

# INQUIRY

THE  
JOURNAL  
OF THE  
VIRGINIA  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGES



Volume 16 Number 1 Spring 2011

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# DOES INCREASING TEXTBOOK PORTABILITY INCREASE READING RATES OR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE?

By Georgeana Stratton, Ph.D.

Unfortunately, too many college students are not reading the required textbook material for their courses. One survey of physics students found that less than 40% of students in the introductory physics course regularly read the textbook (Podolefsky & Finkelstein, 2006). Psychology students read only 27.46% of the assigned readings before class and only 69.98% before an exam (Clump, Bauer, & Bradley, 2004). In one introductory economics course only 17% of students reported completing all assigned readings (Schnieder, 2001). Two more studies with community college populations found that a shocking one-third to three-fourth of students failed to complete any portion of assigned readings before their psychology and education classes (McDougall & Cordeiro, 1993; McDougall & Cordeiro, 1992), while one survey conducted at two four-year universities found that over 78% of their

*“If students were able to access the textbook and download it in audio form to an MP3 device... then they might be able to cover more textbook content, because they could listen to the recordings during their commutes, at the gym, and many other places that MP3 players are found.”*

freshman and sophomore students reported not reading the textbook *at all*, or reading it only sparingly, for at least one introductory course (Sikorski, et al., 2002). These are disappointing figures, especially given that research indicates that greater academic achievement is associated with reading text material before coming to lecture (Phillips & Phillips, 2007; Terpstra, 1979), and that textbook reading not only enhances content comprehension and retention, but “improves reading comprehension in the discipline overall” (Ryan, 2006, p. 135). Even though students themselves expect to do more poorly

in a class in which they skim or skip textbook material (Elias, 2005), study after study indicates that students are spending far less time than the rule of thumb for college study time (two hours of study per week for each credit hour) (Fitzpatrick & McConnell, 2009).

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Most interventions designed to increase textbook coverage focus on potentially punitive measures, such as reading quizzes. Though these measures do tend to boost textbook coverage compared to controls, this increased self-reported textbook coverage has not been reliably correlated with academic achievement (McDougall, 1996), and may deter students from taking or remaining in the class. In addition, many of these measures take away valuable class time and increase time faculty spend on grading, making these assessments unfeasible methods of increasing textbook coverage for many teachers. Indeed, one study performed on a community college introductory psychology class population found that students who completed reading focus worksheets AND received specific extensive timely feedback on their assignments performed better on the midterm and final examinations than their counterparts, and were less likely to drop out of the class (Ryan, 2006). Unfortunately, the same reading worksheet returned without extensive feedback did not produce that same high level of academic performance, nor did regular reading quizzes in the same population. Both of these reading compliance measures were, however, associated with a drop in student retention; the quizzed group being most likely to drop before the midterm.

In an informal study conducted by one of my Northern Virginia Community College colleagues at Manassas campus, 28% of economic students (of 43 students) reported that they had not read any of the assigned textbook reading (Bhadra, unpublished data). Another 28% of those students indicated they read less than 25% of the assigned readings. Only 14% indicated that they read 90-100% of the textbook readings. A common complaint among these students was the lack of time to read the course textbook; several students indicated on the survey that they would read more of the textbook if they had more time. This complaint is frequently cited by students as a rationale for poor textbook coverage in this literature (McDougall, 1996).

It is possible that many community college students complain that they do not have enough time to read the textbook because they are juggling the roles of student, parent, and employee all at once. However, if students were able to access the textbook and download it in audio form to an MP3 device (or any personal computer), then they might be able to cover more textbook content because they could listen to the recordings during their commutes, at the gym, and many other places that MP3 players are found. Having textbook material in an additional modality (auditory as well as visual) should also increase elaboration strategies that are good for memory retention (Myers, 2006) and meet the needs of persons with an auditory learning style, enabling higher academic achievement (Dunn, et. al., 1995). Thus, it is possible that increasing the portability of the textbook might increase both textbook coverage and content mastery.

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Unfortunately, due to legal issues involved with creating audio recordings of a copyrighted book, I was dependent upon Worth Publishers to provide me with audio recordings of the textbook material. Days before I was scheduled to begin the experiment in my classes, I was made aware that instead of full chapter audio recordings, Worth Publishers would only be able to give me the section summaries printed after each major concept section in the textbook. Though these section summaries do not substitute for reading the whole chapter, they are part of each of the chapter readings. Therefore, the MP3 verbatim section summaries do increase portability of part of the assigned readings, and listening to the audio recordings could substitute for reading that part of the chapter and still provide the student with coverage of that part of the textbook.

My hypotheses are that students who have access to textbook section summaries in MP3 form will cover more of the textbook material and show greater mastery of text material than students who only have the text in its traditional form.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Participants were 84 Northern Virginia community college students enrolled in four of my Introduction to Psychology II classes at the Loudoun or Reston campus<sup>1</sup>. The smallest class had 15 students, whilst the largest class had 35 students. Thus, the number of students distributed in each condition were not equal. Fully 60.2% (56) of participants ended up in the experimental condition. Participants ranged in ages from 17-51 ( $M = 21.87$ ). 66.7% of the population was female. Slightly over half of them identified themselves as Caucasian (54.8%). The next largest racial minorities were Hispanic (17.2%) and Asians (16.1%). 5.4% identified themselves as African American, whilst the remainder of participants either refused to report race or indicated a mixed-racial heritage<sup>2</sup>.

Twenty-eight percent of the participants indicated that English was not their first language. Only 5.4% indicated that this was their first semester at college. 65.6% indicated that they went immediately from high school to community college. 60.2% of participants reported that they had to take Introduction to Psychology II as part of their major program<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Procedures***

On the first day of the class, I explained the research study design to students in all four classes. I informed them that their participation was voluntary and that their personal information would be kept confidential. I stressed

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that participation in the surveys and use of the MP3 recordings would have no affect on student grades. Students were then given the opportunity to decline participation. They were also informed that they could withdraw their participation in the study at anytime during the semester at no detriment to their course grade. None chose to do so either on the first day of class or at any other point in the semester.

In order to maintain student confidentiality and still maintain the ability to match up student answers to survey questions and test bank scores, I assigned each student a number. This number was written on each survey and a master file of student names with their associated number was kept only as a written document and stored in a separate file away from both student grades and the surveys.

All classes were assigned Myers' (2006) *Psychology (8th Edition)* as a required text for the course. They were required to purchase the text on their own. Students in two of the four classes were randomly assigned (via coin flip) to get access to the MP3 recordings of the chapter summaries for Myer's textbook. The instruction and access codes were typed, printed, and distributed on the second day of class during the Spring 2009 semester accompanied by verbal and visual instructions by the instructor on how to access and download the section summaries. On that day, students in the experimental condition were urged to download at once all section summaries for the semester to their computer or portable MP3 device so that they could have access to the summaries during work commutes, job breaks, and anywhere else they might carry their MP3 device.

Students in all conditions were treated identically, except for the manipulation of the independent variable: access to MP3 audio readings of the textbook and a 10 minute instruction period during the second class on how to access and use the MP3 recordings.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, the dataset included 93 participants, but 9 of them missed tests throughout the semester and so were removed from all analyses. A chi-square analysis indicated no difference in attrition rates between conditions.

<sup>2</sup> Chi-Square tests revealed no significant differences in gender or race between conditions. A t-test revealed no reliable differences in age between conditions.

<sup>3</sup> Chi-square tests revealed no significant differences between conditions in English as a first language, whether this was their first semester at a community college, or whether psychology was a course requirement. There was a significant difference between conditions of students who indicated that they went directly from high school to community college (more students with MP3 access said 'yes' to this item).

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All students were required to purchase the textbook and assigned pages to read before coming to the class. Lectures, activities, tests, and assignments were identical for all classes. All four classes were graded on the same point system for the completion of identical assignments. At three points in the semester, all four classes took content exams, which included multiple-choice questions drawn from the test bank supplied with the Myer's textbook. Only student scores on the multiple test bank questions were used to assess the main dependent variable: mastery of textbook material.

In addition, all four classes answered identical surveys at the end of each test session as to how often they spent reading textbook material outside of class and how useful they think reading the textbook is for their individual performance in the class (see the Appendix for a copy of the survey). After reading through several surveys, I designed a set of codes for the two open-ended questions to capture the most frequent student responses to the prompt "I have read/covered about [blank] percent of the textbook reading assignments from the textbook so far for this course because..." and "I would read/cover more of the psychology textbook if..."

### ***Materials***

Students were required to purchase their own individual copies of the course textbook: *Psychology 8th Edition* (2006) by David G. Myers. In addition, students in the experimental group were provided with a free account to access the MP3 section summary recordings, compliments of Worth Publishers.

In addition, all four classes answered identical, in-class, one page surveys at the end of each test session as to how often they spent reading textbook material outside of class, and how useful they thought reading the textbook was for their individual performance in the class (see the Appendix for a copy of the survey). Three of these questions were taken from Bhadra's unpublished textbook read survey (unpublished data). The first question on every survey asked students to write in the percentage of textbook reading assignments they had covered in the course (through MP3 and/ or reading) and give an open ended explanation for that percentage. Next, students were asked to write in what factors would boost their textbook coverage. Then, students rated their agreement with several statements about their perceptions of the course, the textbook, and the importance of textbook reading. The first two surveys also asked students general demographic questions such as age, ethnicity, and gender.

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## Results

### *Test bank question mastery as a function of MP3 section summary access*

Out of the 56 students in the experimental condition (those with access to the MP3 recordings), only 22 students reported ever downloading and listening to any of the section summaries. Among these 22 students there was wide variability in the amount of MP3 use before each test (2%- 100%).

Given that so few students in the experimental condition took advantage of their free MP3 textbook access, it is not surprising that there were no reliable differences between the experimental and control conditions. I also ran a set of independent sample t-tests comparing those who did access the MP3 records with those who did not (whether they were in the experimental or control condition). Between these groups there was a reliable difference in textbook coverage. Students who accessed and listened to the MP3 recordings reported covering more of the assigned readings in preparation for the test through reading the textbook and/or listening to section summaries ( $M = 66.08\%$ ) than students who did not ( $M = 49.58\%$ );  $t(76) = 2.91, p = .005$ . However, there was no difference in mastery of text bank questions between these two groups. In fact, when students were split into three groups based on their percentage of textbook coverage before exams (high readers were students who reported 80% or more of textbook coverage, low readers were students who reported less than 21% of textbook coverage), there were no differences between high and low textbook covers on mastery of text bank questions. Furthermore, the variables of amount of textbook coverage and number of text bank questions answered correctly were not even significantly correlated with each other ( $p = .948$ ).

### *Other findings*

Generally, students agreed with the statement that “going over<sup>4</sup> the course textbook material is important to my performance in class” ( $M = 3.34$  on a scale of 1 = strongly disagree with the statement, 4 = strongly agree) and they agreed that “I perform better on Psy 202 tests when I spent time out of class going over textbook material” ( $M = 3.2$ ), but on average, students in these four classes read only 54% on the required readings before an exam. The most frequently cited reason for not covering more of the textbook reading was lack of time (35.7%) though the average amount of time spent out of class on textbook coverage was 3.31 hours per week. Surprisingly, when asked on

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<sup>4</sup> In each class, I verbally defined the phrase “going over the course textbook” as reading the entire assigned pages or doing a combination of reading the text and listening to the audio recordings for the assigned chapters.

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the survey whether they were happy with the amount of reading they had completed for the course, 73.8% replied “Yes.”

Lack of textbook coverage cannot be attributed to boredom with the subject material as students strongly agreed with the statement “I think that psychology is fun” ( $M = 3.66$  on a scale of 1 = strongly disagree with the statement, 4 = strongly agree). Nor did the textbook garner significant distasteful student ratings. On average students reported neither agreement nor disagreement with the statement “I do NOT enjoy reading/covering the Psy 202 textbook” ( $M = 2.24$ ) and they disagreed with a statement that they did not enjoy reading at all ( $M = 1.81$ ). However, there was solid agreement among students with the statement “I wish I had better time management skills indicating that students may improve textbook coverage with time management instruction or increased textbook portability ( $M = 3.02$ ; 1 = strongly disagree with the statement, 4 = strongly agree).

When asked what factors would increase their textbook coverage, the greatest amount of students reported that having more time would help (35.7%). 13.1% of students from the four classes said they would read more of the textbook if there was more motivation to do so (e.g. there were reading quizzes, they could not get most of what they needed for tests from lecture). Only a few students (4.8%) said they would read more in the textbook was in a different modality.

## **Discussion**

This experiment confirmed earlier findings that many college students are not reading the required textbook material for their courses. Even though students in these classes enjoyed the subject and indicated that they would read the textbook if they had more time to do so, very few students took advantage of section summary MP3 files that would have helped them achieve greater textbook mastery. This may have been due to the fact that the MP3 recordings did not contain the full text, but rather just the end-of-the section summaries. It is likely that more students in the experimental condition would have utilized the MP3 recordings if the recordings had completely substituted for reading the chapter. However, my findings do suggest that merely changing the modality of textbook readings to provide greater portability is not enough to increase student readership. Perhaps increasing time management skills through specialized training would be a more effective way of increasing textbook coverage.

In addition, students continue to suggest that they would read more of the textbook if motivated through reading quizzes or other assessments. This indicates that the in- and out-of-class time cost for faculty to create and grade

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such assignments may be warranted. However, care must be taken that the use of such assessments does not increase student drop out rates, which are already high in community college populations (over 50% nationally for community colleges) (Tietjen-Smith, et. al., 2009).

It is also possible that the wording of some of the questions in the survey affected the results found. Students were asked what percentage of the assigned readings they had “read/covered.” It is possible, though not likely, that some students understood the word “cover” in the first question on the survey to mean merely skimming through a chapter, whilst others believed that word only applied to reading and/or listening to every word of the assigned readings. These different interpretations could have obscured the study results.

Interestingly, students who did use the MP3 recordings to cover more of the textbook did not perform better on the test bank multiple choice questions than their cohorts. In addition, there was no relationship between amount of textbook coverage and performance on the textbook’s test bank multiple choice questions. This suggests that another reason why students are not reading the textbook is because they do not see a need to do so. Considerable evidence suggests that today’s students believe it is the instructor’s responsibility to teach all important course concepts within the lecture period and to teach students what is important from the readings (Clump & Doll, 2007). Perhaps instructors have increasingly ceded to these demands whilst constructing their lectures so that mere textbook coverage no longer predicts content mastery. Or perhaps textbook reading is not emphasized enough in college classrooms today.

*Georgeana Stratton (Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at NVCC – Loudoun with eleven years of experience teaching on a wide variety of psychology topics. She has a Ph.D. in social psychology from the University of Southern California, where she conducted numerous research projects on impression formation, stereotyping, and group membership. She also has several years of experience conducting field research in both the education and social science fields.*

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## Appendix

### Reading Across the Curriculum Survey

Please answer the following questions about your experience in Psyc 202 so far.

1. I have read/covered about \_\_\_\_\_ percent of the textbook reading assignments from the textbook so far for this course because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. I spend about \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week reading/covering the textbook material outside of class.
3. I would read/cover more of the psychology textbook if \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Put an 'X' in the box that indicates your agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think that going over the course textbook material is important to my performance in class.	1	2	3	4
I feel that I perform better on Psy 202 tests when I spend time out of class going over textbook material.	1	2	3	4
I feel that it is NOT important to read the course textbook to perform well on Psy 202 tests.	1	2	3	4
It is important that I read/cover textbook material outside of class so that I fully understand psychology concepts.	1	2	3	4
I think that psychology is fun.	1	2	3	4
I do NOT enjoy reading/covering the Psy 202 textbook.	1	2	3	4
I do NOT enjoy reading at all.	1	2	3	4
I wish I had better time management skills.	1	2	3	4

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Please answer the following questions about yourself by placing an ‘X’ in the appropriate box:

	Yes	No
I went directly from high school to community college.	1	2
I have to take this specific class for my major.	1	2
English is my first language.	1	2
This is my first semester at community college.	1	2

What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_ What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your racial background? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you used the MP3 access for the textbook? (circle one) Yes No

If so, estimate how many modules you have downloaded and started listening to. \_\_\_\_\_

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# INCORPORATING STUDENT PRESENTATIONS IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

By Laurie Thurneck

**I**socrates, a teacher of rhetoric during the Greek Classical period, praised the art of communication as the “source of most of our blessings” (Isocrates 50). He explained that the ability to speak gives humans a unique power to affect the world:

[Through speech] we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish. ...If there is need to speak in brief summary of this power, we shall find that none of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of speech, but that in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts, speech is our guide (Isocrates 50).

*“Incorporating student presentations in the college classroom helps students develop the ability to communicate both within the classroom and in the outside world [and to] ...provide a sense of belonging, which enhances the motivation to learn.”*

Isocrates’s inspirational words are placed prominently at the top of my Public Speaking syllabus every semester. Oral presentations, however, do not have to be confined to Public Speaking classes, but could be incorporated into a range of college courses to enhance the learning experience.

The improvement of communication both within and outside of the classroom is promoted by the national Communication-Across-the-Curriculum (CXC) initiative. The first CXC-based program emerged in 1974 at Center College, in Iowa, and since that time, the CXC initiative has gone through a number of changes and challenges. Morreale explains that CXC programs are similar to writing across the curriculum: “Faculty from disciplines other than communication are encouraged to incorporate oral communication activities into their existing courses, to enhance discipline-specific learning and to improve students’ oral communication competencies” (Morreale 14).

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The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) also recognizes that the improvement of communication competencies, including oral communication, is a central component of general education. The VCCS Policy Manual specifies that Communication is one of seven areas in which degree graduates should demonstrate competency. Among the Communication goals and outcomes are the abilities to “assimilate, organize, develop, and present an idea formally and informally,” “use appropriate verbal and non-verbal responses in interpersonal relations and group discussions,” and “use listening skills” (VCCS Policy Manual).

Incorporating student presentations in the college classroom furthers general education goals, promotes student engagement, and provides an opportunity for students to practice an art that will enhance their lives outside of the classroom. What follows are ideas for how to improve learning through student presentations, guidelines for speaking fundamentals that faculty can share with students, and sample grading rubrics.

