

The National Teaching & Learning FORUM

Volume 18

Number 2

February

2009

CONTENTS

- **EDITOR'S NOTE**, p. 3.
- ***Sentipensante Pedagogy***, James Rhem, Executive Editor, p. 1. A look at Laura Rendón's new book on educating for wholeness, social justice, and liberation.
- ***Grading Sentipensante***, p. 5. The bitter rub still lies in giving grades. How to grade non-objective aspects of "wholeness"?
- ***Under the Radar***, p. 6. Trying something radical and new can be dangerous in the academy. Rendón gives some tips on how to keep your head down and accrue some protective coloration.
- **ESSAY: *The Willard Streak***, p. 7. Jeffrey Nesteruk, Franklin and Marshall College, thinks his deep sense that one's choices ought to genuinely reflect who he is comes from his grandfather.
- **CARNEGIE CHRONICLE: *Faith in Students Sets the Pace***, p. 8. Jennifer McBride, Merced College, finds the academic rewards of a determined belief in her students.
- **TECHPED: *Do Students Need a Campus-wide Wireless Network?*** Michael Rodgers, Southeast Missouri State University, p. 10. Wi-fi costs money. Does it enhance learning?
- **AD REM . . . : *Crossing The Cultural Divide***, Marilla Svinicki, University of Texas-Austin, p. 12. Students *are* from a different culture; translation *is* needed.

Sentipensante Pedagogy

James Rhem, Executive Editor

John Dewey once wrote that education wasn't preparation for life, but that education was life itself. Most nod in agreement with Dewey. At the same time, most recognize that many vital aspects of what it is to learn, to be alive to learning through mind as well as heart and spirit, are absent from much college teaching. After years of success climbing the academic ladder, Laura Rendón realized addressing this absence posed perhaps the challenge her whole career had been leading toward. Could a solid and persuasive case be made for ending the segregation of heart and spirit from traditional college teaching? Could a pedagogical model be found that would not dilute intellect with sentimentality on the one hand nor admit affect and spirit only as poor relations on the other, a model that would, in fact, embrace educating for wholeness? Rendón's long journey to find and articulate such a model finally led her to write *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation* (Stylus, 2009). Along the way in her research, Rendón met a wide range of

faculty who have been quietly, almost secretly, teaching for wholeness for a long time. "There are so many people who have been doing this work under the radar screen without having a language to talk about it, and they are ready to embrace it openly, and it's going to take just a little bit more for them to break out in the open with what they are doing," said Rendón, speaking by telephone from Iowa State University where she serves as chair of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the College of Human Sciences. "There is a much wider appeal to this than we give credit for," she continued.

With support from the Fetzer Institute, Rendón located and conducted in-depth interviews with 15 of these fugitive faculty already teaching for wholeness. Her "core question" for her interviewees, most of them award-winning faculty on their campuses, was: "What is the experience of creating a teaching and learning dream (pedagogical vision) based on wholeness and consonance, respecting the harmonious rhythm between the outer experience of intellectualism and rational analysis and the inner dimension of insight, emotion and awareness?"



Guidance from the Past

For Rendón her past, her origins, both colored and animated the question. “Sometimes people talk about spirituality like it’s a new thing, but that’s not true. The things I’m saying in this book about insight, emotion, and awareness were being said hundreds of years ago. So, because I’m Mexican-American, I thought I should look at the Maya and the Aztecs. I wanted to learn more about my roots and religious traditions and indigenous ways of knowing in the Latino

“Sometimes people talk about spirituality like it’s a new thing, but that’s not true. The things I’m saying in this book about insight, emotion and awareness were being said hundreds of years ago.”

community,” she recalled. That decision to look to her own past while systematically looking at an imagined future and a fugitive present in the lives of the faculty she found to interview, led her to an ocean of scholarship at once unfamiliar and yet much of it old and well-established. Along the way, she came to scholarship on Aztec thought, especially Miguel León-Portilla’s *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* and to Don Miguel Ruiz’s *The Four Agreements*, a book on Toltec wisdom.

The notion of “agreements” proved especially useful in outlining problems with current or

traditional teaching and learning. “Essentially what Ruiz is talking about is what Peter McLaren [a leading theorist of ‘critical pedagogy’] and others call ‘hegemonic structures,’ that is to say, the tacit underlying rules of operation in academe,” Rendón explains. In her research (which Rendón more often describes as her “learning inquiry”) she identified seven agreements underlying current practice, each of which works against the wholeness at the center of the “new pedagogical dreamfield” her book describes. She describes the agreements as:

1. the agreement to privilege intellectual/rational knowing
2. the agreement of separation
3. the agreement of competition
4. the agreement of perfection
5. the agreement of monoculturalism
6. the agreement to privilege outer work
7. the agreement to avoid self-examination

Of the traditional approaches to teaching and learning governed by these agreements, Rendón says “God bless them because they needed to be there so we could learn from there, but these old models need to be taken to a higher level, and we need new understandings, new ways of knowing, new ways of approaching what we’ve done in the past.”

After examining each of the present agreements carefully, she offers a new construction:

1. the agreement to work with diverse ways of knowing in the classroom
2. the agreement to embrace connectedness, collaboration, and transdisciplinarity
3. the agreement to engage diverse learning strategies (i.e., competitive and collaborative learning, and individual-based and community-based learning) in the classroom
4. the agreement to be open and flexible about being grounded in knowing and not knowing

THE NATIONAL TEACHING & LEARNING FORUM

Executive Editor:

James Rhem, Ph.D.
2203 Regent Street, Suite B
Madison, WI 53726

Editorial Advisory Board

Jonathan Fife, Director Emeritus
ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education

Gabriele Bauer, Director
Center for Teaching Effectiveness
University of Delaware

Pat Hutchings, Vice President
The Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of Teaching

Susan Kahn, Director
Urban Universities Portfolio Project
Indiana University–Purdue University
Indianapolis

Wilbert McKeachie
Professor of Psychology, Emeritus
University of Michigan

Edward Neal, Director
Center for Teaching and Learning
University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill

Christine Stanley
Executive Associate Dean
College of Education & Human Development
Texas A&M University

R. Eugene Rice
Senior Scholar
Program in Leadership & Change
Antioch University

Marilla Svinicki
Professor of Psychology
University of Texas at Austin

Editorial correspondence:

James Rhem
2203 Regent Street, Suite B
Madison, WI 53726

Subscription information:

The National Teaching & Learning Forum
2203 Regent Street, Suite B
Madison, WI 53726

The National Teaching & Learning Forum
(ISSN 1057-2880) is published six times during the academic year by James Rhem & Associates, LLC — December, February, March, May, September, October.
One-year individual subscription: \$59.

Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI

Postmaster: Send change of address to:
The National Teaching & Learning Forum
2203 Regent Street, Suite B
Madison, WI 53726

Copyright © 2009
James Rhem & Associates, LLC

DUPLICATION BY PHOTOCOPYING
OR OTHER MEANS IS STRICTLY
FORBIDDEN.

<http://www.ntlf.com>
February

Editor's Note:

Let me begin by talking a bit about language, understanding, and the cultivation of wisdom. I'm provoked by two recent incidents in my own life and by the attention given in this issue to Laura Rendón's new book *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy*. Actually, the issue of clarity in language has preoccupied me for a long time. I hate, loathe, and utterly despise deliberately obscure language, especially when it seems aimed as implying a greater degree of insight, understanding, or special knowledge than one actually finds when one decodes the inflated nonsense. (Are my feelings here clear enough?) The first incident involved an essay question given to a college freshman of my acquaintance in a course on gender. It read: "In her book, *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler argues that there is no 'body' that irreducibly marks the body in terms of sexual differences. Rather she sees these differences as emerging through citational practices that are inseparable from regimes of power. What does she see as the work of citational practices and how do they relate to how the body becomes sexed? How is her concern with citational practices linked to her political project?"

I'm a native speaker of American English, but it took me quite a while to confidently decode the meaning here, and once decoded the ideas seemed over-dressed for the occasion, to say the least. As I ranted and raved about the offense done to civilization by such utterances, as I saw it, my calming and wise partner in life's journey brought a classic article by a giant in her field (translation) to my attention, Eugene Nida's "Sociolinguistic Implications of Academic Writing." Nida's "dynamic equivalence" theory of translation has had a huge influence on translation practice for many decades, and at its root, it reflects the same commitment to respecting other cultures that underlies Rendón's thinking about pedagogy. It also touches on the importance of what Rendón calls "transdisciplinarity" — i.e., the importance of faculty in different disciplines talking understandably to one another about their work: "talking *with* rather than *past* others," as Nida puts it. "Do we seek knowledge or wisdom?" he asks. "Are we willing to be beneficiaries of a society without being willing to reciprocate in making our findings as widely acceptable as possible?" Nida concludes by suggesting that scholars need to learn to write both for their specialist peers and for a semi-popular audience. If they do, he says, they will "significantly enhance their basic insights and clarify what they wish to communicate." "There is no better way to brush away the cobwebs of fuzzy thinking than to restate a complex proposition in simpler language," he concludes.

What does my screed have to do with Rendón's sentipensante pedagogy? Simply this: teaching the whole student begins in clarity of language, but to even glimpse the possibility of stepping beyond knowledge (facts, figures, theories) toward the cultivation of wisdom, it must honor means of communicating that lie beyond language and do so with the same commitment to clarity—that is to say, honesty—that Nida's essay calls for. Rendón's pedagogical model takes a courageous step in that direction; hence, the amount of attention given to it in this issue.

—James Rhem

5. the agreement of multi-culturalism and respect for diverse cultures
6. the agreement to balance our personal and professional lives with work, rest, and replenishment
7. the agreement to take time for self-reflexivity.

Animating the Agreements

Anyone who's paid any attention to conversations about teaching and learning in the last ten years has heard much of the language of these new agreements before, so often perhaps that it may have lost some of its impact, so that now it seems merely the new mores of the politically correct. In Rendón's encounters with the fugitive faculty teaching "under the radar," however, and in her contemplations on the relevance of ancient ways of knowing, the depth of meaning beneath the language comes alive again.

"What is the epistemological and ontological framework that becomes a substructure for a pedagogy based on consonance and connectedness?" Rendón asks. Determined to look for answers in a "non-Western, anti-colonial epistemological foundation based on indigenous knowledge," she quickly surveys the world views of peoples as diverse as American Indians, Zulus, and the Chinese, each of whom see duality somewhat more holistically than Westerners often do. When she comes to her Aztec ancestors, she finds a literary device called *difrasismo*, which proves a useful tool in shaping the new pedagogy she envisions. In *difrasismo* a pair of seeming opposites stand not in eternal conflict, but as points of triangulation toward a third concept, the gift of a deeper wisdom hidden in the opposition of the two like the power of a magnet, dependent on the combination of its positive and negative poles. The pairing of "I" and "you" in Aztec thought points to the notion "belong." "Night" and "wind" lead to an image of the transcendence of the divine.

The Integrative and *Difrasismo*

Rendón uses this habit of mind to illuminate the “integrative, consonant pedagogy” of her new “dreamfield,” an ancient heuristic reclaimed to refresh more modern language such as “integrative” or “transdisciplinary” teaching.

Difrasismo emerges almost as an emblem of the mode of expanded thinking underlying the whole of Rendón’s *sentipensante* pedagogy. The dualism it begins with occupies a familiar neighborhood in cognitive development, as does the step to a third, unexpected concept, but the intuitive, reflective, and contemplative processes used to arrive there seem to map territory unfamiliar in current classrooms.

And yet, as Rendón says, the territory has been there waiting to be acknowledged as vital to the deepest learning all along. Talk of “integrative” teaching and learning has a lot of currency, for example, but may not have followed its own implications far enough.

