the art of asking questions. In Educational Planning, mentor and student are doing exactly that: asking questions about goals and life experiences and building trust, while navigating together through emergent possibilities. The ed

planning sometimes feels amorphous and daunting to students. It can be a straight path, for registered programs, or a complex, somewhat lengthy developmental process of self-discovery and self-validation, governed by rules and multiple decision nodes/points that provide many opportunities to imagine, create, open, explore and “close the world.” And commonly there is a sense of danger and risk involved for students: “Am I making the right decisions?” “Will I get this credit?” “Can I do this?” “Is it the right time?”

To maximize their sense of progress and well-being, students benefit from continuous feedback loops to assess what to keep and what to toss (concentration titles, PLA topics, and possible courses). These markers may be badges, flags, completed modules

in a Moodle course, or points and checkmarks along the way. Like a game-world quest or journey, the dynamic and transformative process of educational planning unfolds in space/time according to a set of guidelines. While registered programs and modular online course design are able to inject clarity and direction by chunking and scaffolding educational tasks along a sequential timeline, there are many ways to adapt and adopt game elements into “analog” encounters, as mentor and student solve the riddle of academic progress face-to-face. As we revisit the key role of educational planning at Empire State College, gaming elements and methodologies could provide a framework for embracing challenges and engaging creatively and productively with emergent needs.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> According to Scrum.org (<https://www.scrum.org/resources/what-is-scrum>), “Scrum is a framework within which people can address complex adaptive problems, while productively and creatively delivering products of the highest possible value.”
- <sup>2</sup> For more information, go to <http://twinery.org/>.

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*“To change the culture, to change the stigma, to reduce stereotypes and the use of those stereotypes in forming public policy that affects the funding that students and institutions need so badly, you need to help us change the story. Share the real stories of your real college students, talk about the data as you understand them, share this on social media, tell the person you go to Friday night dinner with, talk to the people who are not involved in higher education right now so that they can reflect on an experience that might not have been their own.”*

— Sara Goldrick-Rab  
*“Paying the Price’:  
 The Costs of a College Education and the Realities of Broken Dreams”*  
 Explorations in Adult Higher Education, 2020, p. 129



# Reflections on Not Knowing

Betty Hurley, Mentor Emerita, SUNY Empire Online

*"I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.'"*

— Toni Morrison (n.d.)

**M**y father, Thomas Hurley, embodied this quote and passed this sentiment on to me. He was a high school math teacher and cared deeply about the success of his students. His goal was to empower them as learners. I have tried to do the same.

This article for *All About Mentoring* has been a writing challenge. With 36 years at the college, the temptation is to think somehow I know more. Yet, Buddhism has taught me about "beginner's mind" and the power of approaching every experience with humility and knowing only that there is so much I do *not* know.

Since my ordination in 2016 as an interfaith/interspiritual minister, I've chosen a word each year to focus on as the core of my experience. For two years, it was "tree," as I both rooted myself in spiritual development (including indigenous traditions in which rooting is a key concept) and branched out, seeking new areas for service. I trained as a hospital chaplain and got a certificate as an end-of-life doula in those two years. Now, as I retire from mentoring, my new words are "not knowing." I am not sure how my retirement years will unfold!

What I do know is that things will change and that the most important entities of my life are the relationships I have with Earth's inhabitants. We are all connected in mysterious ways. Physicists now

support what mystics and shamans have known for years: that what we can see with our eyes is only a small percentage of what exists. Because we are connected in this web, each of our actions affects others around us in ways we cannot predict. So, my task is to mindfully approach each moment, the only moment I know I have, and make it a moment where I make a positive contribution.

And, all of this is actually a wonderful approach to mentoring. Over my last few years at SUNY Empire State College, I saw my mentoring expand to address the whole person. In my early years, my focus was on the neck up. That had some advantages, but it also gave me a limited view of myself, as well as of my mentees. Recent research has shown that we have cells similar to brain cells on our hearts (Daemen, 2013); and researchers have also seen the mind as being present in the whole body, not just in the brain (Pandya, 2011).

What are my strongest memories from my years at the college? What did I learn from them? I remember my interview at what was then called the Genesee Valley Center in Rochester. I don't remember what my presentation was on, but the two hours alone in the main meeting room at the head of the table with random faculty coming in to ask me questions has stayed with me. Then, organizing a busload of students from Rochester to participate in the Women's Studies Residency in New York City and the student who had a history of seizures (including one in my office) not showing up for the bus ride home. She finally appeared and I learned my lesson about risk and vulnerability. And I remember sitting behind George Drury, known for transforming students, watching *Educating Rita*, a 1983 movie about a British Open University



Betty Hurley

professor played by Michael Caine, whose love for literature is reignited by his conversations with Rita, a hairdresser dissatisfied with her own life. I also remember the day of the attacks on the World Trade Center, as we sat in a center meeting getting increasingly desperate reports. I must say that the All College conferences and all those governance meetings have merged into one big blur of faces and documents.

What am I most proud of? My inclination to make connections came with me, apparently. With adult learners, I found it was especially important to help them connect quantitative skills with life experiences. As I was cleaning out my office, I found some booklets I had written to address math for the math-avoidant learner. As we moved into online, I developed, with the help of many others, including Marj Robison, general education math courses that continued making those connections, whether visually, through problem-solving, or through an interest in education. I've also added journaling to all of the math courses on which I worked, finding it to be beneficial in

many ways, including helping students articulate those connections and maintaining a good connection with the instructor for ongoing support.

Connecting students in a community has also been a common thread throughout my time at the college. Since many of my mentees in my early days at what was then the Genesee Valley Center in Rochester were computer science students, I was able to connect them to each other through Caucus, an early conferencing system that was all text. With those students, we also held "Computer Fairs" where students shared their knowledge with other students. In online courses, I used discussions and group work as a way to build a community within a course. There's so much technology available now to facilitate communities. I hope to see Empire State College become more of a leader in this area.

Where to now? Over the past few years, I have been serving as a hospice volunteer and a volunteer chaplain at Albany Medical Center. I'm also a volunteer chaplain at the Edward L. Wilkinson long-term care facility in

Amsterdam, New York. The residents at Wilkinson continue to inspire me. Many come from hard work as farmers, raising large families. They are spirited, full of humor, and care for one another. I encourage you to seek out our elders; they can teach us much about what is most valuable.

In September 2019, a nurse practitioner, Amy Balog, started a palliative care practice in Saratoga Springs, Saratoga Family Health NPs Palliative Care Center, and I am part of her team as a chaplain and end-of-life doula. This will definitely be a role that will evolve over time. It's good my words for the year are "not knowing"!

A little while back, I offered a free course to any Empire State College student who has been dismissed and would like to focus on developing study learning and life skills for success. It's called Psychology of Learning and Success.

I'd be remiss if I did not also express my gratitude for the amazing opportunities I have had at Empire State College. And, I am most grateful for the people I've been able to meet and work with.

Key for me is our core values that include respect for all members of the community and their contributions. I will continue to carry those core values with me as I move on to other forms of service to our Earth and its inhabitants.

Namaste.