### **Learning through Speaking**

It is prudent for faculty to establish early in the semester that participation is expected. Sullivan refers to Newton’s first law of motion to explain the rationale for early involvement in the classroom: “When students are called upon to be involved from the first day of class, there will be less time for them to come to rest and so remain at rest. If we wait until midway through the semester to start getting them on their feet, we fight the laws of physics and typically encounter resistance” (69). Early “icebreaking” presentations should be fun and low-anxiety producing: “There is nothing wrong with having a good time in class! Don’t forget to laugh and have a sense of humor. In doing so, you show students that learning can be fun and that it is not disconnected from the real world around them. The moments that give students happiness are ones they value and share with others” (Quay and Quaglia 1).

- **Presentation Idea #1:** Begin the semester by having students interview and introduce each other in pairs. Present in pairs so that students have someone with them the first time they stand in front of the class.
- **Presentation Idea #2:** Have students read aloud parts of literature, plays, dialogues, or even act them out. Better yet, consider having students write and perform their own dialogue between figures they’ve studied, emphasizing points of difference or similarity (Simmons).

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### ***Presentations Create Belonging and Motivation***

In addition to establishing a participatory norm, presentations also create a sense of belonging in the classroom, which motivates students to learn: “The more your students feel that they are part of the classroom community, the more likely they are to become connected to the course, the subject, and even the school” (Quay and Quaglia 1). In a study of first-year undergraduate students, researchers found that a sense of classroom belonging is promoted by instructors who encourage student participation and interaction. Encouraging a sense of belonging was “linked with students’ motivation and achievement” (Freeman, Anderman, and Jenson 216-217).

- Presentation Idea #3: Have students present contextual information on historical figures, concepts, or time periods. Set a time limit and require students to use visual aids and a certain number of research sources.

### ***Presentations Promote Responsibility***

Presentations also encourage students to see themselves as adults with responsibilities to the classroom learning environment. Deanna P. Dannels, Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at North Carolina State University and Associate Director of the Campus Writing and Speaking Program there, asserts that students are “more likely to take speaking activities seriously if they are designed to enhance and support disciplinary content” (Dannels).

- Presentation Idea #4: In my Western Culture courses, one type of presentation requires students to lead a discussion on primary works that are assigned. Students present five original questions that are designed to elicit discussion. Written work includes the questions and one-paragraph answers to each, and the time limit is ten minutes. Students are required to consult three secondary sources to promote their understanding prior to the presentation. A student made the following comment on an end-of-the semester course evaluation: “Read and Leads really helped me understand the readings and become involved in the class.”

### ***Presentations have a “Real-World” Application***

Finally, student presentations encourage creativity, intellectual curiosity, and ownership of the material. Quay and Quaglia assert that “students need to be able to explore and ask the ‘why/why not’ questions. Those kinds of questions encourage them to make their own connections to the subject matter and to be more engaged in the class” (1). Presentations may be linked to an attempt

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to introduce project-based learning, which is an educational reform that is designed to promote student motivation.

The core idea of project-based learning is that real-world problems capture students' interest and provoke serious thinking as the students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context. The teacher plays the role of facilitator, working with students to frame worthwhile questions, structuring meaningful tasks, coaching both knowledge development and social skills (David).

Proponents of project-based learning believe that it “helps prepare students for the thinking and collaboration skills required in the workplace” (David).

- **Presentation Idea #5:** Have students select debate topics that relate to the course material. Debate topics should be phrased as questions with “yes” or “no” answers, such as “Should euthanasia be legal in the United States?” or “Does music promote brain development?” Students then choose teams, and for each question, one team becomes the “affirmative” side and the other is the “negative.” Each team prepares a presentation that supports its side of the issue while anticipating what the other team is likely to say. The teams deliver ten-minute presentations with two-minute rebuttals to follow. In my classes, students have a good time working with each other to craft their best case and win the debate. Students learn from each other’s strengths and often work through the “real world” issue of conflict resolution.

## **Speech Fundamentals for Any Classroom**

I have been using Stephen E. Lucas’s textbook, *The Art of Public Speaking*, for most of the twenty-five years that I have been teaching Public Speaking. The following tips are gleaned from his book as well as from my experiences in the classroom. It would be impossible to share in this short article all of the principles about the rhetorical tradition and tools that we study in Public Speaking over the course of a semester. Therefore, I have focused on three areas to make these tips as applicable as possible to a wide range of courses: overcoming fear of the audience by meeting their needs for relevance and organization, using visual aids, and delivering the message.

### ***Do Not Fear the Audience; Manage Them!***

- Fear of speaking in public is a prominent concern of American adults. This anxiety is generated largely by feelings of self consciousness. It helps to remember that audiences are egocentric, meaning they are thinking much more of themselves than they

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are of judging the speaker. The way to win them over is to make the speech meet the needs of this self-interested audience.

- The audience will be the most interested in information that relates to their own interests, lives, and work. Effective speakers connect with the audience and show good will for them by using examples that establish common ground. For example, in a presentation on *Hospitality in Greek Life* and *The Odyssey*, in a Survey of Western Culture class, a student began by talking about the meaning of hospitality in contemporary life and gave relevant examples. We had just experienced a snow storm, and many households in the area had lost power, and so she defined hospitality as helping those in need. She also mentioned that some colleges today provide instruction in hospitality by offering majors such as hotel/restaurant management and tourism. This student gained the audience's attention from the beginning of the presentation by creating common ground that was based on contemporary usages of the term "hospitality."
- Other ways to meet the needs of the self-interested audience are to incorporate appropriate humor, make eye contact, and show that one is knowledgeable and excited about the presentation. If the speaker appears confident and interested in the presentation, it is more likely that the audience will want to listen. It is OK to feign confidence. The audience will not know the difference; and once the speaker starts getting a positive response, his or her confidence will grow.
- In general, the larger the audience and size of the room in which one is speaking, the more formal one's style of language should be. However, even small audiences know that a speech is "special," so language should not be colloquial or peppered with "filler" words such as "like" or "um."
- An audience will hear the presentation only once; written material can be reread many times. Therefore, the audience will appreciate efforts to help them understand the meaning of the presentation by using a clear organizational pattern. If the speech is adapted from a written document, it will cover only key points, not every detail. Use an Introduction, Body, and Conclusion. The rule of thumb is: Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and tell them what you told them. In other words, building redundancy into the speech aids listeners. Listeners are not like readers who have the leisure to reread information that they did not understand the first time.

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### ***Visual Aids Do Not Have to be Fancy to be Effective!***

- Make the visual aid count. The visual aid should add meaning and convey something that one cannot say with words alone. Two of the best visual aids I have seen in my classes have been very simple and traditional, yet have added meaning. One student asked the class to breathe for a few seconds through plastic drinking straws that he had provided. This was to demonstrate what having an asthma attack feels like. Another student filled an empty soda bottle with the amount of sugar that such drinks contain. This was to show hidden and excessive sugars in processed foods.
- Avoid passing visual aids among the audience because this takes the visual aid out of the speaker's control. If a speaker wants the audience to have information to take home with them, it should be distributed after the speech.
- PowerPoint is not always the best choice of visual aid. Choose the type of visual aid that will provide the most meaning. Placing an outline of the speech on slides adds very little meaning for the audience. Instead, slides should be used much like traditional visual aids. For example, designing slides that contain charts, graphs, and/or photographs and showing them at appropriate points in the presentation adds meaning for the audience. The advantage of PowerPoint is that it allows speakers to collect visual aids in one place and click through them with a mouse.

### ***Be Yourself!***

- A speaker should focus on communicating with the audience and not on nervousness. Focusing on nervousness makes it worse, but placing one's concentration on the importance of conveying a message makes the nervousness disappear.
- A savvy speaker makes eye contact and channels nervous energy into a display of enthusiasm for the message. For example, if one smiles at the audience, they will smile back and boost the speaker's confidence. Even if one begins with a fake smile, the audience will smile back, and then the speaker's smile will become real and more natural. One should use gestures during the speech just as one would use them in everyday conversation. The audience will not be interested in watching a speaker read a paper; one must engage them with eye contact.

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## Sample Evaluation Forms

On both formal and informal student evaluations of my courses, students have reported that involvement is promoted by presentations, and I have also heard the comment that presentation assignments must be structured and provide expectations and guidelines. In addition to clear assignments and expectations, students are aided by seeing the criteria by which they will be evaluated prior to delivering the presentation. Here are two different types of grading forms; one type is detailed and the other is looser while also conveying general expectations.

I developed the first rubric, which is shown in Appendix A, by beginning with Stephen Lucas's evaluation form and then tailoring it to my needs. Over the years, I made the same "stock comments" many times over; therefore, I created a "key" to accompany the form. Evaluators can place checks beside items on the form that students accomplish well and numbers beside areas that need improvement. For example, placing a number 1 next to the "Central Idea" item would indicate that the student should refer to #1 on the key, which says "Clarify the central idea (topic and direction)."

The second type of grading form, which is included in Appendix B, is one that I use in Western Culture classes to evaluate student presentations. Since we do not spend much time in these survey courses learning the fundamentals of speech, I use a looser format on the grading sheet that allows me to comment qualitatively on broad issues of content and communication.

## Conclusion

Incorporating student presentations in the college classroom helps students develop the ability to communicate both within the classroom and in the outside world. Presentations provide a sense of belonging, which enhances the motivation to learn. Presentations encourage students to have a mature outlook about their role in the classroom, and they present students with the opportunity to learn an art that will improve their lives outside of the classroom.

I hope that the types of presentations described here will be useful in a range of courses, and I would welcome hearing about how other faculty members have incorporated presentations into their classes. You may choose to use the grading forms as they are presented here or tailor them to your own needs.

To see speaking as the source of most of our blessings, as Isocrates did, may seem old-fashioned in today's fast-paced and plugged-in world. However, as long as humans live and work together, in families, schools, neighborhoods, and government, there will be a place for face-to-face communication.

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Incorporating presentations in a range of college classrooms will help students learn this art, which will serve them throughout their lives.

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## Appendix A

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### *Presentation Evaluation Sheet*

#### Introduction:

\_\_\_\_ Central Idea/Enumerated Preview

#### Body:

\_\_\_\_ Main Points Clear and Distinct

\_\_\_\_ Appropriate Supporting Materials

\_\_\_\_ Citation

\_\_\_\_ Transitions

\_\_\_\_ Organizational Pattern

#### Conclusion:

\_\_\_\_ Signaled Conclusion

\_\_\_\_ Reinforced/Summarized Central Idea

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Delivery:

\_\_\_ Eye Contact

\_\_\_ Rate

\_\_\_ Volume

\_\_\_ Gestures

\_\_\_ Facial Expression

\_\_\_ Vocal Variety

\_\_\_ Posture

Style:

\_\_\_ Language is clear, accurate, appropriate, and vivid

General:

\_\_\_ Visual Aid

\_\_\_ Finished within Time Limit

\_\_\_ Adapted to Audience throughout Presentation

\_\_\_ Outline Construction

\_\_\_ Works Cited page

What strengths did the speaker demonstrate? \_\_\_\_\_

What are some areas for improvement? \_\_\_\_\_

GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ***Presentation Evaluation Key***

### Introduction:

1. Clarify the central idea (topic and direction).
2. Preview the main points in the order in which you will discuss them.

### Body:

3. Clarify the organizational pattern.
4. There are too few/too many main points.
5. Connect the main points more clearly to the central idea/theme.
6. Use additional supporting materials to support the assertions.
7. Use a variety of research materials: books, newspaper articles, scholarly articles, websites.
8. Cite sources consistently/thoroughly to build credibility.
9. Work toward stronger transitions.
10. Anticipate counter arguments more convincingly.
11. Your reasoning is fallacious.

### Conclusion:

12. Signal the conclusion.
13. Make the central idea/theme more memorable through reinforcement/summary.
14. Avoid “that’s it” ending.
15. Avoid including new information in the conclusion.

### Delivery:

16. Break with notes to enhance eye contact.
17. Slow/increase/vary the rate.
18. Increase/decrease/vary the volume.
19. Gesture fully/Uncross arms/Take hands out of pockets.
20. Remove hat.

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21. Use more facial expression to engage the audience.
  22. Use non-verbal communication to create a more dynamic delivery.
  23. Avoid fidgeting.
  24. Pronunciation:
  25. Articulation:
  26. Colloquial language:
  27. Keep feet still/uncross legs.
  28. Stand up straight.

Visual Aid:

29. Explain the meaning/significance of the visual aid.
30. The visual aid is difficult to see.
31. Use light text on a dark background on the slides.
32. The slides are cluttered.
33. Other issues regarding visual aids:

General:

34. The topic may be too narrow/broad for the time limit.
35. The topic is inappropriate.
36. Work toward establishing the significance of the topic.
37. Adapt to the audience throughout the speech; use strategies that relate clearly to their needs.
38. Flesh out the outline/use full sentences where required/label topic & organizational pattern at top of page. Label parts of the speech. Use proper Roman numeral format for outline.
39. Consult a stylebook regarding proper format for Works Cited page.
40. Use at least 8 sources on Works Cited page.
41. Aim for greater variety among your sources. Wikipedia is not a scholarly source.

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## Appendix B

HUM 201 – Presentation

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Depth of Discussion and Content (50 points): \_\_\_\_\_

Written Work and Visual Aids (25 points): \_\_\_\_\_

Delivery (25 points): \_\_\_\_\_

POINTS TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

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## TEACHING COLLEGE WRITING USING LEARNER GENERATED MATERIALS AND SELF REVIEW

By Erin Ann Thomas

**B**efore I taught my first freshman composition class at Northern Virginia Community College, I had nine years of teaching ESL under my belt. In many of these experiences, my students came from low levels of education in their native language and consequently hadn't developed their critical thinking skills. Traditional methods of instruction weren't an option—helping a thirty year old man with a primary school background write an essay in English required an innovative battle plan. After two weeks of teaching at NVCC, I realized that my students would benefit from the techniques I used with my ESL students. Many of them were from second language backgrounds, many others were from the inner city, and all of them struggled with writing at a very basic level.

I felt that my job as a freshman composition teacher was to equip my students with the writing skills to be successful in their future education and occupation, which required that they become independent writers and self correctors. After my students walked out of my classroom at the end of the semester, I realized that they might never have the writing process broken

down for them again. I wanted them to leave with an explicit understanding of the structure of an essay and the composition and editing process that would allow them to arrive at a successful finished product. It was immediately apparent that developing these skills in my students would require more than assigning essays and lecturing. Two methods I use in my classroom to bridge the gap between traditional writing instruction and my student's composition abilities are using learner generated materials, a technique borrowed from my years in ESL, and the process of self review, a technique used as a supplement to peer review.

*“After my students walked out of my classroom at the end of the semester, I realized that they might never have the writing process broken down for them again. I wanted them to leave with an explicit understanding of... the composition and editing process... It was immediately apparent that developing these skills in my students would require more than assigning essays and lecturing.”*

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## **Theoretical Background:**

The idea of process based writing has been in vogue since the seventies (Hillock 162) in which students compose essays in drafts and are able to reflect on past weaknesses and strengths. The teacher's role in facilitating this reflection is often referred to as "error correction." In ESL, the effectiveness of this role has been under debate because teachers tend to focus on surface level errors, and students are only able to focus on a limited numbers of corrections at a time (Thomas et. al 91). My colleagues often complain that students don't even read the comments they spend hours writing on their papers or respond to these comments in revisions. Maria Treglia, in a study conducted on teacher-written commentary in college composition classes, asserts that some of this has to do with the quality of teacher commentary, which often consists of "vague directives"(Sommers qtd. in Treglia 67), and that more specific advice is more effective. Additionally, students are reluctant to take on challenging revisions that require clarification in argument or more research (Treglia 82). Paramount in students' ability to progress in their writing ability and remedy their errors is the concept of "noticing," which mediates between input and actual learning (Cross). Using learner generated materials and self review are parts of my instructional strategy, focused on engaging my students in process based writing that attempts to address the above mentioned issues.

## **Learner Generated Materials:**

Using learner generated materials (LGM) is a cutting edge technique in ESL that recycles learner language in order to help students be self-reflective. LGM assures that students are instructed with material that is authentic and appropriate to their level. I routinely take samples from my students' essays to create learning tools that focus on particular problem areas. Isolating these particular mistakes allows students to focus on one issue at a time, which provides a greater opportunity for retention. Additionally, working in groups or individually to correct these mistakes requires that students "notice" them, unlike teacher commentary on essays, which is more easily overlooked or ignored. Using LGM during class time instruction also ensures that students engage in revision exercises that are intellectually challenging.

Three learning tools I've created from student essays are worksheets, a PowerPoint presentation, and a workshop. Some of the worksheets consist of ineffective examples and direct students to rewrite them: the repetition, be-verb, and pronoun worksheets. Other worksheets present effective and non-effective approaches and direct students to identify these and explain their answers: the conclusion and introduction worksheets. The following is an example from "Problems with Pronouns:"

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When you have a baby in your stomach for nine months, you get all excited for the baby's arrival, and you get overwhelmed and don't realize what you are really getting yourself into. When teen moms have their baby, they realize that they have a greater responsibility than they would have. They start to realize they have less time to spend with their close friends and less time to party. They also have to go to school, go to work and pick up the baby.

This selection is taken from an essay written by a student and is far more effective in helping students address shifts in number and person because it is authentic and level appropriate. Editing exercises in textbooks are typically written by professional writers, who attempt to imitate mistakes that students make, which result in exercises on mistakes that good writers make, not writers who are struggling with the basics. This selection could also use improvement in terms of organization, repetition, academic language, and research, but focusing on the aspect of pronoun usage allows students to not be overwhelmed and make the correct edits.

At the beginning of the semester, when I pass back my students' first essay on the assigned topic of "The Drinking Age," I present the PowerPoint presentation, "What to Do and What Not to Do: This is the Answer." Organized around the paradigm that good writing is clear, concise, and specific, this PowerPoint presents effective and non-effective samples from this first essay side by side. It features common errors such as repetition, meandering, rambling, making assertions without evidence, and citing incorrectly, and contrasts this with writing that is on topic, supported by research, and correctly cited. At the end, it concludes with the maxim: above all "to thy own self be true," and an example of plagiarism from Wikipedia. This presentation allows students to interpret the markings on their essays, which are according to a key and a rubric that we have already reviewed. They are able to compare the strengths and weaknesses of their own paper with the strengths and weaknesses of other students' papers on the same topic in particular areas. This presentation also clarifies my expectations for successful writing.