“I began to think about what happens when you really see the connections between the learner and what is being learned,” Rendón recalls. “Do we see subject and object or do we see a greater reality that Owen Barfield calls ‘participatory epistemology,’ not one where the learner is detached, but is deeply engaged with what’s being learned? And it’s the same thing with content and contemplation.”

Through the Looking Glass of Contemplation

As she readily admits, it’s this last step into “contemplation” that defines a threshold many faculty balk at crossing. “[Many faculty will say about] using music, perhaps even meditation, quiet time, doing something creative rather than just a standard test: ‘Yeah, those are nice once in a while, but they are not really what this class is about.’ So it’s that separation mentality again. In

the integrative stance, you combine the two together—the learner and the learned. (The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society <http://www.contemplativemind.org/> has a beautiful website that I would refer you to on this.) But what happens, then, when you combine these? When you have a content matter and you add a way that the learner can approach what is being learned on a deeper level through the use of meditation or other contemplative practices such as poetry, art, community service work, etc., what is generated is not just knowledge, but wisdom. The ability for that student to think about the learning that is taking place beyond facts and figures and concepts, about the deeper meaning of what he or she is learning. ‘How is this affecting me? How am I affecting others?’ Those kinds of deeper questions that are normally



“You don’t have to do contemplative practice if that’s not your thing,” Rendón continues. “And if you’re going to do it poorly, it’s better you not even try it. No pedagogy is for everybody. I would like it if this were, but it’s not.

There are some folks who will never buy into this and that’s fine. I’m not particularly concerned about that. Lecture is not for everybody, collaborative learning is not for everybody. What I’m offering, I hope, is an expanded view of integrative learning that has some cultural overlays to it that honor indigenous wisdom and that is also attuned to the notion of social justice.”

In her book, amply quoted responses from Rendón’s interviews with faculty richly convey how to teach this way. Activities familiar as add-ons to other approaches to teaching take center stage and learning emerges as a creative activity as a result.

Sentipensante pedagogy has three goals, Rendón says. First, “to disrupt and transform the entrenched belief system” that acts “against wholeness and appreciation of truth in all forms.” Next, to cultivate what she calls

personas educadas, or well-rounded individuals who have both knowledge and wisdom about how and why to use it. Finally, “to instill in learners a commitment to sustain life, maintain the rights of all people, and preserve nature and the harmony of our world.”

No one can accuse Rendón of having small ambitions . . . or too little heart. ■■■

“You don’t have to do contemplative practice if that’s not your thing,” Rendón continues. “And if you’re going to do it poorly, it’s better you not even try it. No pedagogy is for everybody.”

not explored thoroughly in traditional teaching and learning.

“Others may see [teaching] differently, and that’s ok. Facts and figures and concepts are great to have, and I don’t discount that at all. Again, it’s about integration. It begins with what you believe about the nature of humanity. If you believe we are bits and pieces disconnected from the whole, this [approach] is going to be like trash to you. But if you believe that everything is connected, and that there’s a unity in everything, then you are going to be open to this kind of work.

For sample syllabi for a range of courses and more guidance on putting these approaches into practice see: <http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/academic/syllabi.html>

Grading and Sentipensante

Grading remains perhaps the most onerous of the hegemonic structures governing teaching and learning in academe. The problem becomes even thornier for a sentipensante pedagogy with its teaching and learning goals, for how do you grade a student's heart? Her spirit? His transformation?

The advent of "assessment," its perhaps temporary assent over "grading" and "evaluation," has served to civilize the conversation to some extent, but everyone, it seems, continues to feel awkward when it comes to the question of grading. In general, the faculty Rendón interviewed made a point of contrasting assessment and evaluation, and spoke of embedding assessment into student learning throughout the semester so that, in a sense, students were continually "grading" themselves as part of their learning process.

Rendón quotes one of her interviewees, Sam Crowell, co-coordinator of the master's program in integrative studies at California State University—San Bernardino, at some length on the problem.

When asked how he knew his students were learning what he wanted them to learn, Crowell replied:

I don't. I only know what they tell me. . . . I usually make a clear distinction at the beginning of every course between the essential question of evaluation and the essential question of assessment. In . . . evaluation you ask a question: Did you learn X, Y, or Z? What I wanted you to learn? Or what somebody wanted you to learn? And there are means of finding out whether or not they learned X, Y, or Z. But I think a more important question for me is the assessment question, which is: What did you learn? And I build that question in several reflective assignments. What did you learn that was significant for you? Can

you explain its significance? Can you explore any revelations or insights from our activities in the course—the reading, the processes, the lectures, your work with others. . . . What happened as a result of this course to your thinking and learning? They are usually incredibly expressive. Sometimes I get they learned the content of the course. But more often than not . . . they are very expressive about transformations that took place. Not that I try to identify what should take place. And sometimes those are quite surprising to me, what took place. They write about it, they reflect on it, they talk about it. Sometimes I will have them write a reflective essay at the end of the course, and they will share it then. Instead of a formal final exam, with four or five others they create a creative expression of what came out. And it is quite powerful sometimes, that level of insight.

Rebecca Williams, a chemistry professor, expressed the feelings of many other interviewees when she told Rendón:

Tests are teaching tools, tests are not for punishment, tests are not for me to give you a grade; test are for us to see where we are . . . So that's real important to me . . . for them to start focusing not on the grade but on, What have I learned? . . . How much have I learned?

One of Rendón's interviewees reported that he did not give grades, though it shocked his colleagues. Instead he made 13 progressively more difficult essay assignments during the course of a semester that showed him a

student's progress or lack of it. How that got recorded on a transcript, he did not say.