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# Take Flight

Laurie T. Seamans, Retired Assessment Specialist, Syracuse

Sitting by the bed, Dora watched the rise and fall of her mother's breathing, not daring to move. She seemed peaceful, a change from earlier when her mother pulled at her gown in disjointed, maniacal motions. It was terrifying to watch. Stay calm, she thought, wanting to run screaming from the room. I have to be here, I have to stay.

Dora stayed. Her mother settled down.

Voices down the hall, scratches of conversations. She wanted to listen but couldn't stomach the endless gossip and complaints. Dora focused on the photograph above her mother's bed, her mother's softball team from the '40s. So young, thought Dora, they were all so young and beautiful. Almost glamorous. Dora remembered another photo — her mother and some friends on a trip to New York City, all huddled in a fake car with a sign behind them, "New York City or Bust!" Their faces filled with big smiles, raring to go. When Dora saw it, she considered asking who they were but doubted her mother would remember. She'd make a circular motion trailing away from her head saying, "My brain flew right out the window!"

Dora's mother couldn't remember friends or enemies, triumphs or heartaches. She couldn't remember the warm, red plaid pajamas she wore the day before or how much she loved coffee. We forget more or less everything in the end.

A nurse appeared and asked how she was doing. Dora wasn't sure if the nurse meant her or her mother.

"Fine, I guess. As well as can be expected."

"I'll be back to give her another dose," the nurse said, smiling thinly.

Another dose. Dora initially thought the morphine would be on a schedule, but an aide explained it was better if she didn't get it too often. It made patients too comfortable and unwilling to let go. Some discomfort is a good thing in the end.

Dora was jarred from her thoughts when her mother grabbed at her, trying hard to speak.

"Big ... red ... bugs," her mother said. "Big ... red ... bugs ... at ... the ... house," her arm dropping to the bed.

Was she hearing her right?

"Big red bugs," her mother exclaimed as she pulled on Dora's arm, then going limp as though exhausted.

Dora had no idea what this meant. Hallucinations? Memories? Memories of what and when? Was she talking about after Dora's sister passed away? An infestation of ladybugs appeared in her sister's kitchen and everyone said it was Sarah. Dora's sister loved winged creatures — ladybugs, butterflies, dragonflies and dragons. It felt like a sign.

Dora's mother loved birds. She had parakeets when Dora was a kid and always a bird feeder under the kitchen window. She kept a small guidebook on hand and knew the difference between a grackle and a cowbird, a cedar waxwing and a cardinal, and more.

What was it about birds that was so captivating? Was it an allegory for freedom? That somehow we can escape the trappings of this earth and fly off to a better place?

A half-hour passed. Her mother began to move. Not spastically like earlier, just a subtle shifting and rustling of the sheets. Should she tell the nurse?



Laurie T. Seamans

Dora heard a nurse's cart in the hall. It was time for afternoon medications. Perhaps her mother's internal clock knew it as well. The nurse entered, administered the dose and left.

Afternoon faded into evening and the call to dinner brought quiet to the halls for a while. Dora's mother would have no dinner. She stopped eating almost two weeks before. Her features were changing, she was fading away. A week ago, her mother recognized Dora when she arrived, "Thank God you're here!" Today, Dora barely recognized her mother.

Standing to stretch, Dora wiped her eyes. It was 6:30 p.m. Residents would be back in their rooms soon. She wanted to go home for a while, but dreaded clearing the snow off her car, so she sat back down.

The night sounds cycled through — residents back to their rooms, visitors talking loudly over blaring televisions, and staff changing shifts. Shift changes were the hardest. Information never

seemed to get from one group to the next. One hand didn't know what the other was doing.

"Time flies when you're having fun," Dora used to say to her mother, whose response was a sarcastic, "Yeah, right!" Most days her mother was OK. Some days she talked about leaving. She told Dora that when she got out, she was going to get a car. Maybe a Buick. Something big. She wanted a car that all her friends could ride in and take off for parts unknown. Dora pictured the photo of her mother and her friends and smiled.

Early morning now and pitch dark outside. The snow stopped during the night. Dora felt numb and exhausted. She went in search of coffee in the little

kitchen up the hall. Sipping from the cup, the bitter taste helped wake her as she walked back toward the room.

An aide trotted down the hall toward her.

"You have to come now, it's time," she said, turning around and heading back.

Entering the room, another aide was at the end of the bed. Dora's mother was panting now, rushed and urgent breaths.

What should she do? She'd never done this before. Did she hold her? Stand here wringing her hands? She waited, watching, breathing. Dora looked at the clock. It was 4:59 a.m. Her mother drew a deep breath and exhaled, her

hand falling from her thigh to the bed. 5:00 a.m. on the dot. She was gone. The room was still.

Dora noticed a breeze push at the curtain. The window was open. One of the aides explained, "We open the window to let the spirit fly out into the world."

Dora smiled. "Take flight, mom. Get in your car and go. They're waiting. I'll be OK."

#### **Note**

Laurie T. Seamans's short story "Take Flight" took first place in the prose category at the Ninth Annual Cortland Community Arts Challenge in January 2019.

*"[There must be] a continuum of services from prerelease in prison, to navigating through the existing services; from providing ongoing mentoring and continuous support, and doing so from a community college perspective, to then ideally transferring to a four-year college and beyond."*

— John R. Chaney and Joni Schwartz  
*"Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens"*  
 Explorations in Adult Higher Education, 2020, p. 52

# 2018 – 2019 Arthur Imperatore Community Forum Fellowship Report

Lorraine Lander, Canandaigua

In August 2018, I began a yearlong Arthur Imperatore Community Forum Fellowship with the objective (as I described in my application for the award) “to partner with and support local public libraries to provide nature education to children.” There are many reported benefits of nature education for children, communities, and the natural world. At the same time, there are concerns about the declining amount of time children spend outside. While I have engaged in scholarly work about sustainability education for several years, primarily focused on the higher education context, nature education for children is a specialty within sustainability education that interested me. I wanted to investigate what high-quality nature education would consist of using the lens of what I already knew about child development, and research that I would seek out about effective approaches to teaching children.

## Phase One

In order to learn more about nature education, I started by reading articles and books on the topic. As well as reading, I examined possible conferences to attend in order to see the latest approaches to nature education and to interact with academics and practitioners in the field. I was surprised at all the variations and approaches that exist for learning about nature. There were conferences that focused on fields like wilderness education, wilderness therapy, environmental education, outdoor education, experiential learning, even wilderness adventure education. In the end, I attended four conferences,

which represented different approaches and audiences. Talking with fellow conference participants became one of the most valuable benefits of attending, as I shared my early ideas about my project and got both enthusiastic support (people overwhelmingly thought it was a great idea to partner with public libraries for this work) and suggestions for materials and approaches.

The first conference I attended explored the field of early childhood nature pedagogy and took place at the Brookfield Zoo outside of Chicago. The title of the conference was “Worlds of Wonder.”

I also attended a wilderness therapy conference where the idea of using nature for therapeutic work was explored. One important aspect of this work is to use nature to increase mindfulness in clients and as a stress reducer. Many of the participants were related to the Outward Bound movement that takes children from the inner city into nature to conduct what they hope will be transformative activities.