The third technique using LGM brings all my other classroom exercises to fruition. I've struggled in my two years teaching at NVCC to identify a teaching strategy to help my students rewrite their papers. Throughout the semester, student papers always improve in quality, indicating that they learn from the mistakes on their previous papers. However, only a fraction of my students take the opportunity to rewrite their past papers for a better grade. This semester I developed the "Revision Workshop" using two essays from a student from a previous semester who understood the principle of revision. I gave students copies of his first submission with the teacher commentary

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and a second submission that demonstrated substantial revision. I required my students to grade each essay according to my rubric. Developed from qualities I noticed in my students' essays, my rubric is divided into 5 areas: overall structure, grammar, research, MLA, and style of language and argument. Specific descriptions for A, B, C, D, and F papers are provided for each area. Students discussed their scores and the justification for arriving at those scores in a group. They then individually answered the following questions on a worksheet:

1. What score did you give the first draft of this paper? Write a paragraph of justification.
2. What score did you give the second draft of this paper? Write a paragraph of justification.
3. What areas had he improved in the second draft? Did he respond to the teacher comments?
4. How could the second draft of Joe's paper be improved? Write down a step by step action plan for the process that he could follow.

The following class period, students brought three copies of an essay they wanted to rewrite. Students read and workshopped these essays in groups of four, commenting on strengths and weaknesses. Each student consequently outlined an action plan for the step by step process they would have to follow to rewrite their essay in keeping with the assertion that "skilled writers approach writing by planning not only what they will say, but also what they will do" (Flowers qtd. in Boersma et. al).

This exercise using LGM led students along the process of revision, allowing each to understand that revision consisted of more than correcting surface level mistakes, but addressing weaknesses in every area the rubric outlines. Students were also able to more clearly understand how I grade their papers and arrive at their scores.

### **Self Review**

As an adjunct who teaches over a full load of classes each semester, my ability to respond to multiple drafts of my students' essays is limited. Self review is my solution to the problem of offering my students additional feedback before they turn in their papers and supports my instructional vision of educating them to be self-correctors. I use this technique side by side with peer review. Although it is always helpful for students to read and review the essays of their classmates, the feedback this process generates is of variable quality depending on the reviewer.

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Additionally, some students enjoy working with their classmates, but other students prefer working alone, so self review caters to different learning styles.

Self review is a form of self evaluation, which is divided into the following categories in a study by Icy Lee: self-editing, self-assessment, and self-inquiry (204). Self evaluation is often incorporated with portfolios, where students are able to see their progress over a semester. Other forms of self evaluation involve check lists. Self review differs from these types of self evaluation in that it is more targeted and specific, focusing only a few aspects of an essay in each review. This allows students to “notice” particular parts of their essays by isolating the number of concepts they focus on at a time.

Five essays are assigned over the course of the semester, and for each essay, students focus on a different set of self review questions, which move from basic principles to the final polishing stages. The aim is that each set of questions will be integrated into students’ natural editing processes, and that students will understand the sorts of questions they should ask themselves at every stage of composing an essay.

In order to overcome students’ reluctance to analyze their essays in ways that require higher order thinking skills, self review is teacher guided. We read the strategies explained in our writing text, *Successful College Writing* by Kathleen T. McWhorter, and then each student responds to a set of questions that helps them evaluate the success of their essay and what steps they could possibly take to make it stronger. This allows students to make connections between the theories of good writing to the practice of good writing. The following selections are the self review questions for the first five paragraph essay, which focus on the building blocks of an essay, and the self review questions for the research paper, which focus on line editing and word-smithing.

### **Self Review Five Paragraph Essay:**

1. **Thesis statement:** Underline your thesis statement. Is it located at the end of your 1st or 2nd paragraph? Is it a statement, not a question? Does it act as an umbrella for all the topics in your essay? Is it stated as an argument, or does it express a point of view? Read it out loud. Is it awkward? *Read pgs. 101-103 McWhorter.*
2. **Topic sentences:** Underline the topic sentences of each of your paragraphs. Do they adequately introduce the information of the paragraph? Do your topic sentences support the thesis statement? Are the topic sentences focused? *Read pgs. 141-144 McWhorter.*

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- 3. Paragraphs:** Examine the information contained in your body paragraphs. Does each paragraph focus on one idea (check for rambling and meandering)? If not, number each of the different ideas to help you rewrite. Does each paragraph have specific and detailed evidence? Is the information in your paragraphs ordered logically, or do you skip back and forth between ideas? *Read pgs. 144-150 McWhorter.*

### **Self Review Research Paper:**

- 1. Sentences:** Go through and circle your “be” verbs. Are there any you can change to active verbs? Read through your paper out loud. Circle any grammar mistakes you find and any awkward sentences. Try to eliminate any extra words to make your sentences more concise. Read through your paper for sentence variety. Try to alternate between short and long sentences. Make sure that not all of your sentences begin the same way or have the same structure (pg. 181). *Read pgs. 178-189. McWhorter.*
- 2. Words:** Do you use academic language? Are there any colloquial or conversational words or expressions that you need to change? Do you avoid using “you” and “I” in the body paragraphs (you may use “I” when recounting a personal experience but not to express a personal opinion). *Read pgs. 184-194 McWhorter.*

The first set of questions focuses on text level concerns, whereas the second focuses on the sentence level. By the time my students have written four essays and are working on their research papers, I have drilled the basic concepts of essay structure into their heads through exercises using LGM, peer review, and teacher commentary. Consequently, the last self review focuses on the questions students need to ask themselves in order to produce a polished final product, so that they are able to rewrite their previous essays and obtain a high grade on their capstone paper.

### **Student Evaluation of using LGM and Self Review**

According to a study conducted by Iona Leki on ESL students in college writing classes, students prefer that composition teachers mark all the grammatical errors (207). Additionally, I find what when my students rewrite their papers without guidance, they tend to revise only the grammatical errors, which only minimally improves the quality of their work. In the beginning of the semester most of my students write C level papers; by the end of the semester most of my students write B to A level research papers, which have improved in every area of my rubric. This demonstrates that students have internalized the attributes of successful writing, understanding that a

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good paper is more than just grammatically correct. What brings about this transformation from C level writers to A level writers? In the absence of a way to measure this quantitatively, I collected surveys from fifty-three of my 111-009 students from fall semester 2009 and spring semester 2010.

The table below categorizes the responses to the following question: There were several techniques that we used in class to help you write better papers: peer review, worksheets and other exercises from students' papers, self review, computer exercises from *The Bedford Handbook*, teacher comments on drafts, teacher conferencing, and the writing center. Which techniques were most helpful to you and why?

Peer Review	Self Review	LGM
29 mentions	14 mentions	11 mentions
Teacher comments	Writing Center	<i>The Bedford Handbook</i>
31 mentions	7 mentions	18 mentions

Teacher comments received the highest number of mentions consistent with the notion that students rely heavily on their instructors for error-correction. In line with Maria Treglia's conclusions, students asserted the usefulness of teacher commentary based upon its specificity: "Teacher's comments on drafts are extremely helpful because they are concise, precise, and accurate." Peer review received the next highest number of mentions, followed by *The Bedford Handbook*, Self Review, LGM, and the Writing Center respectively. Teacher comments, peer review, and self review were most commonly listed as being most helpful.

### Discussion and Conclusion:

Evident from the results of this survey, using LGM and self review should not replace more traditional forms of composition instruction such as peer review, grammar exercises, or teacher commentary, which students deem useful. They should act as a complement, which coincides with their original purpose as a supplement to help students struggling with the basic principles of composition.

Students preferred different techniques, and this may correspond with their different learning styles. The influence of these is evident from some student responses that included justification for preferences. One student wrote: "Anything that was hands on in class helps because I am more of a visual thinker." Another student wrote, "I like working with others, so I always found it helpful to talk to someone, such as in the case of teacher conferencing and the writing center," which contrasted with another student's comment, "I don't like peer review because I like working alone."

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Student responses also served as a validation for the theory behind both using LGM and self review. The following three selections address the value of using LGM in helping students with error correction. “The worksheets were the most helpful for me because the more I did it, the better I got at finding it.” “Examples from other students’ rough and final drafts were helpful in identifying what revisions to make and what to write and what not to write in a paper.” “The worksheets from other students’ papers were most beneficial to me. Seeing problems that other students have made me more aware of my own writing.” The two following selections address the concepts of self inquiry and teacher guidance involved in self review. “Self review was helpful because asking myself questions about my own paper helped me decide what belonged and what didn’t in my paper.” “With Ms. Thomas guiding us through self reviews, I got a lot done.”

Using LGM and self review are two methods of improving composition students’ ability to self-correct through improving their awareness of effective and non-effective elements in their essays. Both of these techniques allow the teacher to guide students through analysis of text, requiring them to use higher order thinking skills necessary to understand writing. In an article on self-assessment Boersma et al. assert, “When students are able to evaluate their own work it helps them reflect on and understand their own strengths and needs, and encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning” (24). Accordingly, using LGM and self review are techniques designed to foster students’ critical ability to evaluate their own writing to the final goal of having “an English teacher in their head” (24).

*Erin Ann Thomas worked at the Alexandria campus for two years from 2008-2010, teaching English 111 and 112, ESL, and Creative Nonfiction. Recently she has taken a short absence from education to sharpen her technical writing skills as an editor for IBM, but hopes to return to teaching in 2012. Her article “Teaching College Writing Using Learner Generated Materials and Self Review” is an extension of her presentation at the 2010 New Horizons Conference. She has published poems in Kalliope, Juice, and Lines n’ Stars. Her essays have been published in Order of the Earth and Dialogue. Her first book length work of creative nonfiction, Coal in Our Veins: A Personal Journey, will be published by University of Utah Press in spring 2012.*

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FOLLOW THEIR LEAD:  
WRITING EXERCISES BASED ON  
SUCCESSFUL AUTHORS' STRATEGIES

By Victoria Winterhalter Brame, Ph.D.

**M**ost students avoid the reflective nature the writing process requires. Their resistance to meta-cognition, thinking about one's thinking, often means they are incapable of capitalizing on their strengths or improving upon their weaknesses.

They often believe, as Anne Lamott explains in her book *Bird by Bird*, that successful writers “sit down at their desks every morning feeling like a million dollars, feeling great about who they are and how much talent they have and what a great story they have to tell; that they take in a few deep breaths, push back their sleeves, roll their necks a few times to get all the cricks out, and dive in, typing fully formed passages as fast as a court reporter.” But as Lamott goes on to clarify, “This is just the fantasy of the uninitiated” (21).

*“The biggest implication of my work is the realization that most of the writing exercises students are commonly engaged in, as a result of teacher initiatives and/or recommendations in books on writing instruction, are not being employed by successful authors. My research leads me to believe that there is a real need for more authentic student writing experiences.”*

So a few years ago, I began reading aloud passages like this in class. Incorporating author's voices proved so effective that I sought out more opportunities to do so. Unfortunately, the examples I found in textbooks were extremely limited, not only in the parts of the writing process authors were commenting on, but also in the types of activities students could do as a follow-up to the readings. There were glimpses of these types of connections, like the inclusion of “Freewriting” by Peter Elbow in *The Writing Kaleidoscope: Writing, Reading, and Grammar* by Kathryn Benander, but no follow through was provided.

Katie Wood Ray, author of *The Writing Workshop*, writes that “teachers who are familiar with writers' lives and habits are that much more effective in guiding their students.” I can't help but think that the same works for students.

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I believe students who are familiar with writers' lives and habits will be that much more effective in guiding themselves through the writing process. Still, if students are truly going to learn the behaviors of proficient writers, then they need to do so by gaining it through procedural knowledge. Being able to name the strategies some authors use during the writing process is not enough.

The most important idea in *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice* by George Hillocks, Jr. is the distinction between declarative and procedural knowledge and thereby presentational and environmental teaching. Hillocks argues that just as you wouldn't give an hour lecture to a group of children learning to swim, and then expect to test them on the stroke you described before giving them a chance to practice, you cannot expect students to master something before they have practiced it together. Therefore, students need to experiment with these authentic strategies by applying them to their own writing process.

### **Authors' Voices in Action**

Writing is a cognitive process, in which the proficient writer not only uses skills, but also strategies to create a text that is meaningful for the reader. In my experience, beginning writers typically fall into two categories: those who write a lot but fail to focus their ideas, and those who write very little. In both cases, the writers do not know how to develop the content of their writing. By imitating strategies used by proficient writers, beginning writers come to own these tasks.

What started out as a journey to come up with fifteen strategies used by authors, which I could integrate into my writing courses to improve student performance, has yielded over seventy different strategies. Thanks to a Paul E. Lee Professional Development Grant awarded by the Virginia Community College System, I spent the summer of 2009 reading interviews with authors in books, most notably the *Writers at Work* series, and magazines, in particular *The Writer*. During this time, I also tapped into a local resource, the James River Writers, and personally interviewed three Virginia authors – nonfiction writers Caroline Kettlewell and Phaedra Hise, and fiction writer Sue Corbett. Doing so enabled me to ask pointed questions in an attempt to fill in the gaps that the secondary sources had left.

As with any research, patterns began to emerge early on. When successful authors spoke of their writing process, they rarely spoke in terms of the traditional stages of the writing process that students are exposed to in writing courses: prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. Rather, they broke down their writing process into three categories: courting their muse, generating their ideas, and crafting their text.

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*Courting Your Muse* includes strategies like *Carrying a Notebook*, *Creating a Writing Space*, and *Drawing Inspiration from a Picture* – steps authors might take to get in the mood for writing. *Generating Your Ideas* includes strategies like *Making Maps*, *Scrapbooking*, and *Visiting a Site* – the methods authors might use to expand on ideas. And finally, *Crafting Your Text* includes strategies like *Storyboarding*, *Skipping Around*, and *Reverse-Outlines* – how the authors write, revise, and edit their drafts.

While the majority of strategies are utilized by more than one author, that is not always the case. Still, with the success that Tennessee Williams had with his strategy – *Talking Out Loud* – I felt it was necessary to gather all strategies, thereby allowing teachers and students to judge what would work for them.

### **Implications of Integrating Authors' Voices**

The biggest implication of my work is the realization that most of the writing exercises students are commonly engaged in, as a result of teacher initiatives and/or recommendations in books on writing instruction, are not being employed by successful authors. My research leads me to believe that there is a real need for more authentic student writing experiences.

The reason, I suspect, that so few authentic strategies are utilized is that they involve a greater time commitment. Although I was able to incorporate fifteen strategies into my ENG 112 course, my weekly class meetings meant that I had to highlight the strategies that I thought would be most relevant to the argumentative writing they were engaged in. If my class met more frequently, twice a week or even daily in the case of dual enrollment, more strategies could be incorporated, thereby providing students with a greater chance for finding tricks of the trade that would work for them.

I also realized that whether a writer chose to record her ideas in longhand versus the computer had nothing to do with age. For every writer that claimed she had to write by hand, another writer swore he had to use the computer. The fact that using a computer made it easier to revise while writing seemed to be the biggest attraction or deterrent. Surprisingly, I would find that most of my students benefited from abandoning their computers and writing by hand, which led me to think that the ease with which beginning writers can revise and edit while they produce interferes with their overall production.

Finally, I noticed that a lot of the interviews I read consisted of answers detailing when the author wrote during the day. Initially, I disregarded this information because I couldn't find any rhyme or reason to timing, but then I came across an interview with Toni Morrison, which helped me to see how this might fit into what I was doing and that I could add *Writing at Your Best* to the category of *Courting Your Muse*.

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“Writers all devise ways to approach that place where they expect to make contact, where they become the conduit, or where they engage in this mysterious process. For me, light is the signal in the transition. It’s not being in the light, it’s being there before it arrives. It enables me, in some sense. I tell my students one of the most important things they need to know is when they are their best creatively. They need to ask themselves, what does the ideal room look like? Is there music? Is there silence? Is there chaos outside or is there serenity outside? What do I need in order to release my imagination?” (Morrison 343)

## The Secret Lives of Authors

One of my favorite discoveries this past summer was a book edited by Dan Crowe and Philip Oltermann. *How I Write: The Secret Lives of Authors* asks seventy-eight authors the standard questions, such as where they get their ideas and how they deal with writer’s block. I love this book because it’s extremely visual, with pictures of everything from desks, to pencil containers, to swivel chairs. I think it makes these authors more real for students, and in turn, their strategies more user-friendly. Will Self covers his walls with ideas written on post-it notes, while Tom Robbin designs a homemade poster with two quotes to serve as a reminder of important truths: “The furthestest out you can go is the best place to be,” by Stanley Elkin, and “Any writer who knows what he’s doing isn’t doing very much,” by Nelson Algren. Author Siri Hustvedt keeps a set of unknown keys she found at her father’s when he died, to remind her of “imaginary keys that unlock nameless interiors.” There were so many interesting techniques to experiment with – the most popular strategies being *Drawing Inspiration from a Picture* and *Drawing Inspiration from an Object*.

Also, evident thanks to *How I Write: The Secret Lives of Authors* is the fact that these strategies are not reserved for fiction writers. The annotated bibliography in the back provides a wonderful glimpse into these varied writers’ backgrounds; thereby disputing the misconception that unique strategies such as these are only applicable in creative writing courses. Two of the authors I interviewed, Caroline Kettlewell and Phaedra Hise, are proof as well since they are both successful nonfiction writers utilizing a variety of these strategies. The practices of Debbie Applegate, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* reiterates this point in an interview with *The Writer* magazine:

“I went and read all these books on how to write thrillers, how to write mysteries – even one of the more helpful things was a little thing on how to write pornography. I really clarified my goals. What is it I wanted to do? I wanted to make ink and paper move somebody – whether it was to tears, or to

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laughter, or at the very minimum, turning a page... I shouldn't say this because I'm sure it sounds very low-brow, but I really wrote that book according to the formulas of the suspense genres" (Applegate 19).

## The Impact of Authors' Voices on Students

At the start of the semester, with the help of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, I created a survey to assess what students already knew about these writing strategies. It was administered to a total of ninety-two students, as another full-time faculty member had agreed to administer it in her three ENG 112 classes for the purposes of comparison. The following highlights the results of those questions, which asked students to indicate the frequency with which they used a given strategy.