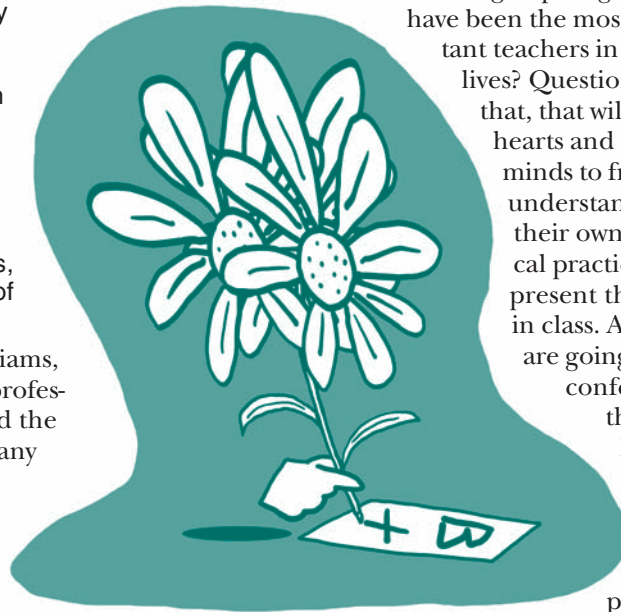
Inspired by her interview with Alberto Pulido, this semester Rendón has assigned the construction of *cajitas* as a kind of final exam. "*Cajitas* are little boxes, memory boxes equivalent to the American Indian 'bundle.'"

The boxes may be any size or shape. Students will fill them with objects that focus or localize meaning for them, somewhat in the way a scrapbook can. "Essentially," says Rendón, "instead of a paper, the *cajitas* will require as much of my students as a paper would take. I've listed a number of questions for them to think about—What are their epistemological assumptions? What are the theories guiding their understanding of pedagogy? Who

have been the most important teachers in their lives? Questions like that, that will stir their hearts and their minds to frame an understanding of their own pedagogical practice. They'll present their *cajitas* in class. And they are going to have a conference there at Iowa featuring these presentations on pedagogy."

Rendón sees the creation of *cajitas* as another form of asking students to "perform" their learning, something one hears more and more about in conversations on teaching. Moreover, she says that, like service learning, which may also serve as a form of performed learning, creating the *cajitas* also becomes a meditative/reflective practice.

In the end, though, will Rendón judge these *cajitas* and give students grades? "Yes," she laughs, "and they'll all probably get A's." ■■



Under the Radar

To break away from entrenched structures inherent in the old vision of teaching and learning is an act of dissent and resistance,” Rendón writes. The 15 faculty she interviewed emerge as serious rebels, confident in the teaching path they follow, but unsure how quickly they’d be crushed, shunned, or otherwise marginalized if what they were doing were more visible.

Susan Nummedal, like Rendón a former member of the *Forum’s* editorial advisory board, said, “I try to be very careful in how I talk about what I’m doing because it is easy to have it dismissed.” Nummedal, a professor of psychology, made the shift to a more holistic mode of teaching almost suddenly, if rather quietly:

I made that shift and it was a pretty radical transformation. It didn’t happen over a long period of time. . . . I very quickly began to engage students in discussion of things and invited them to work in groups. . . . I realized that what I knew was relevant, and that those [old] models that I had I could let go of. I used to get very nervous going into class. Wouldn’t you be nervous if you thought the whole thing was your job? It used to make me incredibly anxious to go into class, and with that transformation I was able to realize, I’m prepared enough. What I need to do is be present in the room — pay attention to what’s going on and to try to be a facilitator of what’s happening, a

good listener and a good responder, and providing opportunities to do that as well. It became a very different kind of experience. I went from being nervous to being really excited because I never quite knew what was going to happen. But I wasn’t worried about the right answer because I began to understand there weren’t right answers. It was really liberating, it was very liberating. I mean there were answers, but they

Emphasize Scholarly Achievement

More than one of Rendón’s respondents acknowledged the need to, as they put it, “play the game.” “I am writing research papers and going to national and international conferences to get support so that I don’t get into trouble,” said one, “especially [because] I’m not tenured.”

Find Supportive Colleagues

Like thinkers exist almost everywhere since the shift toward more holistic teaching appears larger today than ever before. Finding them and comparing notes on teaching practice bolsters the spirit and renews one’s thinking, Rendón’s respondents reported.

Assume Powerful Roles On Campus

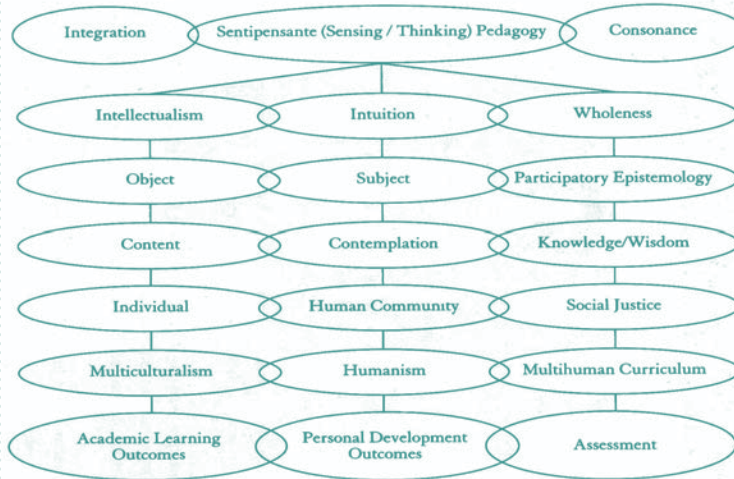
While it’s important to avoid the ethic of needing to work harder than everybody else, assuming leadership positions can help legitimize and, to some extent, shield faculty adopting new modes of teaching from criticism. By becoming president of the Faculty of

Women’s Association, one respondent knitted connections to upper administration on campus, the provost, the president. “My strategy was to make myself invaluable to the department and the college,” she said, “and then untouchable because I had connections in high places.”

Find a Strong Mentor

More often than not, if fortune smiles, one may find a senior figure on campus made wise and open to progressive teaching, a figure like the “quiet man” Alberto Pulido found who operated “behind the scenes” and commanded the respect of his colleagues. Pulido’s relationship with his mentor appeared to protect him from academic threats to his work as well as remind him of his obligation to help others pursuing a more progressive pedagogical practice. ■■■

Model of Sentipensante (Sensing / Thinking) Pedagogy



depend, and it wasn’t for me to provide the right answer. That wasn’t what the enterprise was about.