The third conference I attended was the North American Association for Environmental Education Annual Conference, the biggest of the gatherings. And while many of the presentations focused on a scientific approach, others did not.

The last conference I attended, which was international and focused on outdoor education, was primarily related to physical activities in the outdoors. I learned that in many places in the world, outdoor education is part of physical education programs in public schools and physical education teachers are



*Lorraine Lander (top left) addresses librarians at workshop.*

trained to also be outdoor educators. Hiking and overnight camping were common activities that were presented with a wide range of positive outcomes for those who participated. The conference itself took place in Australia, a country at the forefront of nature education given that environmental education is federally mandated for all grades in their public school system.

In addition to examining various nature education guides, I also looked at theoretical and research findings about good quality nature education. David Sobel (2008), one of the leading researchers and writers in this field, recommended that nature education should be:

- Active.
- Involve sensory exploration.
- Develop children’s mindfulness about their surroundings.
- Open-ended.



- Directed by children's goals.
- Mysterious and adventurous (at the comfort level of the child).

### Phase Two

Using a broad perspective to promote a love of nature and to accommodate a wide range of childhood interests and activity levels, I began the next phase of my project, which was to develop resources for my work to support public librarians. First, I developed a website<sup>1</sup> to store resources for public librarians and others who might be interested in a broad approach to nature education for children. On this website, I stored various materials that I created during my fellowship.

One resource I created was a pamphlet<sup>2</sup> that librarians can share with parents and others about the importance of nature education. Using funding from the Imperatore fellowship, I was able to print copies of this pamphlet and distribute them to the many libraries that ended up participating in my workshops.

To support workshop delivery at the participating libraries, I also used the funding to buy inexpensive magnifying lenses that could be given to children to motivate them to go outside and explore the outdoors by examining what they saw. Knowing that those first steps to learning about the outside might need some incentives and that libraries often struggle with funding, I also provided nature-themed stamps to the librarians. These could be used to keep track of children completing a multistage series of outdoor activities, which could be prominently displayed on the wall of the library so that this public recognition would be a motivator to get children outside.

### Phase Three

In my Imperatore fellowship plan, I proposed working with public libraries rather than doing workshops with children myself in order to maximize the number of children

who could be reached. Thus, in developing my proposal for the fellowship, I reached out to two local public library groups including a group that represents the Rochester area libraries, as well as a group that represents the four-county area that surrounds Canandaigua, where I live (Pioneer Library System). To accomplish my goals with these librarians, I planned to conduct workshops that would point out the importance of nature education and provide some suggestions for the content they could provide to their patrons.

In February 2019, I did a two-and-a-half-hour workshop for 28 children's librarians in the Rochester area that represented 18 local libraries. In April, I addressed 22 librarians in the Pioneer Library System for a one-hour workshop during their annual summer reading readiness day. During this presentation, I shifted my focus a bit since I was also scheduled to do a three-hour workshop with this group in April, using the idea of "the good life" and how nature experiences could support children in developing a sense of place for the outdoors. As well, I shared links to web resources that related to the themes I had found about physical activity, science, art, stress reduction, connections with other species, and stewardship in nature education. The three-hour workshop to this group, like the one in February to the Rochester area librarians, focused more on how nature supports children's health, development, and the various reasons it needs to be broad to accommodate various children's needs and personalities. The PowerPoints for these workshops are available on the website I created.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, I developed two modules<sup>4</sup> that could be used for nature education workshops at public libraries. These modules include many of the qualities cited earlier from Sobel (2008) and the various conclusions I reached during the earlier phases of the fellowship on what was good quality nature education.

The first module is about becoming a nature explorer and encourages children to have open-ended time in the outdoors where curiosity guides their actions. The module focuses on children using their senses to investigate an outdoor area while pretending to be an explorer doing either a quest, trailblazing unknown areas, or just doing a walkabout to experience the outdoors. Thus, the potential for using imagination and creativity are built into this module with the open-ended design allowing for curiosity and differences in their interests among children.

*"... the potential for using imagination and creativity are built into this module with the open-ended design allowing for curiosity and differences in their interests among children."*

The second module is about creating a base camp and considering the homes of creatures in the wild. The point of this module is again to encourage imagination and creativity as children build some type of special place, a common feature of nature experiences that impact children's nature interactions. It promotes having a sense of place, while also encouraging children to explore the homes of other creatures, setting the stage for consideration of other species and perhaps even helping with the development of empathy, as well as pulling them again into becoming familiar with the area they are exploring.

I am grateful for the chance to potentially impact the work of more than 50 public librarians and 35 libraries through my workshops. It is my sincere hope that those individuals will go on

to influence the child patrons at their facilities, as well as guide local parents about the importance of nature for children and how to best provide high-quality time outside. As well, the website I created will go on to support this work in future years.

Going forward, I hope to write a regular blog about nature education, which may draw others to the website who will then go on to impact children and their learning about nature. I genuinely appreciate the support of the Arthur Imperatore Community Forum

Fellowship for completing this work and the potential for it to have continuing influence on the lives of children and their interactions with the natural world.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.sustainablechildren.com/>.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.sustainablechildren.com/world-of-wonder-brochure.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.sustainablechildren.com/worlds-of-wonder-powerpoint.html>.

- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.sustainablechildren.com/become-a-nature-explorer---module-one.html> and <http://www.sustainablechildren.com/nature-base-camps-and-habitats---module-two.html>.

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*“High-Impact Practices (HIPs) work across and against the disciplines. They tend to combine liberal, experiential and sometimes pre-professional learning. Some of the practices foreground collaboration, and others, self-authoring and individual self-transformation. Most break out of the spatial logic of the classroom and even the campus, and break out of the temporal logic of the credit hour and the semester. They are pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that suggest a holistic, integrative, engaged model of learning, a design for educating the whole student.”*

— David Scobey

*“The Crossroads of Change: Why Adult Learners Are So Important to the Future of Higher Education (and Vice Versa)”*  
Explorations in Adult Higher Education, 2020, p. 90

# The Working-Class Experience as Class Politics

Sharon Szymanski, Manhattan

An Extended Review of:

*Leaps of Faith: Stories from Working-Class Scholars*

Edited by Anne C. Benoit, Joann S. Olson, and Carrie Johnson

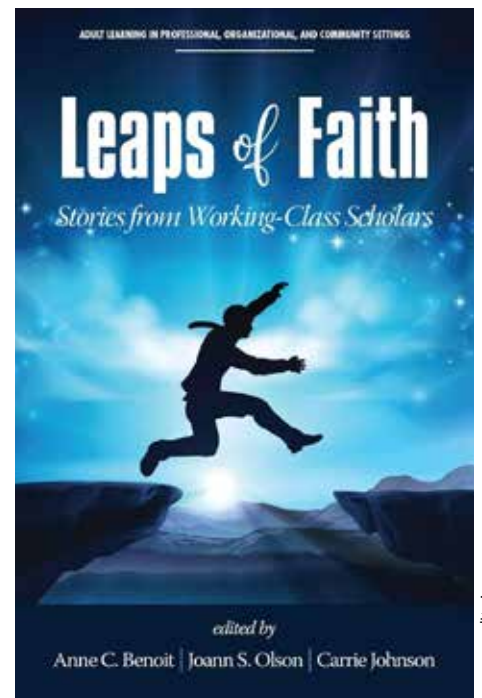
Today, class as politics is emerging in unlikely places. Striking teachers, graduate teaching assistants, professors, nurses, pilots and flight attendants ending the government shutdown with threats of work stoppages — all have brought a renewed legitimacy to working people standing up for their rights (Rhodes, 2019). Once considered a solid middle-class profession, the public has been shocked to learn how little teachers are paid and that their pay is significantly lower than comparable college graduates, precipitating concern for “who will teach our children” (Allegretto & Mishel, 2019). Supported by both Republican and Democratic constituencies, teachers led successful strikes in over eight states and cities (Bollag, 2019). In fact, 2018 saw the highest number of strikes since 2007, involving the highest number of workers, 485,000, since 1986 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019b). Not to be overlooked are the class-based policies put forth by presidential candidates and politicians — calls for “Medicare for All,” taxes on millionaires, a Green New Deal, and a universal basic income, to name just a few.

*Leaps of Faith: Stories from Working-Class Scholars* (Benoit, Olson, & Johnson, 2019) is a collection of essays that can be read within this context of a reinvigorated interest in class and class politics. The book can contribute to classroom discussions about the changing nature of the working class, what defines working-class lives and

experiences, and how these experiences might be analyzed to comprise a fuller understanding of class as a central concept in challenging all inequalities — including racism, sexism, and homophobia — within our economic, political, and cultural spheres. However, on the surface, that’s not what this book is about.

## The Stories

*Leaps of Faith* includes 20 essays (three co-authored) that trace the educational journeys, from childhood through higher education, of 17 women and three men, self-identified as working-class students who overcame various socioeconomic challenges and achieved advanced degrees and satisfying careers in academia — mostly working with nontraditional and adult populations — and, for the most part, solid middle-class lives. Sixteen of the contributors attained Ph.D.s; six, Ed.D.s; and one, a D.Ed. The stories in this book represent an ambitious, talented, honest, and proud group of individuals who are worthy role models for any group of students. The wide-ranging backgrounds described in the stories not only attest to the often unrecognized and ignored diversity of the working class, but they also serve as examples from which any student might choose one, or several, as closest to their own upbringing, and be inspired in overcoming their own educational challenges. Furthermore, the stories also can provide templates for students writing their own educational journeys.



As the editors point out, what makes this compilation of narratives different from similar previous collections on working-class academics is that the “Contributors represent not only racial, cultural, gendered, and sexual diversity but also international working-class perspectives. Moreover, unlike earlier volumes, the narratives provide insight into intersectional memberships from which readers can glean shifting and sometimes competing personalities” (p. 256).<sup>1</sup> This claim is somewhat limited since only three authors are African American, two are Caribbean international students, and one identifies as a gay woman; nevertheless their insights are compelling.

Each author in *Leaps of Faith* has a unique background and journey. The majority of authors are first-generation college students, two authors are Caribbean-born international students who confront what being black in America means, another two authors had stints in the military, another author grew up on a Midwestern farm, one had an alcoholic father, yet another's dream of becoming a scientist was thwarted by the sexism she confronted, a couple of authors didn't complete their degrees until they were past 40, one author came from a conservative family who viewed college as a place where racial and gendered identities were valued over abilities, another author faced misogyny and homophobia, an African American author faced many challenges growing up in a sharecropper family, another author lived off the grid in the mountains of Colorado, an African American author whose grandfather was a college graduate faced racism as well as ostracism by black gentry. There are at least a half dozen more incredibly varied and unique stories in this volume; all are moving.

### **The Working-Class Experience**

While all the stories represent remarkable journeys, what is most significant are the shared experiences that emerge when the authors leave their families for college and then graduate school. These shared experiences can be grouped into themes that contribute to an understanding of what exactly defines a working-class experience, at least from the authors' points of view.

One of the most defining experiences shared by the authors is that of being an "outsider." All the authors, except two, speak of feeling like an "other," an "imposter," or a "fraud" once they stepped on campus. The authors valued the opportunities that college provided, but at the same time they felt their identity as working class were being threatened. One author felt that her peers' parents were all professionals

who read the *The New York Times* and had summer homes, revealing that "... the class differences between us were deep" (p. 96). Another author felt that "The message was that I could, if I worked hard enough, 'pass' for one of them and reap the benefits of thinking instead of having to be one of those sad people who 'do things'" (p. 23).

In some cases, the authors attribute this feeling of "otherness" to not having the right clothes, to speaking "funny" (not the "college" language) or lacking savvy about the way college works — its values, hierarchy, and rituals. For others, the lack of cultural capital was emblematic of their feeling marginalized: "I recall an informal conversation about literature and classical music ... I was exposed to neither literature nor classical music in my younger years and felt as if these colleagues were from another world than I. The truth is, they were" (p. 61). Many continue to feel this lack of not knowing something they can't quite name but that, nevertheless, prevents them from feeling truly accepted and comfortable in their academic institutions: "When I reached my academic goals, I found that I no longer fit with the previous identity's expectations nor did I fit within the new identity's expectations" (p. 151). For some, the sense of "otherness" was intertwined with race and/or gender as well as with class, adding additional layers of confusion and alienation. "For people of color, so much of our identity is analyzed in relation to the majority race that — whether we want to or not — we are confronted with the essential consideration of our position within American society based on race as well as class" (p. 189). Similarly, another author stated, "When I think of who I am as a person, I first think of my race." However, the author then stresses the fundamental status of class for her: "Black working-class individuals comprise a vibrant group who hold the same kinds of working-class jobs as [w]hites and who share the same kinds of concerns ..." (p.190).

Many authors sought college as a way to escape the kind of insecure life they had come from: "I was part of a sharecropper family. ... The work was physically hard and this fostered an understanding of what I didn't want to do for the rest of my life" (p. 142). Many felt they were not prepared academically; they might have been a big fish in their high schools but were out of their league at college. They didn't know how to study or how to engage with academic material since they lacked the foundations and the familial underpinnings for "engaging in deep thought" (p. 208).

Whether or not authors' families encouraged or discouraged attending college, a lack of assistance and guidance — either from underfunded schools or from struggling working parents — hindered the college entry

*"Many continue to feel this lack of not knowing something they can't quite name but that, nevertheless, prevents them from feeling truly accepted and comfortable in their academic institutions."*

process: "But, as to the means by which I would make that happen, I was left to my own devices, I received little guidance. My mother was overwhelmed with making ends meet" (p. 197). Another author said, "It wasn't that they didn't want to help, but without college experience of their own, they didn't know how" (p. 79). And yet another author revealed how she chose a college: "I opened the Cleveland telephone book" (p. 203).