Only 18% of the students always worked in a space conducive for writing, indicating that I was correct to assume that performance was being affected by practical matters such as a writing space.

Only 14% of the students always used questions to guide their writing, indicating that true inquiry was limited as I suspected.

Although 25% of the students always experimented with introductions to grab the reader's attention and 30% knew how to rearrange ideas so writing followed a logical progression, the results indicated few students were using organizational strategies like chronologies (9%), and outlines (18%), which was surprising given the fact that these are typically very traditional strategies that instructors encourage.

Most startling was the students' lack of knowledge for how to generate ideas. Brainstorming from photographs (3%), listening to music (9%), and imitating other authors (1%) are popular strategies with published writers, but were not being utilized by the students surveyed; therefore, it would seem greater attention needs to be placed on how to generate ideas when writing.

These results led me to conclude that beginning writers need more experience with nontraditional methods. As a result, I integrated the following strategies into ENG 112: *Carrying a Notebook*, *Creating a Writing Space*, *Freewriting*, *Crafting Your Topic Sentence*, *Cutting and Pasting*, *Making a Map*, *Creating Chronologies*, *Skipping Around*, *Outlining*, *Using Action Verbs*, *Listening to Music*, and *Brainstorming from Photographs*.

Halfway through the semester, I created and administered a survey for my twenty-five students to see if the strategies of published writers were worth repeating. As I suspected, there wasn't one strategy that every student liked and used nor was there one strategy that every student disliked. My students'

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responses to the strategies were as varied as the authors who created them, which confirmed my belief that writing is an extremely individualized process and that writing courses need to individualize instruction as much as possible.

The most popular strategy, however, was freewriting. Students claimed that once they learned this strategy they repeated it on their other writing assignments. They claimed it permitted easier organization of ideas and that it promoted production, as author Peter Elbow of *Writing Without Teachers* suggests. Unusual strategies were well received. For example, students believed that *Making Maps* enabled them to become familiar with a topic in a way that no other writing exercise could, since it helped them to visualize the setting of their writing. And basic strategies were as important to the students as the more creative ones. Many students said that they didn't realize just how important crafting a topic sentence was until they found out that author Jonathan Franzen spent months on this task. Perhaps the best part of the survey results was reading how frequently students were repeating authors' exercises once they had seen the benefit of them.

At the end of the semester, the post-survey results revealed the following. The number of students always working in a space conducive for writing nearly doubled. The use of traditional strategies, in particular, outlines, more than doubled. The popularity of focused freewriting in my class was also reflected in the post-survey results, with over 80% of the students claiming to try to get all of their ideas down in a rough draft, knowing that they would revise it later. This, coupled with the number of students always or often writing in longhand increasing from 32% to 56%, led me to believe that students benefited from distancing themselves from the computer; otherwise they wouldn't continue to use this strategy.

The biggest differences between my class and the comparison group involved approach and execution. First of all, more of my students cited the use of unusual strategies, such as music, as a way to generate ideas (58% vs. 37%), and my students claimed they no longer attempted to perfect as they wrote, which confirmed that they now saw the importance of the separation of the producing, revising, and editing.

### **How the Use of the Author's Exercises is Evolving**

Thanks to Blackboard, I am able to make the Author's Exercises I'm developing accessible to students with ease. Given the success I had with the strategies in my ENG 112 course in the fall of 2009, I incorporated the Author's Exercises into my ENG 111 and ENG 211 during the spring of 2010. Freewriting continued to be the most popular strategy, but strategies like Skipping Around produced fabulous results as well. My Creative Writing

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course proved the ideal setting for students to experiment with the Author's Exercises. They embraced *Storyboarding* and *Using Strong Verbs* while enjoying *Going for a Drive* and *Drawing Inspiration from an Object*.

Based on these results, I'd now like to see how the Author's Exercises might transform peer revisions, as I suspect asking students to complete strategies in the context of each other's writing. For example: Having students utilize Debbie Applegate's strategy, *Reverse-Outlines*, might allow them to provide more pointed feedback for each other and might allow the writer to see whether their intentions are successfully coming across to the reader.

### **Why Integrate Authors' Voices**

The more I share the idiosyncrasies of different writers' processes with students, the more convinced I am that this approach has wonderful potential to transform beginning writers into proficient ones. While student grades didn't improve as a result of these author's exercises, a more thorough analysis of their writing processes does indicate improvement, as students were able to perform tasks with fewer attempts. Typically, students will opt to revise their essays to improve their grades, and although some did take advantage of this opportunity I extended them, the majority did not, as they were pleased with the grades they'd earned the first time around. Previously, my students would need to complete a minimum of five drafts and two one-on-one conferences with me in order to earn a grade that satisfied them. However, after implementing the Author's Exercises into my course, student drafts were reduced to four and conferences to one with the same results. Therefore, it is my belief that implementing the strategies of successful writers proved effective, as it positively influenced the students' writing processes, which might be less tangible than a letter grade but something that will serve them better in the long run.

My suggestion to teachers eager to include more Authors' Voices in their classrooms would be to begin collecting quotes. Resources like *The Writer* magazine and the *Writers at Work* series were major sources in my research, but interviews with authors can be found everywhere from the free *BookPage* monthly, often found in libraries, to the authors' Websites. As long as there are aspiring authors there will be interviews with published writers sharing their secrets to success.

Maybe it's because as a parent of two young daughters, I am surrounded with kids who love to role play, and I see how much they gain from these creative exercises. But the more I read about the habits and strategies of successful writers, the more confirmations I receive that students imitating the behaviors of the "experts" increases their chances for success. As far as I can tell, being

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a writer is, in many ways, a state of mind. Sure, the days of dress up are long gone for my JTCC students, but I'm inclined to encourage them to play the part anyway. Maybe, if the shoe fits, they'll wear it.

## Appendix I: Student Voices

"I did benefit a lot from *Creating a Writing Space*. Living in such a noisy, busy house, it is important for me to have a space of my own to think and really focus. My writing improved because I can get my work done faster without any interruptions." Candace

"The *Freewriting* has completely changed the process in which I write drafts. Before I could be in front of the computer for hours, typing and deleting, over and over. I will use this strategy with every paper I write." Stacie.

"I thought that *Writing Longhand* was extremely beneficial. I have done it on all my papers. I like it because it allows me to physically organize my thoughts before I have typed up anything. After I type up the paper I find it very hard to break the mold and reorganize what I have already done. But I write the paper, roughly, think about it, add in things I think should go in certain places, then I have another chance to revise as I type it up." Matt

"I ask 'what if' in every day life situations, so *Asking 'What If?'* with my favorite books in mind was very entertaining. I enjoyed letting my imagination run wild thinking about what could have been in books that I love." Samantha

"*Making the Map* for (Elie Wiesel) put into perspective how far he really traveled because of the Nazi regime. I think that if I had to write another paper based on an actual person this would help to see where they are coming from." Brooke

"When we were originally given *Educating Your Eye*, I thought it was going to be boring or tedious, but I really enjoyed it. I went to one of my favorite stores, Petco, and I watched so many different things." Amanda

"I learned from *Creating Character Dossiers* that knowing your character is important in your writing. When you know your characters they develop 'a mind' of their own and they take your story where they want it to go." Raquel

"I really found through this class what it means to be a writer. The use of Author's Exercises was really effective because it made me think of writing in times of my life I would not have otherwise. The exercises helped seek writing improvements outside of places I would typically look." Lara

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“What I loved about this class is that the Author’s Exercises we did opened my mind and made me think outside of the box. Any class that helps me think differently is a class that I feel is very beneficial.” Samantha

## **Appendix II: Sample Author’s Exercises**

### ***Creating a Writing Space***

Although the impact of one’s immediate environment on her writing remains essentially unexamined, George Hillocks Jr., author of *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*, suggests that such matters as time, circumstances, and physical surroundings give students greater control over their writing processes.

The more essays I read by proficient writers about the quirky rituals they put so much stock in, the more convinced I’ve become that these practical matters matter. For example, Kent Haruf writes, “I do not pay much attention to these things (on my desk), but having them there makes a difference... Every time I go down to work, I feel as if I’m descending into a sacred place.”

Therefore, one of the first things I like students to do is focus on tasks, like creating a writing space. By doing so, students can see in tangible results at least in this aspect of their writing life, since their improved writing skills may take longer to develop.

So either redecorate it or relocate your writing space, paying special attention to what is in your line of sight while writing. Doing so will help you get to your writing into focus.

### ***Freewriting***

Anne Lamott writes, “People tend to look at successful writers, writers who are getting their books published and maybe even doing well financially, and think that they sit down at their desks every morning feeling like a million dollars, that they take in a few deep breaths, push back their sleeves, roll their necks a few times to get all the cricks out, and dive in, typing fully formed passages as fast as a court reporter. But this is just the fantasy of the uninitiated” (21).

She says, “For me and most of the other writers I know, writing is not rapturous. In fact, the only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts... There may be something in the very last line of the very last paragraph on page six that you just love, that is so beautiful or wild that you now know what you’re supposed to be writing about, more or less, or in what direction you might go – but there was no way to get to this without first getting through the first five and a half pages” (22-23).

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This is something that most beginning writers don't want to hear or acknowledge. Typically, you're pressed for time because you're juggling a lot - work, school, family - and writing is something that happens on the "fringes of your day" as Toni Morrison says.

But the reality is trying to skip the freewriting required when working on a first draft means you'll end up spending more time on revision, attempting to focus or develop your voice.

If you want to succeed as a writer, then you need to accept that the secret to your success is nothing other than hard work. So start writing. If you begin freewriting in ten minute increments before long you'll notice that your writing proficiency has grown by leaps and bounds. It's the first steps in a new direction that are always the hardest, but if you leap, as Anne Lamott suggests, "The net will appear."

### ***Making a Map***

The problem with setting, I think, is two-fold: beginning writers rarely give it the attention it deserves and they don't understand the importance of developing setting in their nonfiction, as well as their fiction writing. Imagine how one's writing might be enhanced if the author familiarized herself with the subject through maps.

I know what you're thinking. 'Who's got time to create a map? I'm barely finding time to write.' But it is my belief that if you take the time to make a map related to your subject the time you will need to spend writing will diminish greatly. And thanks to the Internet, mapping your writing is easier than one would think.

Start at Google Maps ([maps.google.com](http://maps.google.com)), like author Michael Banks suggests.

"Once you're at the site, you can look at any spot on Earth. Select Google Maps' Satellite View, and you'll find contemporary photos from various altitudes. With the Satellite View's zoom, you can take a gander at the layout of a state or a town, or examine individual buildings from above. The zoom detail is almost stunning. It's possible to infer details - such as whether a house is two stories or one, bungalow, brick, and so far. This sort of information is invaluable to novelists who need to place a character someplace they've never been" (36-37).

And it can be invaluable to you.

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So take a trip without ever leaving your writing space. Create a map that's relevant to your writing project. The exercise just may leave you with not only a greater sense of setting than you had before but also a deeper understanding of your subject.

*Victoria Winterhalter Brame has a Master's Degree in English Education from New York University and has been teaching English in a variety of settings for eighteen years. She is currently an adjunct instructor at John Tyler Community College as well as a freelance writer.*

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# TRACKING DEVELOPMENTAL STUDENTS INTO THEIR FIRST COLLEGE LEVEL MATHEMATICS COURSE

By Pansy Waycaster, Ph.D.

## Background

Based on studies done in 1989 and 1992 by the National Center for Developmental education, “only 14% of the developmental programs at two-year colleges and 25% at four-year institutions engage in ongoing, systematic evaluation” (Boylan, Bonham, & Bliss, 1994). In spite of these low statistics, several researchers have found a positive correlation between program evaluation and retention/success in developmental mathematics programs (Boylan, et al., 1997; Casagga & Silverman, 1996; Congas & Schoeps, 1977; and Maxwell, 1985). Even though there is a need for strong program evaluation to assess effectiveness and to make recommendations for program improvement to better student outcomes, a review of the literature reveals only a few studies or research efforts linking program evaluation to program effectiveness.

*“Rather than just examine success rates in developmental mathematics courses, we chose to compare the success rates of developmental mathematics students to the success rates of non-developmental students in their first college level mathematics courses.”*

First, Kristine Young (2002) reports three related pieces of research which have followed developmental students into their college level mathematics courses. McCabe and Day (1998) found that students who complete remedial programs are as successful in college-level work as those who begin academically prepared. Second, Schoenecher, Bollman, and Evans (1996) reported similar findings for twenty-one public community colleges in Minnesota. Schoenecher et al. show that the successfully remediated students performed as well or better than students who had started college

academically prepared. Finally, Klich (1998) argues that data collected by the BCCC (Bucks County Community College) in Newton, Pennsylvania documents that program completers do as well as non-developmental students in college level work. As noted by McCabe (2000), only one percent of all monies spent in higher education in the United States are spent on remedial

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education. In spotlighting these three areas of research, Young has shown that remedial education programs can be economical and effective. She offers a convincing argument that for a reasonable cost, these studies show that students who have completed sequences in developmental programs perform as well or better than college ready students in college level courses.

Aside from the research efforts reported by Young, there are three dissertation efforts which assess developmental mathematics programs by tracking students into future college level mathematics courses. First, Terry Lynn Hutson (1999) examined the effectiveness of the developmental mathematics courses in preparing students for the next course in the mathematics sequence. The study found that students performed equally well in College Algebra whether they advanced from Intermediate Algebra or placed directly into College Algebra.

Second, Richard Andrew Burt (2006) studied the extent of difference between the success rates of students severely unprepared for college entry coursework and the success rates of two groups of their colleagues. The study considered five different areas, one of which was success in first year mathematics courses. Burt (p.47) compared data from the severely underprepared group (SU) to corresponding data on a group of students in higher levels of developmental math (DEV) and to corresponding data on a group of students who placed directly into traditional freshman math (REG). One of Burt's specific research questions (p.49) was: *What is the extent of difference in first semester math pass rates among students who are severely underprepared, students who place into higher level developmental coursework, and students who place directly into a traditional math course?* The overall result (Burt, p.57) was that SU students performed as well as, or better, in the individual courses they took than their higher-placing counterparts.

Third, Allyson Faye Fleming (2000) analyzed the outcomes of students who were placed in developmental studies courses at Tennessee State University. Her goal was to determine to what extent placement of students into the Developmental Studies courses might have impacted their level of academic achievement and retention. One of her findings (p. 64) was that students who were placed in developmental studies courses because of academic deficiencies had, on average, an overall university GPA of 2.25. This average GPA is higher than the required GPA of 2.00 needed for graduation. She argued that this result suggested that these students, who would not have been able to attend university had it not been for developmental studies, were able to master college after being exposed to the developmental studies program, and thus developmental studies should continue.

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## Current Research

A recent SACS review at our institution prompted an assessment of our developmental mathematics program. We needed to examine the effectiveness of our developmental mathematics courses in preparing students for their first college level mathematics course. Rather than just examine success rates in developmental mathematics courses, we chose to compare the success rates of developmental mathematics students to the success rates of non-developmental students in their first college level mathematics courses. Specifically, we tracked developmental students from their last prerequisite developmental mathematics course into their first college level mathematics course. The developmental cohort consisted of only those students who had *successfully* completed their developmental coursework *before* enrolling in their first college level mathematics course. Furthermore, students in the developmental cohort must have enrolled in their first college level mathematics course within one year of the time they completed their last required developmental mathematics course. This last aspect of the study ensured that content learned in the developmental mathematics course would still be current enough to assist the students in their college level mathematics courses. The chart below details the appropriate paths for students to follow from their last required developmental mathematics course before taking their college level mathematics course. These paths also serve as a map for comparing the success rates for developmental and non developmental students in these college level courses.

Exit Developmental Math Course	College Level Math Course
MTH 02 (Arithmetic) MTH 03 (Algebra I)	MTH 141 (Business Mathematics I) MTH 126 (Mathematics for Allied Health) MTH 146 (Introduction to Elementary Statistics)
MTH 04 (Algebra II)	MTH 151 (Mathematics for the Liberal Arts I) MTH 152 (Mathematics for the Liberal Arts II) MTH 158 (College Algebra) MTH 163 (Precalculus I)
MTH 06 (Geometry)	MTH 151 (Mathematics for the Liberal Arts I) MTH 163 (Precalculus I)

Thus the purpose of this project was to track developmental mathematics students who have successfully completed their last required developmental mathematics course into their *first* college level mathematics class and compare their success rates in this college level course with the success

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rate of non-developmental students in the same course. For the purposes of this study, success is defined as a grade of C or better in these college level mathematics courses.

The following charts provide the numbers of developmental and non-developmental students, as well as their success rates in each of seven first college level mathematics courses at our college during the 2006-2008 academic years. The final chart combines all of these courses into one table and provides the same data. The null hypothesis in this study is that there is no difference in success rates for the developmental and non-developmental mathematics students.

#### **Math 141 - Business Mathematics I**

	<b>Success</b>	<b>Failure</b>	<b>% Success</b>
<b>Dev</b>	12	7	12/19 = 63%
<b>Non-Dev</b>	108	64	108/72 = 63%

The developmental students enrolled in Business Math for their first college level math course had the same success rate of 63% as the non-developmental students.

#### **Math 146 - Introduction to Elementary Statistics**

	<b>Success</b>	<b>Failure</b>	<b>% Success</b>
<b>Dev</b>	18	5	18/23 = 78%
<b>Non-Dev</b>	57	17	57/74 = 77%

Developmental students taking Introduction to Elementary Statistics for their first college level math course achieved a 78% success rate, which is comparable to the 77% success rate of the non-developmental students in the same course.

#### **Math 126 - Mathematics for Allied Health**

	<b>Success</b>	<b>Failure</b>	<b>% Success</b>
<b>Dev</b>	17	4	17/21 = 81%
<b>Non-Dev</b>	156	33	98/189 = 83%

The developmental students taking Mathematics for Allied Health for their first college level math course again succeeded comparably with the non-developmental students in the same course, with 81% and 83% success respectively.

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**Math 151 - Mathematics for the Liberal Arts I**

	Success	Failure	% Success
Dev	20	2	20/22 = 91%
Non-Dev	58	15	58/74 = 79%

Developmental students taking Mathematics for The Liberal Arts I for their first college level math course outperformed their non-developmental counterparts with a 90% success rate as compared to a 79% success rate for the non-developmental students.