Communications professor Kristin Valentine reported that when she began teaching, “I was told not to do any skills stuff, in other words [students] weren’t supposed to stand up and read the poem. They were supposed to talk about how one studies performance but not do any of it. [But] I did it anyway!”

From the experience of those who’ve followed a non-traditional path in their teaching and gone on to become award-winning teachers, a few bits of advice emerge for operating “under the radar.” Actually, these seem good advice for anyone set on succeeding in the academy.

ESSAY

The Willard Streak

*Jeffrey Nesteruk
Professor of Legal Studies, Business,
Organizations & Society
Franklin and Marshall College*

I have to admit it. I have the Willard streak.

I suspect my grandfather, Samuel Willard, knew this when he first told me of this family trait. He was relating how my cousin was one course short of graduation when he decided not to complete his college degree. "He has the Willard streak," said my grandfather. He then gave me a long, knowing look leaving little doubt he saw a lot of my cousin in me.

Still, over the years, I've resisted acknowledging this hereditary mark. Among the ambitious academics that make up my professional world, the Willard streak is hardly a quality likely to give rise to admiration. This is, in part, because it's easily mistaken for simple laziness. How could anyone, I imagine my colleagues thinking, fail to get a college degree simply because of an unwillingness to take a single additional course?

But the charge of laziness misses the mark here. Not that I don't

have my lazy moments. I do. Just ask my Dad how long it used to take me to get around to mowing the lawn at our family home. But these lazy impulses seldom surface in my professional work. Like many academics, my job brings out my compulsive, perfectionistic side.

The Willard streak may on occasion look from the outside like laziness, but its roots lie elsewhere. At bottom, it's the need to believe

in whatever it is you are doing, to have your choices genuinely reflect who you are. My guess is my cousin, at the time (he later completed his degree), simply decided a college degree wasn't a part of how he saw himself. Failing that test, the decision for him wasn't a hard one, despite external expectations to the contrary.

The Willard streak can also sometimes look an awful lot like stubbornness, an obstinate insistence upon doing things your way. This can be a difficult fit in a world such as academia that depends so much on securing the approval of those around you. What academics really want, I remember Stanley Fish saying, is endless applause. That, or one might add, its functional equivalents — widely praised books, prestigious fellowships, high profile teaching prizes.

But while the Willard streak can appear this way, stubbornness implies a resistance to external

pressures, and that's not what the Willard streak feels like when you're experiencing it from the inside looking out. It isn't so much a resistance to external pressures as an inability to be engaged by them.

It's the part of my psychological dynamic that kicks in whenever I sense my integrity is at stake. On these occasions, external rewards fade in significance, even when the go-along-to-get-along part of me might wish otherwise.

There is a danger here, I'm sure, of an antisocial turn, though it's one I've always struggled hard to avoid. This is because, I've learned, once you know yourself, you know you

can't do it all alone. Choices that genuinely reflect who you are are going to reflect your limits. They are going to reveal how much you need others. During his lifetime, my

I know how to recognize when a class is working. I know what brings out my pedagogic best.

Grandfather Willard never seemed to be embarrassed about needing others. Indeed, he often seemed to encourage it. He never, for instance, endorsed the trend of pumping your own gas. He had come to this country unable to speak English and struggled for work. He would say to me, "If you pump your own gas, you're taking away someone's job." Right up until the day he died, he consciously chose to need others, even when it cost him at the pump.

I can't say with certainty if the Willard streak is a virtue or vice. I suspect it's a bit of both, and like so much in our moral makeup, depends on the actor's exercise of good judgment — something I can't always lay claim to. But I find myself now striving to better claim this mark of familial heritage. When a colleague recently urged me to change a class of mine from meeting two times a week to meeting three, I listened, considered his arguments, but made no change. I wasn't surprised that in the days that followed, I heard intimations that my motivation sprung from laziness or an intractable nature. But I've learned a bit in my twenty odd years of teaching. I know how to recognize when a class is working. I know what brings out my pedagogic best.

And upon reflection, I know that, somewhere, my grandfather is smiling. ■■■

E-mail: Jeff.nesteruk@fandm.edu



Faith in Students Sets the Pace

James Rhem, Executive Editor

Imagine that in terms of prestige in academe, you work at the bottom of the scale. You teach the students least prepared (academically at least) for academic work, students some of your colleagues believe should not be in a “college” in the first place. Very little in the existing culture showers praise or perhaps even respect on your work. Ironically, though you may labor in some of the least celebrated fields of college teaching, you find you have accepted one of the toughest teaching challenges around. What do you do?

Jennifer McBride, who teaches English at Merced College in California, thrives. She thrives on the challenge. She thrives on the work. She thrives on faith fulfilled, the gift she receives in her students’ success. Talk with Jennifer McBride for very long about her teaching and you suddenly feel the full flush of what the joys of teaching really are.

Developmental or Pre-collegiate?

Merced College lies in California’s central valley near Fresno, though for many years it seems to have wanted to be somewhere else. The central valley is a large agricultural region. It’s a depressed area in many ways; among the students there are many dropouts who never finished high school. There’s a large migrant student population that is often traveling up and down the valley working in the fields. Sixty percent of Merced’s students need at least one developmental or pre-college course, and of that 60% at least half carry a full load of developmental courses. Many begin in the ESL

program before moving into the pre-collegiate program. But these aren’t children. All of them are over 18 years old. Most work, some have children.

“These students are developmental for so many reasons,” says McBride, “many having nothing to do with intelligence. But, in the past, we taught them like they were children, ignoring the whole world of adult experience they already know about.”