One aspect that is prominent in most essays is the centrality of "hard work" — as a working-class value and a working-

class point of view. Authors wrote about “hard work” as both sustaining them and helping them fit in. “While I may have felt like an outsider, my working-class skills served me well. ... I was raised to believe that hard work and persistence pay off. ... I studied hard and did well” (p. 121). “As we were confronted with middle-class norms and academic culture ... we were able to transmit our families’ values of hard work ... into our academic lives and convert these resources into cultural capital. ...” (p. 127). “... We could be anything we wanted to be if we put our minds to it — no matter what we didn’t have” (p. 103). Another author said, “I know what hard work looks like, I know that persistence and asking a lot of questions will help me to find what I need to succeed. ...These are actually strengths that I’m able to bring to work, and without my background, I would have no awareness that they even existed” (p. 160). Yet another author commented on her family’s lack of any understanding of the role of societal structures and institutions in determining individual success: “Working-class values don’t allow for consideration of these external factors that influence achievement; working hard simply equals some measure of stability, comfort, and happiness” (p. 166).

**Why Class Matters**

The particular stories of the authors and the identification of the themes in their described working-class experiences are important for several reasons. As Michael Zweig (2012) stated in *The Working Class Majority*,

When society fails to acknowledge the existence and experience of working people it robs them of an articulate sense of themselves and their place in society. We know from the vibrancy of other identity movements that to silence and leave nameless a central aspect of people’s identity is to strip them of a measure of power over their lives. (p. 6)

*Leaps of Faith* certainly contributes to this important endeavor of naming the forms that contribute to and acknowledge the working-class experience. However, if defining the “working class” stops here, it could be understood as just another category within identity politics (Naschek, 2018). While honoring these experiences, we can take it one step further. *Leaps of Faith* can be parsed to explore how the “experiences” described by each author impact, and are impacted by, the activities and relations in the economic sphere, thus providing a more complex understanding of class. As Zweig (2012) stated, “Another reason to acknowledge class distinctions has to do with the power of class analysis to help us understand what is happening in the economy” (p. 62). Anyone who is interested in changing the political-economic structure of our society can’t ignore that class and power are two sides of the same coin (class politics).

**What is Class?**

How to define “class” is a contested terrain. Typically, and popularly, class is defined in socioeconomic terms, as indicative of differing degrees of status — levels of education and income are the two most commonly used categories (Draut, 2018). However, these categories are acknowledged as problematic, since the many exceptions in each category call into question the validity of the very categories themselves. For example, is a highly paid union electrician without a college degree working class or middle class? To what class does an office support employee with a Ph.D. belong? And most significantly for those advocating for social change, levels of education and income, while providing useful and related information, do not capture the essence of class as the positional relationship in the labor process between those who produce products and those who control the surplus product (more on this below). Nevertheless it is worthwhile to at least touch on these more popular

categories — education and income — in so far as they relate to the stories in *Leaps of Faith*, in order to gain a fuller understanding of class.

**Education and Class**

Almost all the parents of the authors in *Leaps of Faith* had no higher than a high school degree; many did not complete high school. Two parents had associate degrees. Researchers, particularly in sociology and economics, use a bachelor’s degree as the major determinant of middle-class status relative to working-class status (presumably education is used as a proxy for better-paying jobs and a higher income, another marker of class distinctions). Looking at the table below, most U.S. adults, 68.2%, do not have a college degree (Economic Policy Institute, 2018). Therefore, if using a bachelor’s degree as an indicator of the middle class, one could conclude that most adults are of the working class. Interpreting this data in terms of class politics, one might say, at the very least, that policies that do not take into consideration the needs and concerns of non-college workers (a significant percentage of the U.S. population), are not in the interest of the working-class and may not, or should not, be supported by them.<sup>2</sup>

Share of 18-64-year-olds in the U.S. by level of education, 2018

Less than high school	10.5%
High school	28.3%
Some college	29.4%
Bachelor’s degree	20.9%
Advanced degree	10.9%

(Adapted from Economic Policy Institute, 2018)

**Income and Class**

Every author in *Leaps of Faith* wrote about his or her lack of financial resources: “It should be clear that the primary impact of my background on my experience in higher education was a result of financial constraints created by



that background" (p. 187). Most authors discussed how they missed out on much of college life — including not having enough time to study, no spring breaks, no travel abroad — because they had to work in addition to taking classes. One author talked about the hardships she encountered by not being able to afford even a beat-up secondhand car or get her computer repaired. Yet another was astonished when he found out that books were not included in tuition. One author was accepted to an Ivy League school but couldn't attend due to a lack of finances, even with scholarships. And another author said, "I had to work to earn money while many of my peers were told by their parents that their job was to 'be a student'" (p. 124). Every story included poignant statements about a significant lack of money — while the authors were growing up and while they were in college and graduate school. Economics was a defining factor in each author's working-class experience.

*"Economics was a defining factor in each author's working-class experience."*

In general, we assume that the working-class earn less income than the middle class. Researchers often define "middle class" as those households with incomes between two-thirds to double the national median income, adjusted for geographic location and household size (Newport, 2018). In 2018, the income range defining "middle class" was roughly between \$42,000 and \$126,000. While this definitional range certainly can be debated, the important political question is whether or not there can be common ground between the working class earning less than \$42,000 and those in the broad income range

defining the middle class. Given rising inequality and the levels of extreme disparity we are witnessing today with an average annual wage of \$37,575 for the bottom 90% relative to the average annual wage of over \$2 million for the top 0.1% (Kopczuk, Saez, & Song as cited in Economic Policy Institute, 2019) — there is ample basis for common economic and political ground between the middle and working class, in opposition to the interests of the very wealthy. Faced with student debt and limited job opportunities, a fairly recent study found that 56.5% of 18-35-year-olds identified as working class, a percentage not seen since 1982 (Malik, Barr, & Holpuch, 2016). The Occupy Wall Street slogan of "We are the 99 percent" was prescient in capturing the growing divide between a small group of "them" and a growing, bigger group of "us."

#### Occupation and Class

For the most part, *Leaps of Faith* authors described their parents' jobs and their lives as blue-collar. Their parents held the kinds of production and nonsupervisory jobs that are associated with the working class — including a waitress, a mechanic, a miner, an autoworker, a tool and dye worker, a retail worker. Bowles, Edwards, Roosevelt, and Larudee (2018), in their economic textbook *Understanding Capitalism*, defined class in contradistinction to levels of education and income, as "a group of people who share a common position in the economy with respect to the production and control of the surplus product" (p. 123). Following in the Marxian tradition, they went on to say that class only exists in a relationship within the labor process, that class relationships are hierarchical in so far as the group on top controls the work and process of producing the product (including those who do the producing), and that the interests of the two groups usually are in conflict (pp. 124-125). Grounding this explanation in the labor process as a

whole, heterodox economists turn the analysis to the occupational structure of the U.S. economy.