**Math 152 -Mathematics for the Liberal Arts II**

	Success	Failure	% Success
Dev	3	1	3/4 = 75%
Non-Dev	13	3	13/16 = 81%

We should point out that we are considering both Math 151 and Math 152 in this study because students may begin this sequence in either order or simultaneously. We should further point out that if a student were enrolled in both of these courses during the 2006-2007 academic year; we included only that course which the student enrolled in first. Developmental students taking Mathematics for The Liberal Arts II for their first college level math course performed comparably, with a 75% success rate, to the non-developmental students in the same course, who had an 81% success rate.

**Math 158 - College Algebra**

	Success	Failure	% Success
Dev	6	2	6/8 = 75%
Non-Dev	28	22	28/50 = 56%

Developmental students taking College Algebra for their first college level math course outperformed, with a 75% success rate, the non-developmental students in the same course, who achieved a 56% success rate. One possible reason for the developmental group having a higher success rate in this course may be that they had just successfully completed Math 04 – Intermediate Algebra – which provided them with a basic coverage of the content covered in College Algebra. MTH 158 serves as a bridging course for those students who pass MTH 04 but are still not quite ready for Precalculus.

**Math 163 - Precalculus I**

	Success	Failure	% Success
Dev	31	10	31/41 = 76%
Non-Dev	269	71	269/340 = 79%

The developmental student taking Precalculus I for their first college level math course again performed comparably, with an 76% success rate, to the non-developmental students in the same course, who had a 79% success rate.

Some students are required to take MTH 06 after taking MTH 04, before taking their first college level math course, so these students were also tracked into their first college level math course for the second year of the study. Data was not obtained for these students during the first of year, 2006-2007.

#### Math 06 to Math 151 - Mathematics for the Liberal Arts I

	Success	Failure	% Success
Dev	1	0	1/1 = 100%
Non-Dev	33	5	33/38 = 87%

The developmental student taking Mathematics for The Liberal Arts I for their first college level math after MTH 06 course outperformed the non-developmental counterparts with a 100% success rate as compared to a 87% success rate.

#### Math 06 to Math 163 - Precalculus I

	Success	Failure	% Success
Dev	6	3	6/9 = 67%
Non-Dev	160	37	160/197 = 81%

The developmental students taking Precalculus I for their first college level math course after MTH 06 did not perform as well, with a 67% success rate, as compared to an 81% success rate for the non-developmental students in the same course.

#### All Courses Combined

	Success	Failure	% Success
Dev	114	34	114/148 = 77%
Non-Dev	682	222	682/905 = 75%

$$p = 0.68 \geq .05$$

Finally we merge all of the students from the separate courses into one group and find that the success rates are indeed most comparable, developmental with 77% and non-developmental with 75%. Since the 2-proportion z-test is valid for this data with all the courses combined, the computed  $p$  value can be used to test the null hypothesis. The  $p$  value of 0.68 from the 2-proportion z-test was greater than .05, so we do not reject the null hypothesis. In other words, there is no difference in success rates between the developmental and

non-developmental students in their first college level mathematics courses. In conclusion we argue that once students weak in mathematics background complete their developmental coursework in mathematics, they are indeed ready to enroll in college level mathematics courses.

### Extended Tracking

When presenting this data to local math groups, questions rose as to how these success rates would compare for online versus face-to-face classes. In response to these comments and at the request of my Dean, this tracking was carried out for online and face-to-face classes for the eight academic years 2001-2008. First, Table 1 and Table 2 present the success rates and percentages for four developmental mathematics courses — MTH 02, MTH 03, MTH 04, and MTH 06—for the two academic calendar years (six semesters) 2006-2008. (It should be noted that a grade of R is counted as a failure.) Table 1 presents success rates for online and face-to-face classes **combined**. Table 2 presents success data **separately** for online and face-to-face classes.

**Table 1:**  
**Overall Success Rates in Developmental Mathematics Courses 2006-2008**

Course	Success	Failure	% Success
MTH 02	140	106	140/246 = 57%
MTH 03	281	211	281/492 = 57%
MTH 04	112	122	112/234 = 48%
MTH 06	34	22	34/56 = 61%

**Table 2:**  
**Success Rates in Developmental Math Courses 2006-2008:**  
**Online versus Face-to-Face Classes**

Course	Online	Face-to-Face
MTH 02	51/83=61%	89/163 =5 5%
MTH 03	46/112=41%	235/375 = 63%
MTH 04	_____	112/233 = 48%
MTH 06	_____	34/56 = 61%

Since MTH 04 (Intermediate Algebra) and MTH 06 (Geometry) were not taught online during this two-year study, no data was available for comparison with face-to-face classes. It should be noted that the success rates during this two-year period were comparable for online and face-to-face MTH 02 classes during this two year period, but the success rate was 22 percentage points lower (41% versus 63%) for online MTH 03 classes.

After comparing success rates for online and face-to-face students for the 2006-2008 period, online and face-to-face students were tracked, separately, from MTH 03 into their next math course for 2001-2008. Table 3 presents the success rates for online and face-to-face mathematics students. The MTH 03 students did not proceed to take the subsequent math course, but stopped with completion of MTH 03. However, 8 of the 88 online and 17 of the 442 face-to-face students took the MTH 03 course in 2008, which means they may have take the subsequent math course during 2009. It should also be noted that the other category includes those students who continued with a college level math course other than MTH 04, after MTH 03. These courses were: MTH 151, MTH 152, MTH 163, MTH 164, MTH 141, MTH 146, MTH 240, MTH 241 MTH 126, and MTH 158. Interestingly enough, 10% of these students (online and face-to-face) who had just completed MTH 03 were able to succeed in these other college level math courses.

**Table 3: Success Rates for MTH 03 and MTH 04 Online and Face-to-Face Students 2001-2008**

Course	Online	Face-to-Face	<i>p</i> -value
MTH 03	88/331 = 27%	442/1346 = 33%	$p=.03 \leq .05$
MTH 04	40/331 = 12%	229/1346 = 17%	$p=.03 \leq .05$
Other	32/331 = 10%	140/1346 = 10%	

The 2-proportion z-test is valid for this data which means that it yields a good normal approximation to the binomial data (success or failure) in this study. Comparing the online and face-to-face success rates for MTH 03, the computed *p* value of 0.03 was less than 0.05 which means we can **reject** the null hypothesis that there is no difference in success rates between the online and face-to-face students taking MTH 03 over the academic years 2001-2008. Comparing the online and face-to-face success rates for MTH 04, the computed *p* value of 0.03 was less than 0.05 which means we can **reject** the null hypothesis that there is no difference in success rates between the online and face-to-face students taking MTH 04 over this same period. In other words, face-to-face students are performing significantly better in MTH 03 and MTH 04 than online students.

## Discussion

Tables 1 and 2 data from 2006-2008 reveal that overall **57%** (61% online and 55% face-to-face) of the MTH 02-Arithmetic; **57%** (41% online and 63% face-to-face) of the MTH 03-Algebra I students, and **48%** (all face-to-face) of the MTH 04-Algebra II students do indeed succeed in these developmental math courses. Furthermore, the tracking data for this same period show that 77% of these students go on to succeed in their first college level math courses, as

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compared to 75% of the non-developmental math students in the same college level courses. So for this two-year period, those students who did complete their recommended developmental math courses and, within a year, proceed to take their first college level math courses do succeed at a comparable rate to that of non-developmental students. If we stopped our tracking here, then this data would provide a positive scenario for our developmental math students. But the extended tracking for MTH 03, broken down by method of teaching (online versus face-to-face), paints a somewhat different picture.

Table 3 presents the 2001-2008 overall success percentages of **32%** (27% online and 33% face-to-face) for MTH 03 and **16%** (12% online and 17% face-to-face) for MTH 04. These percentages are quite lower than the 2006-2008 success rates for the same courses, reported above. But how can these success rates be so different? One explanation may be that the tracking data includes the students who drop out of developmental and/or college altogether during this eight year period, counting them as failures, and the two-year period data does not include these students. Thus the two-year period will only report the efforts of first time developmental students and those students repeating the course. So the tracking data will have much higher failure rates, but will also present a more complete picture over the long term.

The findings in this extended tracking suggest that the problem with our developmental mathematics program is twofold. First, our student success rates over time in developmental courses are not as good as we once believed from our yearly tracking practices. Thus, changes need to be made in the program so that more students can successfully complete their developmental coursework and go on to enroll in the college level math courses required for their area of study. The second problem is that students in online developmental math courses (MTH 03 and MTH 04) succeed at a significantly lower rate than students in face-to-face classes. This comes as no surprise, as students in online classes do not have the regular classroom interactions with a teacher and other students, and receive less structure and guidance in the routine of doing homework and learning mathematics. But it behooves us as developmental educators to incorporate the structural items present in a face-to-face classroom into our online classes. Such an effort could increase the success rates of our online developmental math students.

## **Recommendations**

The Community College Research Center Report (CCRC, 2009), the presentation of the CCRC study (Jenkins, 2009) to the VCCS Advisory Council of Presidents, a draft from the VCCS Developmental Task Force responding to the CCRC report (2009), and Smittle's article (2001), *Essential Attributes for Developmental Education Teachers*, along with the current

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analysis of data regarding developmental mathematics have prompted the following responses.

First, page 11 of the draft from the Task Force (2009) lists one of their three goals—to reduce the time to complete the developmental math requirements for students. This is a commendable goal and our college, beginning summer, 2010, is offering a MTH 05 course for students who have borderline COMPASS scores for being placed into MTH 04. So these students will be able to complete MTH 03 and MTH 04 in one semester instead of two.

Pages 4 and 35 of the CCRC report (2009) recommend finding alternative pathways for students starting at the lowest level of the developmental mathematics sequence—MTH 02, Arithmetic. Our college is working on another combined course for MTH 02 and MTH 03 for students who have borderline COMPASS scores for being placed into MTH 03. In a similar fashion these students will be able to complete MTH 02 and MTH 03 in one semester, instead of two. A second alternative for those students needing the entire MTH 02 course is to advise them to take the course in the summer prior to the beginning of their fall semester. Completing MTH 02 in the summer would then make it possible to complete the remainder of their developmental coursework in one academic year.

A second recommendation of the CCRC report (p. 21, Jenkins, 2009) is an “investigation of course structures and instructional techniques that improve effectiveness of online courses among underprepared students.” As mentioned in the discussion above, this recommendation is vital for developmental students. Since developmental students are free to self-select into online courses, it is imperative that we structure online developmental math classes in such a way that the students receive as much attention and assistance as the students in face-to-face classes. The following guidelines will help to bring about this change in structure.

- **Use the best textbook and/or format available for online courses,** i.e. one that contains high quality online lectures with detailed assistance when working examples in the reading assignments as well as when doing homework. Students should be able to get help on homework when they need it and good online math courses have such help available 24/7. MyMathLab is one such online source provided by Pearson publishing company. One online teacher and all face-to-face teachers will have this source available to all of their students beginning fall, 2010 at our college.

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- **Provide a schedule of activities with deadlines.** This agenda will guide the student through the material and enable him or her to complete the course by the end of the semester. Instructors should check the online activity of the students regularly to ensure students are spending enough time engaged with the course.
  - **Include regular quizzes.** A multiple choice format is most practical for quizzes, as students can get results quickly, proceed to correct mistakes and continue with their lessons.
  - **Do not use multiple choice tests,** but use open-ended tests, which are graded diagnostically by the instructor. This technique will help the student find and correct mistakes on the test and better understand the material for future work.

Smittle (p. 3) says that her “studies of personality types of developmental students indicate that they need structure.” These guidelines will provide structure for the online developmental student.

Third, tracking developmental students over time and into subsequent college level math courses is recommended by the CCRC report (p. 5 & p. 40) and Smittle (p. 3) points out that “One of the measures of a successful developmental education program is the success of students in subsequent courses.” The Task Force (p. 10) reminds us that “Developmental education courses were designed to serve as a means to provide the academic preparation students need in order to be successful in their subsequent college-level courses.” Thus, tracking developmental students is essential to determine if our developmental math programs are successful.

A fourth and related recommendation was sparked by a keynote address to the Virginia Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges (VMATYC) April, 2008, in Charlottesville, Virginia. Dr. Susan Wood, Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and Research for the VCCS (Virginia Community College System) and a past President of AMATYC (American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges), suggested that perhaps we might mark student success in community colleges in different ways. For example, we could look at the percentage of students who: complete the General Education sequence; enroll in and successfully complete our gatekeeper math courses – Math 163 and Math 151; complete their developmental course requirements; or complete 12 or 24 credit hours. These are all measures of success for the community college student. And consistent with the above list of suggested milestones is the one addressed in this paper, i.e. students who successfully complete their developmental mathematics course requirements and their first college level mathematics courses. Thus, colleges should not only track

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developmental students into subsequent math courses, but also monitor the completion of developmental courses, general education courses, and gatekeeper courses.

Last, but certainly not least, ongoing professional development is crucial to the success of a developmental math program. As Smittle (p. 1) points out “Teachers are the key components to student success and retention...and the argument that anybody can teach developmental students is absolutely false.” She goes on to say that (p. 4) “many teachers teach developmental students for reasons not in the best interest of students — the class fits their desired schedule, they think the developmental course will require less preparation than higher level content courses, they may be banned from teaching other content courses, they may be teaching out-of-field and the college allows them to teach developmental courses.” She concludes (p. 6) that since most colleges do not have a staff that is professionally trained in the field of developmental education, comprehensive, on-going training is imperative for successful programs, and this is especially true since colleges are using many part-time teachers. Thus, including adjunct instructors in professional development activities is essential to ensure all faculty members are well-prepared to work with developmental math students.

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE  
AND “POST-RACIAL” AMERICA.  
OR, YOU KNOW, NOT.

By Jacqueline A. Blackwell

**I**n 1983, when I began graduate school at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville as the only black student in the Graduate English School, it offered no graduate-level African-American Literature course. If I wanted to take a black literature course, I was told, I had to take the one undergraduate-level course, but I would be allowed to take it for graduate credit. In 1985, there was a graduate-level black literature course, but when I was ready to write my Master’s thesis, I wouldn’t be allowed to write about Zora Neale Hurston – because she wasn’t in “the canon.” (E.D. Hirsch, of *Cultural Literacy* notoriety, was teaching at UVa. at the time.)

Times have changed. Today an undergraduate student at the University of Virginia can major in African-American and African Studies and take courses like African-American Drama, Black Women Writers in America, and Fictions of Black Identity. A graduate student can take her pick of four graduate-level courses: Early African-American Literature, African-American Poetry, Studies in African-American Literature and African-American Literature.

*“[B]lack literature is more than narratives of victimization. It is more than stories and poems about race. It is wholly American: bold, diverse, and iconoclastic, a joy to read, study and deconstruct.”*

Now there are arguments about the “balkanization” of literature, and a graduate student in English Language and Literature at the University of Virginia can take a course in Charles Dickens, Keats, Mark Twain, or Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Now arguments have begun, even among black scholars, against continuing to teach black literature and/or black history in American universities and colleges. Last

year, MacArthur fellow and literature professor Charles Johnson, author of *Middle Passage* and *Flight to Canada*, wrote an article titled, “The End of the Black American Narrative.” Johnson argues that the black narrative is “a tool we use, consciously or unconsciously, to interpret or to make sense of everything that has happened to black people in this country since the arrival of the first twenty Africans at the Jamestown colony in 1619.” But today,

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Johnson says, “the truth and usefulness” of what he calls “the traditional black American narrative of victimization,” or the slave narrative, should be questioned. Challenged. Why? Because things have changed in America.

Two months after Barack Obama was elected president of these United States, professors in historically black colleges and universities began re-thinking African-American literature and history courses, according to Lydia Lum, a correspondent for *Black Issues in Higher Education* magazine. America is now, these professors say, “post-racial,” and it’s time to move on. Our students no longer see parallels between themselves and the characters of *Uncle Tom’s Children*, for example. “They don’t want to identify with African-American characters,” says Dr. Joy Myree-Mainor, an assistant professor of English at historically Black Morgan State University in Baltimore. Dr. Coretta Pittman, an assistant professor of rhetoric and composition at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, says that our students, black students, “believe race doesn’t matter anymore” (qtd. in Lum).

This change has been reflected in community colleges as well. Recently in the VCCS college where I teach, students who wanted to take my African-American Literature course (English 253-254) were hearing, from TNCC counselors, that the course was not transferable to four-year colleges --that there was no need to take that course unless one was an African-American student. This was despite the fact that the University of Virginia and Adrian College, among others, accepted the course for its “Non-Western Perspective Requirement”:

Today’s global village requires the responsible citizen to be aware of the values, languages, economies, religions and structures of other societies. Because most students are introduced to western societies throughout their education, Adrian College students are expected to learn about societies that are not historically European. In addition to the study of topics in specific non-western courses, students are encouraged to complete independent studies on non-western topics and to study abroad. (Adrian College)

TNCC is not offering the course this semester or next semester, citing enrollment reasons. Though it is still offered at other VCCS colleges, the growing resistance of scholars and professors to the study of African American literature could jeopardize its study in the community college system as well as in four year colleges.

The problem with these stances is that black literature is more than narratives of victimization. It is more than stories and poems about race. It is wholly American: bold, diverse, and iconoclastic, a joy to read, study and deconstruct.

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The first bit of black literature I remember analyzing is Phillis Wheatley's lines:

'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land,  
Taught my beknighted soul to understand  
That there's a God, that there's a Savior too:  
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.  
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,  
"Their color is a diabolic dye."  
Remember Christians; Negroes, black as Cain,  
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train. (219)

When I was an undergrad, we marveled at Wheatley's precociousness in the English language, the facility with which she imitated Alexander Pope. Of course, even decades before I entered college, black literature students were talking about Wheatley's choice of words: *Pagan*, *benighted*, and *diabolic*, for example. How could she call kidnapping and objectification "mercy"? Today, students and scholars are combing Wheatley's bold poetry for seeds of rebellion, to date having found only a letter to a Native American minister in which she refers to slaveholders as "our modern Egyptians." Personally, I'm fascinated by the biblical and cultural allusion Wheatley dropped in the penultimate line of "On Being Brought from Africa to America": "Remember Christians; Negroes, black as Cain ..." – the part where we are reminded that whites and blacks alike in antebellum America were often taught that the "mark" that God put on the first murderer was black skin. In my African-American Literature class, we used to discuss the contradiction between the details of the myth – that the "mark" was intended to keep other men from harming Cain – and the realities of harm directed against black-skinned folk in eighteenth-century America. But that's "victimization," isn't it? What is not victimization is what Wheatley asserts in the last two lines of her poem: that Heaven is multicolored.