A Grounding in Text

Until five or six years ago, Merced’s English department gave these students (most of whom don’t have summer vacations) writing assignments like the classic “what I did on my summer vacation.” The final exam in the final stepping stone course from the pre-collegiate program into college work simply asked for a personal narrative.

“That’s all we expected,” says McBride.



“It seems so sad to say these things but that was our existence.”

“Now,” McBride reports, “[that exam is] argumentative, with works cited, etc., in three hours.” Indeed, she says now all the writing in the department is “text-based and focused on argument.”

Some vestiges of the old culture still remain: some faculty still think these students should be enrolled in “adult school,” not “college.” Some continue to feel more prestige teaching in the college’s transfer program than in the pre-collegiate sequence. The culture has changed somewhat, however, in large measure as a result of its participation in the Carnegie Foundation’s Strengthening Pre-collegiate Education in Community

Colleges (SPECC) program. Involvement in that program, says McBride, “concentrated on teachers, and we were able to get together (a large group of us) and talk openly and honestly. Then over the years, later administrators were folded in, and they listened to us and now we have programs with administrative support.”

Good (Outside) Influences

Among other things, the SPECC involvement also allowed Merced to bring in Berkeley’s Horton Grubb, author of *Honored But Invisible: An Inside Look at Teaching in Community Colleges*, once a month to speak with faculty. Among the supportive and encouraging aspects of his research, Grubb reported that he found learning communities like the one Merced faculty had formed worked most effectively at the developmental or vocational level. As a result, says McBride, “for three years we focused on that, and didn’t do any transfer learning communities.

Just now when we’re done with SPECC, we’re looking at transfer LCs again. But now we have students ready for transfer work.”

The support for reexamination and renewal of the teaching culture at Merced SPECC helped provide has proven encouraging to McBride in the way she teaches her classes. Formerly, some colleagues viewed her approach as having too much “hand-holding,” too much “scaffolding” in it. Some still do, but fewer.

Argument and Respect

“I want to treat my students with respect as adults,” McBride declares. “I want to get away from this mind-numbing English grammar myth. And I want to build upon their own experiences. I select highly controversial texts that affect their lives in some way. And I conduct my classes from the perspective of argument and

research from the lowest levels on up.

"It's hard work, but I'm with these students five days a week and we get it done.

"To me argument is basic. They get it because that's what we humans do on a daily basis — argue. I teach them all the fallacies. They may not know the fancy words — 'ad hominem' and so on — but you just explain it, and they get it. But our curriculum here doesn't even touch fallacies until they get to college level work. Fallacies are all around us every day!!

And so it sort of empowers them because they see 'Yeah I know this stuff,' I've seen this."

If the translation of "ad hominem" to "name-calling" helps reveal connections between the high-falutin and her students' common experience, so does the selection of texts McBride makes to have students study and respond to.

In a recent semester McBride assigned essays from a reader in the *Opposing Viewpoints Series* on immigration (ed. Mary E. Williams, Greenhaven Press, 2003), one by Samuel Huntington arguing that "Hispanic Immigration Threatens to Divide America," and one by Jan Jarboe Russell who argues that diversity strengthens community. "Ninety percent of my students are Mexican immigrants or first generation," says McBride, "and *they have opinions!*" McBride's approach has been called a marriage of high challenge and high structure. The challenge lies both in the texts read and in the reasoned argument expected in response. The high structure lies in the relentless, step-by-step insistence on clarity, understanding, and evidence McBride leads the students through. "I tell them they can't jump into the academic conversation [about immigration] until they thoroughly understand the two authors' ideas. So we go through a meticulous summary of each essay we outline. It takes us weeks." Indeed, McBride's class spent four weeks, five days a week on these two essays.

Some colleagues still tell her she can't use this kind of text because the reading level is too high for these students. "And I say, 'Well, we'll just get out our dictionaries and go sentence by sentence,' you know?" After such intense study, she always has at least one student who argues against immigration. "It's shocking every time: you never know what they are going to say." But while some faculty still doubt the

"To me argument is basic. They get it because that's what we humans do on a daily basis — argue."

value of her approach, McBride can name five or six of her fellow English instructors who now teach in much the same way.

Stepping through the Process

If step one in McBride's long process is summarizing, where she models annotating, dictionary usage, reading strategies, and so on to make sure students understand what the authors are saying, step two gets more passionate, but with its own restraints. "Step two is their argument, how they feel in support of one or the other position or something unique," she says. But step two immediately runs up against step three (as reasoned argument always does): identifying the opposition. "I don't want them to write opinion papers," McBride continues. "I want them to write arguments. So who do you disagree with, who is your opposition? This may sound basic, but this takes them a long time to understand." Once that's done, students must go back through the text and highlight specific points where they disagree. "I have them start each paragraph with 'When Samuel Huntington says "[so and so]," I disagree

because "[such and such].'" Then they switch to the other text and include quotes that help their argument."

It's the "because" part of this step that sprouts the seed of development: "They can't just disagree; they must have articulated reasons supported with evidence. That's an argument."

Writing their own essays forms the final step and after such meticulous work it proves a satisfying one. "They produce these essays that are filled with argument focused by an idea they disagree with. They don't just use that one quote, but other quotes that support their argument or amplify their disagreement. I think they come up with some really sophisticated paragraphs and essays as a whole that grapple with texts, and not just one text, but two. And then we keep going and going, and I show them how to introduce quotes into an argument and so on."

"I carry [these essays] around," says McBride. "I'm proud of them."

Perhaps McBride has an advantage over some of her colleagues. She grew up in the central valley and went to Merced herself before going off to Cal State in Sacramento for her B.A. and M.A. in American Literature. Like most every other grad student she aspired to go on to the Ph.D. She came back to teach at Merced to gain a little teaching experience and accumulate a little money for graduate school. "Then after a few years I fell in love with it," she says. "I was teaching these developmental students. I had no training in it. Most of us don't. We have degrees in literature. But here we are." Now married with two children, she still loves it. Why? "They get it. My students get it. They've been doing it [thinking and arguing] all along. I have faith in my students. My students are so much more than their past barriers." ■■■

E-mail: mcbride.j@mccd.edu

Do Students Need a Campus-Wide Wireless Network?