The U.S. Department of Labor groups the hundreds of different jobs in the United States into five, broad occupational categories, including management, professional and related; service; sales and office; natural resources, construction, and maintenance; and production, transportation and material moving occupations. Using the labor process concept of class described earlier, and thus excluding the management, professional and related category from the calculations, the working class represents approximately 60% of all employed persons (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019a). The Department of Labor also groups workers in another way that results in an even larger percentage being identified as potentially working class. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, of the roughly 129 million private-sector employees, about 80% are "production and nonsupervisory," or "working class" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019c, 2019d; Zweig, 2012, p. 31). While this category includes professionals, these are among the "white-collar" groups now seeking to join unions or form worker organizations as their autonomy and working conditions deteriorate and become more similar to what was once thought of as typical working-class jobs. In other words, this Bureau of Labor Statistics definition has some teeth to it as it can be interpreted as reflecting the Marxian sense of class struggle playing out in deteriorating labor processes for many groups of workers.

While the earlier discussion is a very cursory and incomplete overview of the occupational structure as a window into the labor process analysis, the point is that the working class is extremely diverse and broadening, with potential for exerting political power as the structure of the economy changes.

### **Working-Class Scholars Benefit Higher Education**

The authors left their families to pursue the opportunities and dreams associated with higher education. Not only did they face myriad challenges in college, but for many it was increasingly difficult to come home to circumstances that were so different from what they were experiencing in college. “Visits home were intensely painful, as I tried to acclimate to independent thought in college while being expected to be no different than I had been when home, a common predicament among college students, but even more so among first-generation college students” (p. 49). While most authors felt like “others” while in college, they were often viewed as becoming “others” by their own families and, to varying degrees, betraying their upbringing and roots.

However, rather than abandoning their working-class identities, all the authors have come full circle, incorporating their own working-class experiences, consciousness, and insights into their choices to work with adults and nontraditional students and their views about, and practices in, higher education. “My personal position as an ‘insider’ with ‘insider knowledge’ of marginalized communities was a key motivation to becoming a basic skills tutor. I drew upon my own life history ... and being the first generation of my family to enter college and university” (p. 66). Another author stated, “I now teach and advise nontraditional undergraduate students in the adult education degree completion program. ... My own experiences inform how I teach and how I advise my students” (p. 97). Yet another author said, “I made a commitment to serving as a mentor to all students, and in particular students who are underrepresented. I committed to making explicit every aspect of college life so that they too, could become infiltrators while preserving their identities” (p. 126). And yet another author stated, “As we often work with first-generation adult learners

from marginalized communities, we frequently reflect on our life experiences to provide our students with a meaningful learning experience” (p. 71).

Some author’s comments revealed more class-based reflections. One author commented on the transformational possibilities in higher education for leveling the playing field for students from disadvantaged backgrounds: “We need to recognize and address the historical and contemporary disparities that exist in their lives (e.g., class, gender, and ethnicity). A way to address this is for educators and society to recognize and value the cultural dimensions the learners bring with them and work with these to create a curriculum that is meaningful to their life” (p. 73). Another author stated, “Part of maintaining higher education as a place of equalization means we must reframe how we see education and access to it. ...” (p. 99). And, an African American author stated, “And though many of my students are from different ethnic and racial groups than I am, our shared socioeconomic class serves to bridge these gaps. ... It is important to remember that social class distinctions can create divisiveness within the academy just as easily as racial divides” (p. 198).

Indeed, in keeping with the spirit of these quotes, one of the editors, in her final comments, stated that “... there couldn’t be a more important time for working-class scholars to bring their unique talents and lenses to teaching, research, program administration, mentoring, and community partnerships” as more first-generation and working-class students attend college and will be recruited to sustain financially struggling institutions (p. 268).

However, the hope is that these and other scholars will do this and more. As revealed in the authors’ stories in *Leaps of Faith*, higher education is viewed as an opportunity, an “escape,” from a certain stratum of the working-class, with the expectations of achieving

something better — economically, culturally, intellectually. However, only a small percentage of those receiving Ph.D.s will become part of the educational elite. Most working-class scholars, and most of us in academia, will find that we are not leaving a certain class position with our Ph.D.s; rather, we are merely moving to another part — and it’s not with the one percent. The fundamental crises we in academia face, with the corporatization of higher education, is one of power — questions about who will have control over access to education and who will have control over our, and our students’ labor processes and resources. Arising from their own experiences, there is a collective demand that all the authors in *Leaps of Faith*, and their students, could come to support; that is, the problem comes down to the economics of higher education whose solution will have to include consideration of free higher education in public colleges for all those who qualify.

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotation page numbers refer to page locations in *Leaps of Faith* (Benoit, Olson, & Johnson, 2019).
- <sup>2</sup> Levels of educational degrees vary considerably by race. In 2017, 15.1% of African Americans, 12.2% of Hispanics, 30.5% of Asians, and 21.8% of whites, 25 years and older, had a bachelor’s degree. For master’s degrees, it was 7% of African Americans, 3.9% of Hispanics, 17.6% of Asians, and 9.4% of whites, 25 years and older (Census Bureau, 2017).

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## Remembering Our Colleagues

*We remember these colleagues who were vital parts of our community. We think about what they provided our students and what they offered to all of us over many years. We hope that reading even a few words about these people (some of whom we may have known well; others whose names we might recognize; still others who we are learning about for the first time) reminds us of what we care about and what we try to do, and about lives and work at SUNY Empire State College.*

### MARY J. GOLDMAN

*Mary J. Goldman, who died in April 2019, lived in Rhinebeck, New York, and worked part time for more than 25 years with students in Business, Management and Economics at the New Paltz and then the Highland locations. Deeply devoted to her students, and always interested in trying out new ways to better respond to their academic needs and interests, Mary was a cherished colleague and an enthusiastic spokesperson for Empire State College.*



Mary J. Goldman

Photo credit: BurnetWhite.com

### From Karin Dedrick, student success and development coordinator

Working with Mary Goldman was a gift. Her love of life, of teaching, learning and mentoring students was infectious. Her smile lit up every room and her laughter echoed throughout our Highland location. Mary was a giving and kind person who worked tirelessly to help all of her students discover the joy of learning as well as graduating! She was a pioneer in the SUNY Learning Network and developed the first Hudson Valley Residency. More than anything, Mary was devoted to the college and its mission, to her family and friends, her colleagues and her students. She was a cherished friend and colleague and is missed every day.

### THELMA JURGRAU

*Thelma Jurgrau came to the college in 1977 as a mentor in literature and the humanities at the Hudson Valley Center where she worked for two decades. Thelma died in January 2019. She earned a Ph.D. in comparative literature and devoted her scholarly life to the work of George Sand, editing and leading a group translation of Sand's autobiography, *Story of My Life* (1991), and founding the group, *Les Amis de George Sand*. Thelma was a patient and deeply devoted mentor to her writing and literature students and, at every turn, a trusted colleague.*

### From Mayra Bloom, retired mentor

When I first joined the Hudson Valley faculty, I was soon told about Thelma Jurgrau, an extraordinary mentor in Comparative Literature. I was starstruck, but when we met, Thelma immediately put a stop to any of that. With a marked twinkle in her eyes and a wonderfully wide smile, she extended a warm



Thelma Jurgrau

collegial welcome and a generous offer to assist me whenever I might need it, which I often did. Over the years, I learned a bit more about Thelma's Brooklyn background in the Jewish immigrant community. She excelled at school and at the piano, and positively inhaled all things French: language, literature, history, culture, conversation, passion, and precision. She dreamt about living in Paris, and returned every summer for pleasure, inspiration, renewal, and, no doubt, scholarly pursuits. Thelma did her dissertation on the country novels of George Sand and George Eliot, but Sand was Thelma's true subject. Not only did she publish a great many translations, papers, and journal articles about Sand, she ultimately took on the monumental scholarly/organizational task of translating Sand's autobiography into English. Thelma's capacity for collaboration was matched by her clarity about roles and standards. Perhaps this was part of her success as a mentor — capable of connecting deeply with students, and also of organizing an administrative workload that crushed many of her colleagues. Thelma's collaborative

approach was also in keeping with the progressive ethos of Empire State College. As a mentor, Thelma not only created learning activities for students at all levels, but also, in the words of Nell Noddings, saw them “in the best possible light consistent with reality.”