Let's look, also, at two of my favorite passages in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. First, the part where he discusses the results of learning how to read:

The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men. As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! that very discontentment which Master

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Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! (413)

But it is thinking, and reading, and talking of his victimization that eventually moves Douglass from thoughts of suicide to plans of escape. “You have seen,” writes Douglass, “how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man.” In chapter ten of *The Narrative*, we read where Douglass decides that he will *no longer* be a victim:

Long before daylight, I was called to go and rub, curry, and feed, the horses. I obeyed, and was glad to obey. But whilst thus engaged, whilst in the act of throwing down some blades from the loft, Mr. Covey entered the stable with a long rope; and just as I was half out of the loft, he caught hold of my legs, and was about tying me. As soon as I found what he was up to, I gave a sudden spring, and as I did so, he holding to my legs, I was brought sprawling on the stable floor. Mr. Covey seemed now to think he had me, and could do what he pleased; but at this moment – from whence came the spirit I don’t know – I resolved to fight; and, suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose. (427)

Although Douglass’ story offers plenty of examples of injustice and cruelty, the classic slave narrative follows the archetypal pattern of bondage, fight, flight, and freedom. It is hardly a “narrative of victimization.” Slave narratives are worth studying if only for the incidence of what we used to call “the triumph of the human spirit.”

This theme emerges in much of black American literature. When we leave traditional slave narratives, we see this same triumph in Toni Morrison’s version of the slave narrative, *Beloved*. Though slavery does its best to destroy Sethe and her family, even bringing the Middle Passage back from the dead, Morrison creates a community, a group of meddling prayer warriors, in fact, to triumph over the evil that has taken over Sethe’s life. I think Octavia Butler

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is also playing with that theme in her novel *Kindred*, in which a black woman is snatched from 1975 to rescue a white, slave-owning, nineteenth-century great-grandfather. Yes, Butler attempts to convey the inhuman cruelty, the insanity of slavery, but mostly, as she said in an interview, she wanted to talk about survival:

But when I did *Kindred*, I really had had this experience in college that I talk about all the time, of this Black guy saying, “I wish I could kill all these old Black people that have been holding us back for so long, but I can’t because I have to start with my own parents.” That was a friend of mine. And I realized that, even though he knew a *lot* more than I did about Black history, it was all cerebral. He wasn’t feeling any of it. He was the kind that would have killed and died, as opposed to surviving and hanging on and hoping and working for change. And I thought about my mother, because she used to take me to work with her when she couldn’t get a baby sitter and I was too young to be left alone, and I saw her going in the back door, and I saw people saying things to her that she didn’t like but couldn’t respond to. I heard people say in her hearing, “Well, I don’t really like colored people.” And she kept working, and she put me through school, she bought her house – all the stuff she did. I realized that he didn’t understand what heroism was. That’s what I want to write about: when you are aware of what it means to be an adult and what choices you have to make, the fact that maybe you’re afraid, but you still have to act.

Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada* is **certainly** not about victimization, as the first lines of Quickskill’s letter to his master attest:

Dear Massa Swille:  
What it was?  
I have done my Liza Leap  
& am safe in the arms  
of Canada, so  
Ain’t no use your Slave  
Catchers waitin on me  
At Trailways  
I won’t be there  
I flew in non-stop  
Jumbo Jet this A.M. Had  
Champagne

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Compliments of the Cap'n  
Who announced that a  
Runaway Negro was on the  
Plane. Passengers came up  
And shook my hand  
& within 10 min. I had  
Signed up for 3 anti-slavery  
Lectures. Remind me to get an  
Agent (3)

This theme appears, I think, in Percival Everett's *God's Country*, too. It's not a slave narrative. It's a post-slavery story, as one of the characters points out:

“What’s your business?” [Bubba] asked.  
“How do you know this ain a social call?”  
“Your color and mine.”  
“Christ, man, it’s 1871, ain’t you people ever gonna  
forget about that slavery stuff?” (24)

This satirical novel is about Curt Marder, a white man, a bigot and a loser, in the old West, having to lower himself to ask Bubba, a black man, to track the kidnappers of his wife. And Bubba, a master tracker, has to lower himself to help the bigot, in the hopes that he will at least get paid for his work. In the end, though, the story isn't about *quid pro quo*; it's about Bubba and Curt deciding to make an investment, however tenuous, in each other, for some reason or other. In an interview by Robert Birnbaum, Everett touches, rather obliquely, on this subject as he discusses writing fiction:

When I started writing I did it because I wanted to make art and now I understand that art and politics are inextricably bound and that you can affect the world in really small ways and hope that something good happens. But I never have a message and I try to teach [my students] to not have a message but it's hard to do that while at the same time trying to teach them that part of the reason they are writing is to participate in the world.

Certainly the decision to participate in the world – Bubba, the master tracker's decision – is not the decision of a victim.

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Look also at “Alice, the woman without a mind,” in Edward Jones’ *The Known World*. Yes, she portrays herself as a victim, a slave kicked in the head by her master’s mule, but she exploits people’s belief in her mindlessness:

She grabbed the patrollers’ crotches and begged them to dance away with her [...] She called the white men by made-up names and gave the them day and time God would take them to heaven, would drag each and every member of their families across the sky and toss them into hell with no more thought than a woman dropping strawberries into a cup of cream. (12)

Alice isn’t punished, not by whites, for her behavior; in fact, she exploits her reputation for mindlessness to escape slavery – and to create art, “a massive miracle,” a map of her known world, a “map of life made with every kind of art man has ever thought to represent himself. Yes, clay. Yes, paint. Yes, cloth.”

Are we really going to shelve the slave narrative because it’s difficult to talk about – and, after all, we have a black president now? Are we really going to argue that the slave narrative has value only if a student is black? Are we really going to support the assumption that a black literature course shouldn’t transfer as literature at four-year colleges? One of my friends, a white colleague in Texas, says, “I can’t help but wonder when we’ll be having such conversations about Dickens and the abuses of the poorhouses and the workhouses. We ARE post-industrial and post-unionization now, after all” (Jones-Barnes). There is no way to get to the “post-racial” part of future history unless we discuss the hard subjects. This, after all, is what the American black narrative, slave or otherwise, all interesting American literature, black or otherwise, is about: the choices that adults have to make to participate, in some small, but effective way in the world --the way ordinary people do.

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## TEACHING THE RESEARCH PAPER THROUGH INQUIRY-BASED INSTRUCTION

By Sara Zeek

**T**he freshman research paper can be a labor for both the teacher and the student with its many layers of skills and expectations. While academia has moved beyond note cards and simplified documentation models, students continue to get lost in the research process, often to the point that instructors may even wonder if they had been teaching in an alternate reality once they begin grading the finished products. As a dual enrollment instructor for Virginia Western Community College (VWCC) and Botetourt County Public Schools for the past eight years, I have struggled to make the research process more appealing to my students so that their investment in their final papers is greater and yields more success. Typically educators see the research process as an individual and isolating experience where no one shares ideas or sources to

avoid plagiarism. The truth is that students freely share ideas and sources and have become adept at hiding their collaboration from instructors. In the past year few years, I have changed the way I teach the research paper to include more technology and to make stronger connections to the real world through an inquiry-based learning and collaboration. This process has reduced plagiarism, increased students' research and writing skills, decreased my paper load, and increased student investment during all parts of the research project.

I teach two classes of English 111/112 in Botetourt County. One section is scheduled as an independent class. The second section is taught as part of the Senior Humanities Seminar, which is an interdisciplinary course taught with a political science instructor at Botetourt Technical Education

*“The seminar research project exploded in scope after we hosted guest speakers who presented information on global poverty... The students were moved to action ... and the next class period began with a clamor from students to support Mercy Care and the food bank... At the end of the week, the students had decided to collect money in classrooms at the high school and at basketball games, to donate money themselves, and to conduct an underwear drive for Mercy Care.”*

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Center (BTEC) in Fincastle, Virginia. My collaborator, Lindsay Brooks, teaches the political science section of the class, Political Science 211/212. Students travel to BTEC for the seminar class from two sister high schools, Lord Botetourt, located in Daleville, and James River, located in Buchanan, to allow students from across the county to learn together. Seminar students earn high school credit for senior English and government, which are required for graduation, and twelve college credits through VWCC. In 2009-10, we served twenty-four students in the program. The research paper is a requirement of English 111/112, which we complete during the fall semester.

The benefits of the interdisciplinary aspect of the course are felt through every project we complete. Nearly all of our assignments are directly integrated. We read essays and current events that reflect the concepts taught in political science and complete projects and essays that use the rhetorical strategies required for English 111 students. Students and instructors reap the benefits of interdisciplinary instruction:

...interdisciplinary instruction can be intellectually enriching for faculty and students alike. At its best, interdisciplinary and team-teaching involves close collaborative teaching among faculty members so that students have the chance to become involved in the dynamic exchange of ideas across academic disciplines. Students learn how to think about a given subject from different disciplinary perspectives and how that subject is shaped by different approaches. They participate in a debate that is larger than the boundaries of a single discipline and thus can become a part of a larger intellectual community....For students and faculty alike, there are few devices more effective in strengthening intellectual community than interdisciplinary teaching. (“Recommendations Concerning Interdisciplinary Teaching”)

In the fall of 2009-10, we shifted to an inquiry-based model in the Senior Humanities Seminar to teach the research paper by approaching the project as a thematic unit in an effort to connect the project to the real world. Inquiry-based instruction is “an educational approach that supports critical thinking, skill building, and problem solving, in addition to content learning. Inquiry-based instruction encourages students to develop questions about the world, to make connections between self, school and society, and to apply integrated thinking to solve real problems” (“Inquiry Based Learning”). Traditional instruction places most of the burden for learning on the instructor and students are expected to master content; inquiry-based instruction is more student-centered and asks students to become responsible for their own

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learning through understanding and applying content. Why use inquiry-based instruction? It not only increases student motivation and investment, but also

...provides a means to actively involve students in the learning process. With the trend in higher education to move away from teacher-centered instruction to a more student-centered approach, IBL gives you the opportunity to help students learn the content and course concepts by having them explore a question and develop and research a hypothesis. Thus, giving students more opportunity to reflect on their own learning, gain a deeper understanding of the course concepts in an integrated fashion, and become better critical thinkers. (Lane)

Our shift to this model came through participation in a program sponsored by the National Association for Independent Schools.

In August 2009, I found an advertisement in *NEA Today*, published by the National Education Association, for a program called Challenge 20/20, which was sponsored by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). Challenge 20/20 opened the door for us to change the way we taught the research paper. The program connects schools internationally to research one of twenty global issues and is based on the book *High Noon: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them* by J.F. Rischard. We saw the program as an opportunity to research a real world problem with students in other communities and to make the research process more relevant. The project provided students with an opportunity for community service, which cemented their understanding of the impact that poverty makes at all levels and made the research process more worthwhile. Through exploring the impact of global poverty with inquiry-based instruction, students could ask questions and develop solutions without the instructors imposing ideas upon them.

Our seminar class was paired with students studying Southern literature at Ensworth School in Nashville, Tennessee and a group of students in Shanghai, China. Unfortunately, the Chinese students had to withdraw due to their country's censorship policies, but we worked through the end of the semester with the students in Tennessee. Our goal was to communicate with the Ensworth students at least three times through video conferences and weekly through a class ning to arrive at a workable solution to combat global poverty. The ning, a format that is similar to a wiki, was established by NAIS as the communication tool for the partner schools and was separate from our class wiki sites for our individual research. Students were encouraged to use the ning and received a participation grade for using it, but it was not part of the formal grade for the research process.

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Global poverty became our theme, and students began reading Rischard's book in mid- September to gain an understanding of global poverty and its connection to other issues such as global warming, biodiversity, education, peace keeping, and global economies. We then brainstormed for concepts related to global poverty, and students chose topics in which they were most interested for their individual research papers. As a class, we broadened our definition of poverty through viewing video clips and reading articles from newspapers, *TIME*, *Newsweek*, and online sources. We also began our collaborative research and discussions with our partner school, Ensworth, through conferences and the ning. Throughout the semester my collaborator, Lindsay Brooks, and I team taught the concepts related to the project. Brooks connected our investigation into poverty to concepts in U.S. government. I instructed students in the writing process, and they produced papers that examined various aspects of our preliminary research, while mastering the concepts required in English 111. For example, the class completed a study on unemployment in the U.S. and its impact on poverty levels as a combined comparison/contrast and cause/effect essay. They researched the employment rates for different states from 2006-2008, and compared them to rates at the end of 2008 and early 2009. They then narrowed down the major industries that had contributed to the rise in unemployment through layoffs and loss of production and profits. From these figures, students then determined how the loss of jobs impacted local and national poverty rates. In completing this essay, students practiced researching credible sources, organizing material, developing a thesis statement, documenting sources, using statistics effectively, and other skills in the research process.

Before beginning the poverty project, students first had to determine the content that they needed to know in order to develop a solution for global poverty. Their first task was to define poverty in the U.S., in other developed nations, and in developing nations, such as Africa. We set aside one class period to brainstorm questions related to the broad topic of poverty, which ranged from the simple to the complex:

- How is poverty determined in the U.S.?
- How is poverty determined in developing nations?
- What group determined poverty levels in developing nations?
- How does poverty affect crime rates and types of crimes globally?
- Are there different types of poverty? Is it all related to income?
- What organizations assist impoverished nations?

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- How do tribal conflicts arise from or contribute to poverty?
  - How do living conditions contribute to poverty?
  - How do cultural differences contribute to poverty?

Students developed a list of about twenty questions that then became the basis for their research. Each student chose a question to answer from the class list as their broad topic. From there, each student developed a research question, a narrowed topic, and finally a thesis statement and paper. The collaboration in the early stages of the research process set the pattern for their work as they became more involved in their topics.

In order to give the BTEC students a space to collect their research and collaborate as a class outside of school, we established websites through Google mail for each student with the help of our current Instructional Resource Teacher, Teresa Simmons, and Jim Dixon, Coordinator of Technology for BCPS. Google websites function much like a wiki and offer space to post videos, graphic, charts, tables, music, and other media just like those sites that are commonly categorized as wikis, such as [www.wikispaces.com](http://www.wikispaces.com) and [www.wetpaint.com](http://www.wetpaint.com). Seminar students were then able to collaborate on topics and issues as a class before presenting their findings to the Ensworth students, which created a higher level of comfort for the Botetourt students when communicating with the partner school. Brooks and I established with our students that the websites/wiki would become a repository for credible electronic sources on their topics, a forum to discuss each other's points, and finally a tool to peer edit finished products. Brooks and I also researched with the students and posted our own sources. Using the websites/wiki did not change the basic requirements for the paper, which still had to be a minimum of five pages, use MLA formatting and documentation, and include a variety of sources, one of which had to be a book in print written at the appropriate academic level. Students were given models and instructions on the class home page for each assignment (Zeek 148). Seminar students met the following requirements as part of the research process by posting to their individual websites:

- Home Page with student name, broad topic, one graphic, one video, two quotes, one illustration, and a description of topic and proposed research project.
- Current Events Page with due dates, article dates, analysis/commentary on article and works cited entry for each posting (four total).

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- Periodical Review Page with due dates, article dates, reviews of journal articles from the VWCC online library, and works cited entry for each posting (two total).
  - Book Review Page with review of book that is central to research, photo of book, and works cited entry.
  - Internet Review with due dates, article dates, reviews of credible websites, and works cited entry for each posting (two total).
  - Intro and First Body Paragraph posted.
  - Draft of Research Paper Page posted.
  - Final Draft of Research Paper posted.
  - Threads- at least two threads started for discussion- one about topic and one about current event.
  - Five responses to others' pages- significant, thoughtful responses to questions posted on discussion thread pages. (Zeek 153)

Students wrote more text and more frequently than they would have in a traditional classroom project as they discussed each other's work and commented on sources posted on the pages. We started the process sooner and were able to practice elements of the research process as we moved through the semester. Assignments were due on the project about every other week until the last three weeks of the term, when we fully concentrated on just the research project. The more they collaborated and developed their web pages, the more invested they became in the research process. While the multiple deadlines required strong organizational skills on both the part of the students and the instructors, the students felt that overall, the website/wiki helped them maintain control of their project (Zeek 152).

The use of the websites eased the burden of grading the final papers since all electronic sources were easily accessible in one place. The use of the websites/wiki also reduced plagiarism because the students themselves began to post their drafts and edit portions of each other's work for citation errors. By the time the final papers were due, each had been reviewed by several readers. Students were graded using rubrics on their use of their website/wiki pages as part of the research process, on their participation in the project as a whole, and on their final research paper as a hard copy.

While the community service portion of our research project was not a full service-learning project, it planted the same seeds for citizenship and

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community spirit that true service-learning projects develop and it developed out of the students' desires to put action into their research projects. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) notes that service projects benefit students by encouraging responsibility, providing positive role models, increasing a "sense of self-efficacy as young people learn that they can impact real social challenges, problems, and needs, [developing] civic engagement attitudes, skills and behaviors, [and tapping] new energy, capacity, and creative ideas" that build positive relationships among youth and their community (Roehlkepartain). The CNCS further notes that "[c]ommunity colleges are centers of educational opportunity." Expanding the research project to include a community service component reflects the spirit of community colleges, which are "ideal locations for service-learning programs because community service is a part of their mission" (Robinson and Barnett). Including a community service component in the research process made the project more valuable and worthwhile to students who saw their civic action make a difference for those less fortunate in their community and in the world.