Michael L. Rodgers
Southeast Missouri State University

Not Business as Usual!

On December 11, 2008, a letter¹ from my university's President to the campus community warned that general revenue operations appropriations for the upcoming fiscal year may be "dramatically reduced." The letter went on to reveal that key legislators have requested impact statements for appropriation reductions of 15, 20, and 25%.

Despite instructions from my President not to "panic," and reassurances that the institution's response to the shortfall would be formulated through an "open, public, and collegial" process, uncertainty and unease are widespread. Emergency department meetings, program reviews, and public forums to identify cost-saving measures are common. Search committees charged to fill open positions accelerated their work, in hopes of producing signed contracts before hiring freezes went into effect. In general, plans to expand and improve our capabilities have been reshaped to reflect a survival-mode outlook. One notably pessimistic colleague sent an e-mail to my department titled, "the sky is falling." People are worried for the future of their courses, programs, institutions, and careers.

Debate Amidst Uncertainty

The somber budget news came as the University debated the merits of investing in a ubiquitous wireless network. Proponents of campus-wide wireless (wi-fi) were not hard

to find. Those charged with recruiting students to campus advocated strong investment in technology, so as to maintain the university's attractive image with prospective students. Recruiters frequently reported prospective students' keen interest in the level of technology in place, as expressed through technology-focused questions. The tenor of the questions was less about discovery of new technologies, and more about reassurance that familiar technologies — including wi-fi — were freely available on campus. Technology was seen as a "me-too" defense against competing institutions' technology offerings. Recruiters pointed to media coverage and ads proclaiming the high level of technology available at competing institutions: campus-wide wi-fi was often cited as strong support for those claims.

Anecdotal evidence from students already on campus suggested that students would bring laptop computers to class, and rely on them more heavily while studying between classes, if the campus had ubiquitous wi-fi. Some faculty, staff, and students saw wi-fi as another tool to be used to build and maintain campus community. Emergency responders proposed a wi-fi based campus-wide emergency alert system. Those faculty not threatened by the prospect of students working online during classroom lectures looked to ubiquitous wi-fi as a platform for experimentation in teaching and learning applications, especially those involving student-student collaboration.

Campus politics also favored ubiquitous wi-fi: existing wi-fi hotspots were installed (*vide infra*) in accord with the desires of high-profile groups, such as Student Government and those units on

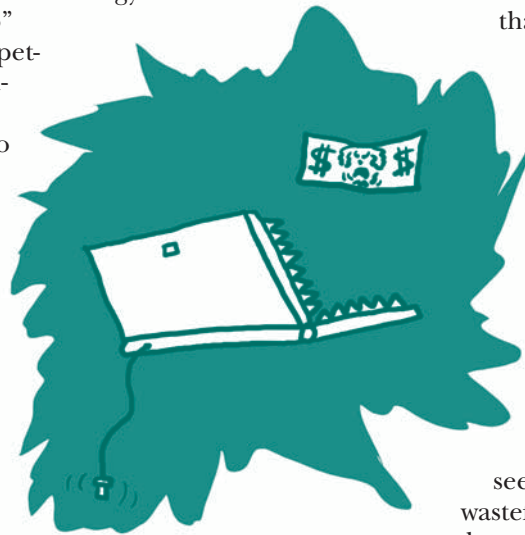
campus that had independent funding to pay for wi-fi. Ubiquitous wi-fi was seen as an inclusive, democratic solution to Internet access on campus.

It is fair to say that support for ubiquitous wi-fi was broad. So why was there even a debate? Certainly, cost was a concern: some in the IT office placed a million-dollar price tag on a wi-fi installation robust enough to reach the entire campus. Even before the recession raised deep concerns about the budget, the prospect of funding a relatively

slow network that would indiscriminately bring Internet access to restrooms, janitorial closets, and other non-instructional areas seemed wasteful and overdone. Security

was also a concern, especially for the IT folks who would be responsible for it.

The argument usually pointed to increased risk as a consequence of the very ubiquity that wi-fi was intended to provide: "Wi-fi is inherently more difficult to secure because access to the network is much easier than with a wired network." Moreover, the campus (including four branch campuses) was already heavily invested in a wired network, with wired computers and network drops in classrooms, offices, dorms, and many other areas around campus where learning was expected to occur. The wired network overcame numerous challenges associated with building construction: some buildings were so impervious to broadcast signals that, in the words of one IT staffer², "the NSA could move in there."



And, the campus already had significant wireless access: over 70 wireless access points (WAPs) were installed in areas other than residence halls, with additional WAPs in the residence hall student lounges, generally following policies to place WAPs where students are³. Interestingly, when asked about the need for a wireless network, students in an honors political science class⁴ were skeptical, believing that wi-fi made access to course content too easy, so that students would stop coming to class as a result.

Wi-fi Alternative?

Perhaps as a result of the concerns raised, the University's President placed a moratorium on wireless installations, to give the campus community an opportunity to develop a thoughtful plan for wireless access. One alternative to wi-fi floated during the moratorium was to implement a network based on cell phone technology, such as the 3G network used by multi-featured cell phones, of which the iPhone is the most notable example.

Proponents of the cell phone network saw it as the most cost-effective way to deploy a campus-wide emergency alert system. Moreover, there was a sense, consistent with published surveys, that the mobile phone, not the laptop computer, will continue to be the most widely-used connectivity technology. For example, in the Pew Internet & American Life Project survey⁵ "The Future of the Internet III," nearly 80% of experts surveyed agreed with the statement, "[t]he mobile phone is the primary connection tool for most people in the world" in the year 2020.