### TIMOTHY LEHMANN

*Timothy Lehmann, with a Ph.D. in sociology from Berkeley, came to Empire State College in 1973 and became vice president for research and evaluation, authoring many key institutional reports. Later, he was a most valued mentor in the graduate program. Tim was also the founding director of the National Center on Adult Learning (NCAL), an ESC “think tank” that welcomed and, thanks to his kindness and intellectual rigor, nurtured some of the most important research and theorizing in adult learning in the country. Tim Lehmann died in September 2019.*



Timothy Lehmann

#### **From Xenia Coulter, retired mentor**

Although when I knew Tim well (1984 to 2004), he was an administrator (one of “them,” my son tells me), I saw him as a colleague whose passion for the original mission of the college I shared. We often met in local restaurants for lunch to talk about research plans and share our ideas about adult students and mentoring. In his role as

program evaluator, he collected reams of institutional data and became the resident scholar on alternative higher education with an office crammed full of his and other data, newsletters, reports, journal articles, and books. Indeed, no one wanted the office on the floor below his in the now refurbished Alumni House, because it was seriously believed that the ceiling might collapse from the weight above. Tim was one of the kindest, gentlest, and supportive scholars I knew. As the college changed its direction, his role also gradually shifted toward the graduate program; nonetheless, he retained his always cheerful outlook and a deep interest in adult higher education in whatever form it took. I miss him still, as do all those whose lives, like mine, were enriched by his support and enthusiasm for what we sought for our students.

### EMIL MOXEY

*Emil Moxey, a mentor in Community and Human Services, served our students with quiet intelligence and dignified care for many years at the Bedford-Stuyvesant location, a significant office of the Metropolitan Center. Emil earned his Ph.D. in clinical practice at the NYU School of Social Work and, over a long career, worked for many New York City social services agencies. Emil Moxey, who retired from ESC in 2010, was honored for his many contributions to the community by the Bahamian American Association and was a recipient of the 2013 Heritage Award given by Empire State College’s Black Male Initiative. He passed away in March 2019.*

#### **From Lear Matthews, mentor**

Emil Moxey was a notable stalwart of nontraditional education, committed to the intellectual and skills development of students and dedicated to the ideals and mission of Empire State College. He represented the consummate educator — a good communicator promoting principled values. As one of the first faculty members of *color*



Emil Moxey with Lear Matthews

at the Brooklyn campus, Emil pursued mentoring with a passion, vibrancy, yet with a conservative demeanor that was characteristic of his own humble socialization. Working assiduously with former Center Director Rudy Cain and Administrative Secretary Ethel Bowles, he created a positive learning environment conducive to the needs of a cadre of diverse students under conditions that at times were less than ideal. Many former students boast about “Mr. Moxey” as being demanding but “the best mentor.” I was honored to present Emil with the 2013 ESC, BMI-sponsored Heritage Award.

I must extend this brief tribute to my friend and colleague by invoking my introduction to Emil’s elder brother, also known as “Mr. Moxey” in their native Bahamas. In true-to-form generosity, Emil arranged the meeting with his brother when my wife, Monica, and I vacationed there. Unbeknownst to us, the elder Moxey, a former local politician, was not only one of the most knowledgeable individuals I ever met, but in contrast to Emil, he was ebullient in manner and an extraordinary raconteur. He conducted a tour that surpassed the experience of the average visitor, in detail and education. When I reported to Emil upon return, he calmly said, “That’s my brother for you!” We had a hearty laugh.



## GEORGE P. PILKEY

*George P. Pilkey, a longtime and most valued part-time mentor in the Saratoga location, died in February 2019. For more than three decades, George, with a Ph.D. in counseling education, was director of counseling at Fulton-Montgomery Community College. Devoted to community service of all kinds (including a local soup kitchen) and to nature conservancy (he was an Adirondack 46er!), George was an inspired and caring teacher whose commitment to ongoing learning was felt by so many.*



George P. Pilkey

### From Elaine Handley, mentor

At least once a week George would come to my office door, lean up against the doorframe and say, "Have I told you how much I love this job?" Sometimes it would be at the end of a particularly harried day and I would look at him cross-eyed, wondering where the buoyancy, that optimism, that unending well of good cheer came from. It was all genuine and ever-present. He really did love (and there is no other word for it) what he did. He was grateful for the opportunity to share what he knew and support students in their learning — he was a passionate teacher, indefatigable in his delight to be in conversation about ideas and their application. He was generous with students, and he was generous with colleagues, especially those of us in the Saratoga Unit. George

shared, always shared. And he listened too. We regularly talked about what we were reading, related exchanges with students, and sometimes would troubleshoot an issue one of us was having in a course or with a student. He brought us chocolate from his travels. It was a lovely thing to have a colleague, a friend, who epitomized student-centeredness, who laughed often, loved ideas, and who dedicated himself to making his corner of the world better through understanding, kindness and gratitude. How lucky we were to be in his corner.

## DAVID PORTER

*David Porter came to Empire State College in 1980 and worked with students in the New Paltz location in an imaginative array of social, political, and historical areas for 25 years. A specialist in Algerian politics and in anarchist movements, Dave was the editor of Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution (1983) and, most recently, translator of Kadour Naimi's Freedom in Solidarity: My Experiences in the May 1968 Uprising (2019). In addition to his lifelong commitment to alternative education, Dave threw his critical spirit and energy into many grassroots political projects, including as co-founder of AFFIRM, the Association for Intelligent Rural Management. Dave died in December 2018.*



David Porter

## From Steve Lewis, retired mentor

David Porter, my dear friend and valued colleague from those halcyon days at the New Paltz and Highland Hudson Valley units, was a man of competing admirable qualities rarely found in one human being: both righteous and charitable, virtuous and affable, he "maintained" the messiest college office I have ever seen ... and the clearest and sharpest mind I have ever had the pleasure of knowing in academia. Most important, though, in a world seemingly growing more heartless by the day, David Porter was among the kindest people on earth.