The seminar research project exploded in scope after we hosted guest speakers who presented information on global poverty. The first speaker was a representative from the Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Food Bank. Through her presentation students learned about poverty on the local, regional, and national levels. Students were stunned to learn the facts of poverty in Virginia and even in their own county, and soon realized that poverty was much more than just facts on a page or experiences that happened to strangers. Our second guest speakers were Carol and Wayne Brown, directors of Mercy Care Centre in Kenya, Africa, which has its U.S. headquarters in Forest, Virginia, about two hours east of Roanoke. The Browns shared their experiences with the children and teachers at Mercy Care Centre's school and orphanage, which is located in one of the most impoverished areas of Africa. The center serves about 750 students, some of whom have families but are so impoverished that they receive their only meals and clothing from Mercy Care. The students were moved to action by the presentations, and the next class period began with a clamor from students to support Mercy Care and the food bank. Our lesson plans for the next three days quickly shifted to allowing the students to run the class as they developed a plan to make their support for both charities part of their research project. At the end of the week, the students had decided to collect money in classrooms at the high school and at basketball games, to donate money themselves, and to conduct an underwear drive for Mercy Care. Students met with the administrators to secure permission for their service work and scheduled work times for those who wanted to participate in the drives. Those students who did not participate

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were not penalized, but students who did participate were rewarded with extra points as participation grades for their additional time and effort. Over all, the drive included contributions from students at Read Mountain Middle School, from BTEC, and from Lord Botetourt High School. A total of \$500 was divided between the two charities. The clothing drive netted over 1,300 pairs of underwear for Mercy Care Centre. The work further inspired members of the Activism through the Arts Club at Lord Botetourt to sponsor a concert and donate the proceeds to Mercy Care. The project had truly moved beyond the walls of the classroom and brought various communities together.

In the end, all students agreed that education was the best tool to combat poverty and shared their beliefs with the students at Ensworth as we brought that portion of the project to a close in December. To reach this conclusion, they expanded their definition of education to reflect all types of learning, including education in the trades and practical sciences, formal classroom instruction, knowledge of farming and medical practices, daily living skills and hygiene, and financial management. They recognized through their research that poverty could not be narrowly defined, but that the cause and effect relationship among education and learners could change individuals, villages, towns, and societies.

While we have the unique situation of teaching political science and composition as an interdisciplinary course, the results could be the same for an independent section of English 111/112. Students quickly lose interest in the research process as it becomes a series of obstacles they must overcome to earn a grade. Giving purpose to the project by basing it on a real world problem (theme and service) and using the inquiry-based model for instruction allows the students the opportunity to make a larger investment in their own work. It further creates connections for students that illustrate the benefit of successfully completing the research process and applying their new knowledge in their future careers. Today more than ever students want to know “what’s in it for me” when choosing how to spend their time. Turning the research paper into a student-centered project based on real-world issues allows them to discover that they can make a difference in their own education and in the world, and encourages citizenship at the same time.

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## Appendix A

### *Rubric for Research Paper (and generally for all papers)*

Category	Level 1 (D to F)	Level 2 (C)	Level 3 (B)	Level 4 (A)
<b>Overall Structure</b>	Lacks a strong thesis statement; the paragraphs are poorly ordered or don't support the thesis; frequent meandering; poor topic sentences.	Weak introduction or conclusion; some meandering in paragraphs; some paragraphs lack strong topic sentences; main idea generally supported throughout the paper.	Sufficient introduction and conclusion; the thesis statement is supported by the paragraphs; minimal meandering.	Compelling narrative hook, and conclusion that leaves the reader something to think about; all paragraphs are well-ordered and introduced by clear and well-stated topic sentences; no meandering.
<b>Grammar</b>	Fragments, Run-ons, and frequent grammar mistakes	Some grammar mistakes; little variety in sentence structure; repetition.	Some sentence variety; a few mistakes that are not easily remedied by spell and grammar check; some awkwardness in phrasing.	Smooth and well reading sentences that demonstrate variety in structure; no mistakes other than minimal comma errors.
<b>Use of Research</b>	Few sources to back up argument; does not reference or quote outside material.	Makes minimal use of sources; erratic choices of quoted material; research is solely web-based.	Uses sources to back up most of the argument; uses some good quotes and statistics; more research would strengthen the argument; use of some academic sources (books, academic articles, newspaper articles, official data/most current data from web-sites).	Researched material is naturally incorporated into the text; all of the author's ideas are supported by illustration, statistics, or other factual information; all sources used are academic and reputable.

Category	Level 1 (D to F)	Level 2 (C)	Level 3 (B)	Level 4 (A)
MLA Style	Title and name formatted correctly; no sourcing of material throughout essay; sources pasted at the end without regards to MLA standards.	Title and name formatted correctly; some inaccurate sourcing of material throughout the essay; errors in Works Cited page.	Paper is formatted correctly and there are minimal errors in in-text citations and the Works Cited page.	Completely accurate according to MLA style in paper format, in-text citation, and Works Cited page.
Style of Language and complexity of argument	Basic sentence Structure; frequently uses casual expressions not appropriate for academic discourse; no use of transitions or advanced vocabulary; basic and shallow examination of the issue.	Language is basic; some use of transitions and advanced vocabulary; some thoughtful analysis of the topic, but topic is mundane and ordinary. Argument shifts.	Language is academic, but lacks originality; use of advanced vocabulary and obvious use of transitions; thoughtful analysis of the topic that exhibits some creativity.	Language is academic but has a distinct individual voice; the argument is put forth persuasively by the style of writing; transitioning is used, but doesn't stand out; an original topic is examined in depth, or the author has taken an individual slant on a traditional topic and makes a compelling argument.



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## LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH THE PIEDMONT FUTURES PROGRAM: WHY CAREER EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT TO STUDENT SUCCESS

By Erin Hughey-Commers

An architect stands in the middle of the school lunchroom near a projector. “This is your school,” she says, pulling up a drawing of the building she’s sketched out since her arrival half an hour ago. She pauses, waiting for the fifty-six students seated at cafeteria tables to recognize the building. “Now you redesign it. What do you want to do? You change it however you want to.”

Hands shoot up in the air, and so many voices are raised out of turn that a counselor has to restore order. “I want a big gym. I want an amusement park. I want a swimming pool on the roof.”

“Let’s start with the pool,” she says. She quickly draws it in, pausing only to show students how it would look from the front of the building, and to have them consider how they’re going to get up to the roof. Are there special stairs? A ladder? More discussion ensues.

*“Instead of talking about her job and losing her audience to the allure of orange Jell-O, the architect gives students a direct, hands-on experience of her career.”*

When it’s time for questions and answers, a student raises his hand. “How do you get to be an architect?” he asks eagerly. “What classes do I have to take?”

Instead of talking about her job and losing her audience to the allure of orange Jell-O, the architect gives students a direct, hands-on experience of her career. Before leaving, she gets the counselor’s email and promises to send a web site where students can continue to redesign the school on their own. Weeks later, emails are still going back and forth between her and several interested students.

Hands-on learning with business professionals is at the heart of our approach with the Piedmont Futures program at Piedmont Virginia Community College. Too often as educators, we provide the answers before students have

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asked the questions; we create career pathways without providing students with sufficient opportunities to explore which path they want to take. Having worked with the Piedmont Futures initiative for nearly four years now, it's becoming clear to me just how important career education is to student success.

### **What We Do, and Why**

At Piedmont Futures, our career programs run the gamut from tutoring programs and the Career Pathways Speaker Series for fifth-graders described above, to the Commonwealth Scholars program for eighth-grade students, to the Dress for Success job readiness workshops for eleventh- and twelfth-graders. We work directly with the business community, engaging area professionals as classroom speakers and career exhibitors. In all of our programs, professionals are asked to talk to students about their own careers and career pathways, and to help students draw the connection between current academic work and future success in the workplace.

Although many students hear these messages from their teachers and parents, all students benefit from exposure to other working professionals who can give them a broader view into the workplace.

When I came on board the Piedmont Futures program, I had little idea of what “career education” looked like. The college had just signed an agreement with five school systems in its service region to coordinate regional career education programs. Our mission is to “promote personal and academic success for all students through regional business and industry involvement in K-12 education and to build a community of responsible and productive citizens for the 21st Century” (“Piedmont Futures”). Besides the fact that we were to recruit employers for two region-wide career events for seventh and tenth graders, how we would achieve our mission was unknown.

### **Developing a Career Education Program**

Many of our current programs have grown area needs, just as the larger division of Workforce Services, which houses the program, responds to industry and education needs as they occur.

For example, a school counselor with lunch duty at an elementary school wanted her fifth-graders to be more engaged during meals, and asked us to start a lunchtime speaker series. We asked a business professional to come in and talk with the students for twenty minutes about what was fun and interesting about his job. This evolved into the Career Pathways Speaker series, a monthly event featuring a speaker from a different career cluster each month. The program was a hit – students loved the interaction, and speakers

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loved the illustrated thank-you notes students sent them afterwards. We have now offered the program at ten elementary schools across the region.

Our tutoring program for elementary school students grew out of survey responses from teachers who said their students needed more academic help. Fortunately, we were able to partner with an existing tutoring program, Friends in Schools Helping (FISH). This was already being run by a local organization, Jefferson Area Board of Aging, which provided this service at two elementary schools. At the same time, we were able to engage the college community as contributors to the program by offering students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to serve as tutors in the program. When this occurred, I realized that carrying out our mission involved not only working closely with the business community and the schools, but included partnering with some of the other agencies and non-profits in our community which were working toward the same end. Additionally, I saw that our role was not simply as a liaison but also as a contributing partner with our own unique resources to bring to the arrangement: students who were involved in service learning, and staff and faculty members who were willing to take some time out of their day to serve students in area elementary schools.

The year our initiative began, the Commonwealth Scholars program was set to expand from a few pilot sites. The governor, having learned what we were doing with the Piedmont Futures program, asked us to expand the program in our area to all five school systems that we serve. Suddenly we were promoting the program and recruiting speakers for all eighth-grade classrooms in our region. We have spent the last three years working closely with the CS program. First, we coordinated it in our region for two years, then we had the unexpected opportunity to revise the PowerPoint presentation and train six other colleges to coordinate the program regionally. We've grown in our understanding about how this program works, how it needs to work, and what its limitations are, which is true of most of our programs.

### **Different Programs for Different Grades**

Early on, it was decided that the program should impact students at almost every grade level so that these young people would grow up having some sense of the workplace. Programs for different age groups took on different characteristics. Elementary school programs provided a solid academic foundation and gave students the material to dream a little about their futures, supplying them with role models that they could use to see themselves in a job. The middle grades focused on exploration and beginning to recognize the progression of a pathway.

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During the regional Seventh Grade Career Expo students explored careers by going table to table, learning about careers. We've improved at coaching businesses to present career information in a concrete, hands-on format. Each year an engineering association brings a "building challenge," requiring students to use scotch tape, recycled blueprints, and their own ingenuity to build the tallest tower. A recent addition has been asking healthcare students from an area high school to lead activities such as dipping seventh-graders' gloved hands into a bucket of "blood" and then teaching them to remove the gloves without contaminating their hands. This has been useful for both sets of students – the seventh graders experimenting for the first time in the health fields, and the high school students showing the younger ones have evolved into what they knew how to do. "You get to see what it's like to be a teacher," a high school-age exhibitor reflected after the Expo last fall.

Programs for the upper grade levels help students find their way onto career pathways. Students at this level have very concrete questions about academic requirements for getting into career areas of interest. During the Tenth Grade Career Day, we fill PVCC classrooms with professionals – over 125 during the two-day event – who talk to groups of twenty to twenty-five students about their day-to-day work and the education and training necessary to enter their field. From time to time, students make connections with these speakers that yield summer internships.

Another program in which students have participated has been an interviewing skills workshop with employers, which took place prior to an on-campus job fair. We worked to have a diverse team of employers present for this event, including non-traditional role-models, so that each student had a chance at seeing himself in a job. Students attended the workshop and then practiced their new self-presentation skills at the fair. The event was considered a success if students gained confidence in seeking a job. Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers, a company that is annually involved in the workshop, later interviewed several of the students who participated in the workshop for a position at the company, and hired two who continue to work for them today. Students have responded that they find the program, even if they don't find a job at the fair. One young man commented, "It made me think about how to approach things, and how I can better myself."

### **Successes and Challenges**

The young lawyer stands at the front of a dimly-lit classroom, a PowerPoint presentation projected onto a screen at the front of the room. Even though the lights are dim and the slides have been rolling, he has the eighth grade students captivated. He's just given the class of eighth-graders examples of the type of work available with only a high school diploma, and discussed the

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limited chances to move into a managerial position without further education. He's talked about his own experience working at Arby's in the summer while in high school. An image of a pizza, representing a salary, comes up on the screen, and slowly, piece by piece, the money is whittled away by taxes, rent, food, and medical expenses until there's only a sliver left over. The point of his conversation is not to simply show how much money students can make at different levels of education, but also what that money will buy. Throughout the presentation the lawyer talks about the Commonwealth Scholars program, a curriculum in high school that better prepares students for success in college and the workplace. For many of these students, this is one of the first financial reality checks they've had, and receiving it from a young professional who has worked his way up to a stable and rewarding job makes an impression.

Anecdotal student response to this program has been positive. Comments have included the following: "I now want to go to college." "[The presentation] made me think about my career plans a lot." "Very helpful."

More importantly, the data also suggests that this face-to-face interaction between professionals and young people is impactful. Data on the program since it was taken over from the VCCS indicates that students in schools where the program has been in operation for more than one year have significantly higher rates of students taking the required courses in the Commonwealth Scholars program, including three years of science (biology, chemistry, and physics), three years of math (Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II), and two years of a foreign language – as well as higher rates of students graduating with an advanced diploma (Swaim and Chafin). Even this one hour of an interaction with a business professional seems to be making a difference in how students choose to spend their time in high school, indicating a difference in how they are thinking about themselves and their futures.

What's worked well about the Commonwealth Scholars program, in which business persons give presentations on the importance of a rigorous course of study in high school, is the interaction between business professionals and students. This can become a dialogue between presenter and students about life-long learning, and what success means to each student. The program provides the opportunity for professionals to show an interest in an up and coming generation of young people in a way that can be validating and inspiring for those students. And even the least inspirational experience can be educational. Many times potential business presenters hesitate to become volunteers for the program, saying that they did their education/careers "all wrong." We reply that students need to learn from their stories.

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Amid the successes, there are challenges. A survey from participating schools included comments that some of our presenters are not adequately trained in providing an interactive, hands-on presentation. While we are continually working with business people to integrate hands-on career learning into their presentations, this leads us to the question of how useful career education can be if it is structured in exactly the same way as students' school classes.

### **Problem Based Learning**

Employers tell us that while they can teach almost any hard skill, what they want most in an employee is someone who can not only find a solution, but also identify the problem. These are the skills of almost any professional today - doctor, engineer, or HVAC technician. Many of the lessons students learn in school are taken out of context, presenting a problem that is already well-defined, to which the answer is already known. Career education at its best happens when students interact in a (perhaps simulated) real-life situation, so that they are able to determine the problem as well as work towards its solution.

Recently we discovered a form of career education that provides students with an in-depth look at a given career field, by immersing them in it for a week. Two years ago when Central Virginia Community College received a grant to provide funds and mentoring to other colleges to emulate their highly successful Summer Career Academies for middle school students, PVCC applied and received funds to run two summer Academies, one in health technologies and another in computer technologies. Following a template established by CVCC, we created a weeklong program in which students learned about technology with program instructors at PVCC and took field trips to area businesses, and U.Va. Students were able to spend more time in-depth exploring – programming robots, writing code, and performing CPR. Comments from the health technologies academy included: “I loved the rescue squad visit and the surgery tour.” “Now I’m comfortable saving a life.” “I liked how the instructors participated and how the [helicopter rescue] people showed us how a real emergency was.”

Given such positive response to our programs the first year, last summer we expanded our Academies to include six different topics, focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Students were challenged to launch rockets, build telescopes, and document global climate change.

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We partnered with the University of Virginia, including the Computer Science Department and the Center for Diversity in Engineering on these Academies. Many departments at the University served as field trip sites, with undergraduates and faculty members hosting. In conjunction with the CS department, we received an award from Google Roots in Science and Engineering to help fund the program, enabling us to provide scholarships to financially needy students. We also worked closely with Computers4Kids, an organization serving low-income youth, to recruit students for the Academy. Together we are building a career/education pipeline for area students, including girls, minorities, and urban/economically underprivileged youth. This summer, we are looking forward to over twenty different career academies, including forensics, intelligence analysis, biology experiments, and architecture.

In problem-based learning, students can take different roles in a team effort. Some people become the problem-solvers on the technical side, while others serve to facilitate the discussion and take the lead in determining the best solution. Many middle school students may already have a sense of their strengths, while others don't have a clue. The key is to give students a picture of the breadth of possible career choices and work roles, and an experience of themselves as significant contributors in a dynamic world of problems and solutions. Ultimately, this is not merely about providing individual students with motivation to go on to post-secondary training or education, but also about having these young minds help re-define the problems we are facing today – and in a few years, with some acquired skills, work with us to solve them.

Career education goes beyond making students aware of universal career skills. It helps students develop an ability to take the lead in their own learning. At the community college, we can do this by leveraging our relationships with both businesses and K-12 education, and by shaping this interaction to give students a glimpse of their future.

Through meaningful interaction with working professionals, students begin to see a connection between their present and their future. They have their own reason to make use of their time in school, and to choose a career pathway. They've learned *why* the pathway. They've asked the question, and we're providing the answer.

*As Coordinator of PVCC's Piedmont Futures program, Erin Hughey-Commers works with five school systems and over one hundred local businesses, non-profits, and civic groups to implement career pathways programming for students K-12, including the Summer Career Academies at PVCC. In addition to coordinating regional programs, Piedmont Futures has worked with the VCCS to provide statewide leadership for the Commonwealth Scholars program since 2009.*

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# INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE STRATEGIES IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING CLASSROOM

By Mary Ellen Gleason

**I**n 1983 Howard Gardner, a Harvard cognitive psychologist and author, shook the educational world, if not the psychometricians, with what he called multiple intelligences in his book *Frames of Mind*. The theory of multiple intelligences provides a point of view that is a variant to the traditional intelligence assessments utilized by school psychologists for nearly a hundred years. The intelligence assessment originated over a century ago when a headmaster at a French school asked a psychologist to develop a means for predicting those students who would be successful and those students who would not be successful in school. Alfred Binét developed a test in response to the headmaster's request (Armstrong, 2000). Today we call that test an intelligence test or the IQ test.