Cell phones are already ubiquitous on campus. Students know how to use them, and have already learned how to access and share information in multiple formats: voice, text, and image. The compact size of mobile phones suggests that students will prefer them to laptop computers when anytime/anyplace connectivity to the Internet is

needed. Cell phones can even support increasingly popular "clicker"-based pedagogies. For example, Poll Everywhere⁶ allows instructors to collect student responses through a text message system, obviating the need to distribute stand-alone infrared (IR) or radio-frequency (RF) "clicker" devices to students.

Teaching and Learning When Budgets Are Bad

Our debate over ubiquitous wireless was put on hold for planning purposes, but now the budget threatens to delay a decision. Still, with the university hoping to defray cuts in its state appropriation through increased fee collections from higher enrollments and improved retention, the delay may be brief. In any case, a decision to implement campus-wide wi-fi, opt for a cell phone solution, or do nothing at all, will shape the way that our students use technology to learn. Speed, cost, and security issues aside, both the "do-nothing" approach and the laptop-centric wi-fi solution would connect students to the Internet (and to each other) on machines that support the most powerful software tools that we have available on campus. Students would work with information in a Windows environment that is designed to support sophisticated data treatments using multiple software tools simultaneously.

On the other hand, a phone-based network, like the Information Commons that we have previously⁷ explored, possesses an informality that suggests spontaneity and simplicity. If students want to do "quick stuff," such as a simple Google search⁸, a check of the day's weather report, or a brief note to members of a student's project team, cell phones provide the easiest access. Is this enough, or do students need more? Thus, the choice is more an issue of platform than connectivity: where are the people who are most likely to use a Windows machine — walking down the street or in a lab?

In more prosperous times, the solution to the problem of ubiquitous connectivity might have been to host **both** a wi-fi and a phone-based network, because both phones and laptops support student interactions with information and communities that we would find worthwhile and deeply connected to student practices and expectations. But these are not ordinary times. If you are a faculty member contemplating how you want your students to interact with information, consider carefully what kind of network your institution maintains. Better yet, get involved in the debate about the kind of network your institution *should have*, to provide guidance about ways students *should* interact with content. In these days of constrained budgets, infrastructure decisions like the one outlined here may be the only avenue that remains to influence the way that teaching and learning happen on campus. ■■■

Endnotes

¹ Ken Dobbins, "Southeast Newswire," e-mail to Southeast Missouri State University faculty and staff, 11 Dec. 2008.

² A. Sprengel, Personal interview, 12 Jan. 2009.

³ For example, DePaul's practice in "DePaul University chooses an SSL VPN to connect students and staff seamlessly and easily to its wireless network," *Communications News* Sept. 2008: 17-20.

⁴ B. Smentkowski, Personal interview, 7 Jan. 2009.

⁵ Janna Anderson and Lee Rainie, "The Future of the Internet III," *Reports: Internet Evolution*, 14 Dec. 2008 (Pew Internet & American Life Project, Washington, DC). Accessed 15 Jan. 2009. http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/tr/270/report_display.asp.

⁶ <http://www.poll Everywhere.com/>.

⁷ M. L. Rodgers and D. A. Starrett, "Are You a 21st Century Library-Ready Instructor?" *The National Teaching and Learning Forum*, May 2006: 15 (3).

⁸ Readers who recall my recent TechPed column on aging will recognize the value of a quick and simple Google search done anytime/anyplace.

Crossing the Cultural Divide

Marilla Svinicki
University of Texas - Austin

This weekend I'm at a conference on teaching psychology and one of the sessions this morning gave me a lot to think about in terms of expectations and how they impact behavior. The topic of the session was unspoken assumptions that we make about students' perspectives on what is culturally appropriate in the academy. It connected with the topic I wrote on in the last issue about the sometimes conflicting perspectives on assignments that students and instructors have. What seems so clear to one is not as clear to the other. So while it's still percolating in my mind, I thought I would draw some parallels with cultural communication.

Sometimes when students don't understand our assignments, it's as if we were from different cultures and we don't speak the same language. Actually it's not "as if"; we really are from different cultures in early classes. As students become socialized into the discourse of our discipline, they start speaking and understanding our language and its

customs, and it becomes much easier to communicate. It's those "first contact" situations that often result in miscommunication.

So if we think about our students as possibly being from a different culture and speaking a different language, does that give us any ideas about how to communicate our expectations more effectively? It gave me three.

First, I can look for a point of intersection between the students' culture and mine. For example, suppose I want my students to write a paper that compares and contrasts two theories on the same behavior. Some students wouldn't understand "compare and contrast." That's a term that we as academics know tacitly, but doesn't come up in everyday conversation. However, if I ask them to imagine that B. F. Skinner and Carl Rogers are having an argument about whether I have free will to decide whom to vote for, they might get a picture of what "compare and contrast the two theories" means.

Another idea that might help is putting the assignment in context. Why am I asking them to "compare and contrast"? It's not just an academic exercise. I ask this because as teachers, they will have to make choices between instructional strategies to use in a given situation. To do that they need to be able to identify strengths and weaknesses of each strategy and

"compare and contrast" them to make the best choice. That situational context might help the students understand the "what" because they understand the "why."

My third idea comes straight out of social theories of learning — the use of models. An immense amount of what we learn is through observing others, especially when we're in a different culture. I have found that providing good models of the kind of response I'm looking for from my students has a tremendous effect on the quality of the assignments I get. Note that I use the plural — "models." If I give only one, I get imitation. But if I give more that are different but still meet the criteria, my students are forced to look for the best qualities of each and build those into their response. And if I point out what is good about each, they're more likely to see and use those qualities in their response.

This morning's session helped me to reframe the conversations I have with students from thinking of them as literalists to thinking of them as communicating from a different culture. Until they become a part of my culture, I need to find ways of crossing over the cultural divide. ■■■

E-mail: mvinicki@mail.utexas.edu

The National Teaching & Learning Forum
2203 Regent Street, Suite B
Madison, WI 53726

Periodicals postage



- **FORWARDING: If you are changing or have changed addresses, please send us your forwarding address so you don't miss a single issue of your subscription.**

- **renew your subscription quickly and easily at**

www.ntlf.com