## DIANA WORBY

*Diana Worby, who died in November 2019, worked at Empire State College in Rockland County for more than 30 years. An enthusiastic and devoted mentor in writing, humanities, and literature, Diana worked with any student who came her way. She received Empire State College's Excellence in Student Advisement award, as well as the Rockland County Women's Network Award for Achievement in Education, both in 1982. After retiring from Empire State College in 2006, Diana founded The Learning Collaborative that continues to provide retirees with the kinds of learning opportunities her own life celebrated.*



Diana Worby

Photo provided by Rachael Worby.

### **From Miriam Tatzel, retired mentor**

In the spring of 1975, not many months after I joined ESC, I received a two-month reassignment. Who could take over my work with psychology students in this nascent, somewhat amorphous new college? An English professor at Rockland Community College (RCC), where we were housed at the time, recommended Diana Worby, a recent M.A. in literature, and an RCC grad. Not my area, psychology? Nevermind. Diana was a natural. I admit to some jealousy when I returned and sensed that some of my students might have preferred to stay with her. As the years went by, I came to think of Diana as a Star Mentor. She made deep connections with students, took pride in their accomplishments, and students flocked to her. Fast forward to current times. When I retired in 2015, Diana had already been retired for some 10 years. During that time, she became one of the founders of the Learning Collaborative (see “Life After Empire: The Learning Collaborative,” in this issue). In 2016, I joined her in taking classes there, and we met regularly over lunch. She was now in her 90s. Something about turning 93, in particular, made her feel “old.” This meant that she would only drive locally, but take an Uber (she had her special driver) when going to the theater or concerts and such in New York City, or to Westchester to be with her family. One time, she and her driver went to Boston and back in a day so she could see her granddaughter in a dance recital. We both loved taking the classes. Her strong suits were literature and music, but she said she liked to learn new things, and she took courses in history and philosophy. As I reflect on the last part of her life, I’m put in mind of the old refrain, “I’m going to live until I die.”

### **ERIC ZENCEY**

*Eric Zencey was an eclectic social critic, economist, historian, ecological analyst, and novelist who came to Empire State College in 2002 after many years on the faculty of Goddard College. The author of many volumes, including Virgin Forest: Meditations on History, Ecology, and Culture (1998) and the novel, Panama (1995), Eric devoted his world of thinking and imagining to the possibilities of a sustainable life. After retiring from Empire State College, Eric lectured at the Sam Fox School College of Architecture at Washington University and in the Honors Program at the University of Vermont, where he was a fellow at the Gund Institute. Eric died in July 2019.*



*Eric Zencey*

**From Phil Ortiz, former ESC mentor; assistant provost for undergraduate and STEM education, and coordinator of the Empire State STEM Learning Network, SUNY**

It is difficult to write just a few words about Eric Zencey. He was not just any one thing. Author, environmentalist, educator and mentor, activist, economist, and scholar all come to mind. But to many of us at ESC, most of all he was an excellent colleague and generous friend. He was happy to talk about almost any topic, and striking

up a conversation with Eric could be an invitation to lose an afternoon! He had a few favorites, environmental economics and justice, being among them. He would speak with passion and conviction, and by the end, you’d be convinced that he was right and that you needed to help spread the insights you had just gained. Speaking for myself, I can’t tell you how many times I’ve said, “My friend Eric once pointed out that communism failed because it didn’t tell the economic truth, and capitalism is doomed to fail because it doesn’t tell the environmental truth, and I think he is right because [fill in the blank with any one of the many reasons he had shared!]. There were many dimensions to Eric, and I was glad to have gotten to know him outside of office conversations. We spent many a lunch sitting on the Broadway patio at Uncommon Grounds with the small group of “regulars” talking softball, cars, politics, small-head hydropower, Vermont, MGs and Lucas (The Lord of Darkness) electronics, our families. You name it, we talked about it (and he was passionate about it!). Our last day together was spent driving sports cars around a race circuit as fast as we could. He pushed his car and himself hard, each lap faster than the one before it. And, as I look back to that day, I think it captures Eric’s spirit: curious, eager, adventurous, competitive, a little bit silly, and great fun. Before his passing, to ensure that his intellectual passion would persist, he was honored by the University of Vermont’s Gund Institute with the creation of the “Eric Zencey Prize in Ecological Economics.” If you wish to honor his memory, more information can be found at <https://www.uvm.edu/gund/news/gund-institute-creates-eric-zencey-prize-ecological-economics>. I am sure I speak for many people — Eric brought joy to our time with him, he pushed us to think new things (or old things in new ways), and he will be deeply missed.

## Core Values of Empire State College (2005)

The core values of SUNY Empire State College reflect the commitments of a dynamic, participatory, and experimenting institution accessible and dedicated to the needs of a richly diverse adult student body. These values are woven into the decisions we make about what we choose to do, how we carry out our work in all parts of the institution, and how we judge the outcome of our individual and collective efforts. More than a claim about what we have already attained, the core values support our continuing inquiry about what learning means and how it occurs.

We value learning-mentoring goals that:

- Respond to the academic, professional, and personal needs of each student
- Identify and build upon students' existing knowledge and skills
- Sustain lifelong curiosity and critical inquiry
- Provide students with skills, insights, and competencies that support successful college study.

We value learning-mentoring processes that:

- Emphasize dialogue and collaborative approaches to study
- Support critical exploration of knowledge and experience
- Provide opportunities for active, reflective, and creative academic engagement.

We value learning-mentoring modes that:

- Respond to a wide array of student styles, levels, interests, and circumstances
- Foster self-direction, independence, and reflective inquiry
- Provide opportunities for ongoing questioning and revising
- Reflect innovation and research.

We value a learning-mentoring community that:

- Defines each member as a learner, encouraging and appreciating their distinctive contributions

- Recognizes that learning occurs in multiple communities, environments, and relationships, as well as in formal academic settings
- Attracts, respects, and is enriched by a wide range of people, ideas, perspectives, and experiences.

We value a learning-mentoring organization and culture that:

- Invites collaboration in the multiple contexts of our work
- Fosters innovation and experimentation
- Develops structures and policies that encourage active participation of all constituents in decision-making processes
- Advocates for the interests of adult learners in a variety of academic and civic forums.

## **SUBMISSIONS TO ALL ABOUT MENTORING**

If you have a scholarly paper-in-progress or a talk that you have presented, *All About Mentoring* would welcome it. If you developed materials for your students that may be of good use to others, or have a comment on any part of this issue, or on topics/concerns relevant to our mentoring community, please send them along.

If you have a short story, poem, drawings or photographs, or have reports on your reassignments and sabbaticals, *All About Mentoring* would like to include them in an upcoming issue.

Email submissions to Alan.Mandell@esc.edu.

Submissions to *All About Mentoring* can be of varied length and take many forms. (Typically, materials are no longer than 7,500 words.) It is easiest if materials are sent via email to Mandell as Microsoft Word attachments. In terms of references and style, *All About Mentoring* uses APA rules (please see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th ed. [Washington, DC: APA, 2010] or [http://image.mail.bfwpub.com/lib/feed1c737d6c03/m/1/BSM\\_APA\\_update\\_2010.pdf](http://image.mail.bfwpub.com/lib/feed1c737d6c03/m/1/BSM_APA_update_2010.pdf)).

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