*“[S]tudent writing as a means to making sense of one’s experience is inherently utilizing the intrapersonal intelligence.”*

## **A Composite View of Intelligence**

Gardner’s new theory outlined seven intelligences:

- linguistic intelligence
- musical intelligence
- logical-mathematical intelligence
- spatial intelligence
- bodily-kinesthetic intelligence
- intrapersonal intelligence
- interpersonal intelligence

While the number of intelligences have grown as Gardner has continued to explore the concept since 1983, the implications of a pluralistic view of

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competencies of intelligences has also been explored by a variety of learning communities. Initially Gardner recognized seven intelligences in *Frames of Mind*. His later book *Intelligence Reframed*, published in 1999, listed and explored other intelligences, “including naturalists, spiritual, existential, and moral ones” (4). For educators, multiple intelligences have “important educational implications” (2006, 6).

### **Intrapersonal Intelligence in Higher Education**

While many of these intelligences can be incorporated into the higher education classroom, intrapersonal intelligence poses some intriguing opportunities in the developmental writing classroom. According to Gardner, developing intrapersonal intelligence produces an emerging self. Gardner refers to intrapersonal intelligence as the “sense of self” (124), and as developing the “internal aspects of a person” (4-6). Gardner elaborates, “The core capacity at work here is access to one’s own feeling life – one’s range of affects or emotions: the capacity to label them to enmesh them in symbolic codes, to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one’s behavior” (239). Thomas Armstrong in his book, *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, describes intrapersonal intelligence as “self-knowledge and the ability to act adaptively on the basis of the knowledge. This intelligence includes having a picture of oneself (one’s strengths and limitations), awareness of inner moods, intentions, motivations, temperaments, and desires, and the capacity for self-discipline, self-understanding, and self-esteem” (p. 124).

### **Personal Narrative or the “Haunted Essay”**

If the emerging self is a result of intrapersonal intelligence, could strategies which utilize the intrapersonal intelligence in composition help produce an emerging writer? As an instructor of developmental writing, I stumbled upon the value of students developing their self-knowledge as an aid in learning to write more fluently and with confidence. During the first semester that I began teaching developmental writing, I prepared a writing prompt for a personal narrative. I drew my ideas for the personal narrative assignment from *Writing from personal experience* by Nancy Kelton. I asked my students to recall an experience that really got to them and still haunts them today. The writing prompt for what I have dubbed the “haunted essay” asks the students to consider a number of questions in order to write about an event that still haunts them. The questions are:

Can you see pictures in your mind?

Do you remember dialogue, even if it is just pieces of it or if you have to paraphrase it?

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What was said to you?

What made you react so strongly?

How did you feel?

Write down some of the adjectives that come to mind. Then use behavior, action and dialogue, and details to demonstrate those adjectives.

How did you respond to your emotions? Anger, loneliness, or embarrassment? If you were embarrassed did you try to cover it up, make a joke about it, stutter, talk fast, or blush? (Kelton, 1997)

I was not prepared for the essays that I received. One student whose family is from New York City wrote about two cousins who were killed in the Twin Towers on September 11. They were both firemen. One woman talked about coming home from school when she was a child and finding that her home was in flames. At first no one could tell her if her family was safe. She wrote about the horror and confusion and then the joy in finding that all of her family had escaped. As an adult reflecting on the loss of her home, she mourned the loss of family pictures. Another student described how, as a result of his parents' divorce, his mother came and took his brother. He described watching his mother's car pull away from the house with his little brother looking at him from the back window as she drove away. Frequently, my students talked about the loss of a loved one.

When my students wrote about what haunted them, they were the experts. They and only they knew the answers to the questions and could elaborate. They were motivated to make a point and support it with details. An introduction and conclusion had a special meaning to them when they wrote about what haunted them. They wanted to communicate effectively about that which they were experts, and in many cases, I believe writing about what haunted them was healing. Moreover, student writing as a means to making sense of one's experience is inherently utilizing the intrapersonal intelligence.

Recently, I was able to unpack the haunted essay in a new way. I spoke with each of my students about their personal narratives before I returned their essays to them. Frustrated by the students' lack of attention to the higher levels of composition that I included in my rubric for revision, I noted again and again that my students went through their essays and corrected grammar and mechanics without addressing some of the more important changes that I recommended in the rubric. Again, I was surprised. One student, who could not seem to stop talking in class, listened intently as I talked one on one

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with her and suggested that she should make some of the noted changes, keep this essay beyond this semester, and come back to it sometime in the future. I told her that children of divorced parents would one day find their voices and be able to better address the issues that they had to face. Her essay was pervasively sad, but was a worthwhile essay because as a writer she opened up to show her sadness by explaining the disappointment she and her brothers experienced again and again without resolution, and her father who died without reconciliation with his children. Another student who needed to revise her essay had included some humorous comments about a snake she met one morning coming downstairs. She said in her essay that the snake had mistaken her staircase for a rainforest. I talked with her about her successful humorous voice in her writing. She worked at revising her essay, and I saw her humor surface again in other essays. I am glad she took the risk of using humor again and was aware of that element of her voice in writing.

### **Reflective Journaling**

I discovered that reflective journaling is another means of introducing intrapersonal intelligence into the developmental writing classroom to stir the emerging writer. Bringing reflective journaling into the developmental writing classroom has introduced me to three pedagogical issues with which to grapple—assignment approaches, instruction on reflective thinking, and evaluation of journals.

From Greek philosophers and Roman writers to St. Augustine, journaling has not only been practiced, but highly recommended throughout the centuries. Strangely, journaling fell from practice in the educational environment in the twentieth century. However, in more recent years, journaling has been utilized in a variety of disciplines, in a span of ages from elementary age to adult students. “Even though the various educational benefits of journal writing have been known for centuries and the process was popular a hundred years ago, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that journaling became widespread as a tool in the educational setting” (Palmer, Cozcan, Olson-Dinges; 1999, pp. 71). Daily writing is recognized as a means of improving reading and writing for the language arts student. Furthermore, reflective self-dialogue helps the student find his or her voice and provides self-expression which is part of intrapersonal learning.

I do not argue the importance of journaling but finding the best means of engaging my developmental writing students in journaling has been a challenge. I tried various journaling assignments. All had limited success. Initially, I asked my students to keep a journal for at least three days a week in a spiral notebook. Each week I checked to be sure they made at least three entries a week. Finally, a few of my students sprouted some wings. I was very

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surprised at one young man who worked at Wal-Mart and wrote personal poetry in his entries. I never dreamed that he had a poetic bent.

There are other journaling assignments that I have tried in my classroom. I had several of my classes keep a sensory journal for several days, cataloguing and keeping a written record of stimulations to their five senses during the day. Giving ten to twenty minutes during the class to write reflectively and storing this journal on a flashdrive is another approach that I have used. After a few weeks, I asked them to turn in a hard copy of all of their entries.

While journaling presents several assets, I discovered that it also engenders several liabilities. The assignment of writing about something that haunts my students intrigued them, but journaling initially seemed to fall flat. Again and again I would read, “Today I . . .” Events were sequential and not reflective. To challenge their thinking, I talked to them about the differences of a diary and a journal (Kemper, Sebranek, & Meyer, 2001). Both diaries and journals involve continuous daily entries. Both diaries and journals are a record of events. However, journals differ from diaries in that they encompass reflective thinking about events, people, and a variety of thoughts, questions, and perplexities. Journaling in the developmental writing classroom can introduce and promote reflective thinking and introduce the student to the freedom of expression necessary to encourage writing as an art.

The catch in journal writing for my developmental students appeared to be not the daily journal writing but the concept of reflective thinking. Spalding and Wilson claim that “reflection is a mysterious concept to many students. . . .” Reflective thinking is an essential skill to the adult learner who strives to identify, analyze, and solve problems. Defining reflection, Spalding and Wilson quote John Dewey’s *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process* as “the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends” (1394).

Further, I discovered that students may feel that they are journaling reflectively, and in actuality, they may not really be making the thought connections needed in reflective thinking. Why do the students perceive themselves as writing their journals in an elevated manner inconsistent with what they actually did write? One educator proposed the following:

“...lack of preparation might explain why some of the journals are of poor quality...the students are used to writing in an academic context...[where] the students have been asked to copy, summarize and regurgitate for fourteen years...and then we want them to

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critically reflect, think and write in their journals...no wonder they look a little transfixed when I give them a journal assignment..." (O'Connell and Dymont, 2006, p. 690).

Because I discovered that my students tended to confuse personal narration with journal writing, it became apparent that instruction on reflective thinking and writing in order to journal would be a necessity. I would agree with Dewey, who said, "reflective habits of mind must be taught" (Dewey, 1933, p. 1395). Without instruction in reflective thinking, the developmental writing instructor can expect to see the students' journals begin, "Today I..." written repeatedly at the beginning of each entry and a flat sequential ordering of events. Quoting John Dewey, Spalding and Wilson define reflective thinking as the "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed... knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). Training is necessary for a higher level education student to produce the type of sustained critical thinking involved in journaling. (Spalding & Wilson, 2002).

Drawing from the research of Spalding and Wilson, I utilized four pedagogical strategies. These strategies helped my students to develop criteria in their reflective journaling:

1. Reflection in/on action
2. Personal reflection
3. Deliberative reflection
4. Critical reflection

Reflection in/on action would be reflective writing about events and performances bringing in detailed observations. Personal reflection would involve personal narration with interpretive thinking. Deliberative reflection observes and critically writes about competing points of views. Finally, critical reflection notes larger ramifications such as social, ethical, and political consequences and implications and even tries to be philosophical.

Applying this typology to my classroom, I developed a PowerPoint outlining the four criteria in reflective journaling elaborating with bulleted items and pictures to create an interactive class discussion about these points. Then I gave my class an essay entitled "In case you ever want to go home again" from *High Tide in Tucson* written by Barbara Kingsolver and recommended by Spalding and Wilson. As they read a passage in the essay, they were to annotate throughout the text marking an "A" for reflection on action or

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events, “P” for personal reflection, “D” for deliberative reflection, and “C” for critical reflection. I then divided the class into knee groups allowing them to discuss and defend their choices with their peers. From this point on, I marked any reflective journaling that they turned into me with the same annotations. Grading was based on how well they developed the reflection on events and personal, deliberative, or critical discussions. All four criteria did not necessarily have to be used but reflection on one or more of those criteria was essential. This class activity served to make my students more aware of how to engage in reflective thinking and writing and helped to bring them to the “Ah-ha” in their reflective thinking and writing.

A final issue that I have faced in reflective journal writing is evaluation. Evaluating a student’s journal can be problematic. Assessment can be difficult. Some faculty may question whether journals should be graded at all. If an instructor gives a uniform grade for simply completing the assignment, some students may feel cheated who have written more reflectively than others who have simply summarized or recorded events. Privacy can also be another issue for students who are writing a journal with freedom of thought. Assessment methods used to evaluate journals can include rubrics, pass/fail, or a subjective evaluation based on a given criteria. I have chosen the subjective evaluation. I read through their journals making comments and using the A, P, D, and C annotations on their journals. Most comments are positive and encourage more development on certain points. If a genuine effort was made, I give a 100%. If a minimal effort was made, I do not give the student a 100% but ask them to try again or give them a lower grade. I have found that my comments are the most important part of the evaluation. I realize that they are on a learning curve in reflective thinking and writing. For most of them, this writing is a very new form of writing, but frankly, they like it, and I do not want to discourage them from writing reflective journals. I want to encourage this type of writing, but use essays and chapter homework as the work that I grade more formally.

### **Assessments Aiding Self-knowledge**

Learning about learning has been another strategy I have used to incorporate intrapersonal intelligence to benefit my students in their work in my class and in their program – not to mention their lives. Adult students can grow in their self-knowledge by taking assessments or questionnaires that inform them of their learning strategies or their learning modalities.

A questionnaire called VARK provides students with an attitudinal assessment of their learning modality preferences. The VARK test is an acronym for visual, aural, reading/writing, and kinesthetic modalities of learning. Modalities of learning refer to the students’ preferences in taking in and giving

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out information. While this sixteen question assessment is an attitudinal test and not a diagnostic test, community college students seem to appreciate the information that this assessment provides them. I often ask my students, “Did this learning assessment surprise you?” With one exception, I have been told that the learning preferences that they have been shown to have seem true to their experiences.

Understanding and utilizing the VARK assessment to its full potential requires understanding multi-modal learning versus singular modal learning. Students who are multi-modal will need to receive information in a learning environment that touches on each of their preferred learning modalities. They will not reach the comprehension level adequately unless each of their learning preferences is utilized. Students with a singular modality preference are able to comprehend new information with the use of their single learning modality. However, if they are in a learning environment that is not predominately or only remotely using their modality, they will need to strategize carefully in managing their learning. For example, a student with a single aural learning modality who is learning a subject or task without lecture or discussion may need to find other aural means to strengthen their learning of that task or topic. Seeking out discussions with classmates or the instructor or perhaps even locating an audio book on the subject may be helpful. Knowing and using this information can help students manage their own learning by situating themselves to gain and give out information using their learning preferences. This management of learning can produce a higher level of learning. Conversely, the students who are not aware of their learning modality preferences can become frustrated in their learning environment if they are not utilizing an awareness and management of their best learning modes.

Accessing the VARK questionnaire is not difficult. Our college is currently using Susan Anker’s Real Writing for Developmental Writing courses. In Chapter 1, a copy of the VARK questionnaire is provided. The chapter further helps students to understand how knowledge of their learning preferences can help them in college. The VARK assessment can also be accessed by going to <http://www.vark-learn.com/>. At the VARK website the students can then print out a copy for themselves for future reference.

Once my students have taken the assessment, I sometimes ask them to write a classification essay or a compare and contrast essay on the different learning preferences that they have. Typically, if I ask them to write a compare and contrast essay, I request that they compare and contrast their strongest learning preference with their weakest learning preference. Again, because this is about them, they are the experts. They can use the website to reference for

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their primary support and use their personal knowledge of their own learning to provide details and illustrations from their life to be the secondary support.

Other self-assessments that are metacognitive can help developmental students develop intrapersonal intelligence strategies. The LASSI is a learning strategies test that is not attitudinal. Rather it is a diagnostic assessment with standardized scores and national norms. It is a reliable test that also provides recommendations to strengthen weak areas. Multiple intelligence assessments are also available online.

Reading “The Nature of Adult Learning and Effective Training Guidelines” by Hewitt, I became very aware of the components of adult learning (Hewitt, 1995). The more I read about adult learning the more I wanted my students to be aware of the different learning qualities that adult students possess as they attempt to further their education. I feel it is very helpful to them to realize that if they have been out of school for a long time, or if they did not do well in school when they were in school, they now possess a different lens that works in their favor as a student of a community college and as a student in developmental writing. They are not in Kansas anymore.

To help crystallize the differences between pedagogical and andragogical learning, I prepared a PowerPoint on adult learning. I pictured each component as a slice of a pizza. Once we review the slide presentation and discuss the differences, I ask my students to write a compare and contrast essay on the differences that they note in their learning as a child and now as an adult. Personalizing their essays motivates them in their essay writing.

## **Summary**

The teaching of writing has undergone a major paradigm shift in the past forty years. Prior to this shift, English instructors assigned “themes” to their students and then graded the themes by noting grammar and mechanical errors. Teaching students to write today involves teaching the writing process and the recursive dynamics in composing. English teachers must be informed and creative in their instructional strategies. The theory of multiple intelligences inherently addresses a diversity of learners. Research on multiple intelligences for higher education has been sparse. According to Adrianna Kezar, the Director of ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, “Surprisingly, however, MI theory has not yet had any significant influence on higher education institutions.” (2001, p. 141) For community colleges, research on multiple intelligences has been minimal. Although the nature of the community college is to reach a diverse population, exploration of the various intelligences has been overlooked. For community college English instructors, incorporating multiple intelligences into their teaching strategies can facilitate writing proficiency among the

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diverse developmental students who have not previously achieved confidence in writing skills. I have found that intrapersonal intelligence offers a plethora of applications to help the developmental writing student progress in their writing skills. Personal narrative essays, reflective journaling, and writing prompts utilizing metacognitive strategies can support a novice writer in fluency and voice and confidence in the developmental writing classroom.

*Mary Ellen Gleason is an instructor of Developmental Writing and College Composition I at Paul D. Camp Community College. She earned a B.A. in English at Virginia Tech and an M.Ed. at Old Dominion University with a concentration in English. She is continuing her studies in English at Old Dominion University in a graduate professional writing program. Some of her academic research and writing interests include adult learning, multiple intelligences, dyslexia, and rhetoric.*

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INQUIRY: THE JOURNAL OF THE VIRGINIA  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Papers on Subjects  
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**Submit by May 15, 2011**

*Inquiry* is a refereed journal that encourages writing from community college personnel. The journal is published once a year by the Virginia Community College System and the Virginia Community Colleges Association.

### Article preparation:

- Papers should be prepared according to *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th edition*, or the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition*.
- Manuscripts should not exceed 6,000 words.
- Please submit manuscripts by email as Microsoft Word attachments to [gpotts@reynolds.edu](mailto:gpotts@reynolds.edu).

### Questions? Please contact

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INQUIRY: THE JOURNAL OF THE VIRGINIA  
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**Cover Artwork Contest**

Spring 2012 Issue

**Open to All  
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**Submit by May 15, 2011**

*Inquiry* invites community college students to submit their best artwork for possible publication on the front cover of the journal. Works may be photographs, drawings, paintings, ceramics, sculpture, printmaking, and digital images.

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**Guidelines:**

- Artwork must be original, previously unpublished, and created by a student enrolled in a Virginia community college.
- A student may submit up to three images for consideration.
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- Images should be submitted in digital form by email attachment.

The winning artwork will be selected by the journal's editors, and the winning artist will be notified in July 2011.

**Submissions of artwork should be sent as email attachments to:**

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College liaisons assist writers who are interested in submitting papers and help with the distribution of the journal at their colleges.

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Joel Brent Fitzgerald (on right) photographed “Staunton Station” while enrolled in Adjunct Art Instructor Ben Wyrick’s “Digital Photography I” course at Blue Ridge Community College.