

# Faculty Forum

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## **Teaching Ethics: What's Our Responsibility?**

Last year I designed an exercise on leadership styles for my Group Communication class and discovered something very disturbing about my students' sense of ethics. I would like to see an ongoing discussion about the university's expectations for ethical student behavior and about what we can do to change the attitude that it's all right for students to cheat in order to "get ahead."

In my classroom exercise, I divided the class into three groups, selecting leaders for each group and privately telling each leader to adopt a specific leadership role. One would be an autocrat and rule with an iron hand. Another would lead democratically, helping the group arrive at a consensus by soliciting the input of group members. The third student would be a laissez-faire leader, sitting back and letting the group do whatever it felt like doing, giving as little direction as possible.

The class was then given a case study about a student named Bob who needed to get a "B" in a particular class in order to keep his scholarship. The graduate teaching assistant for the class had been given the next test and answer key in advance and for \$10 would provide the questions and answers. What should Bob do? Go to the GTA and ensure his "B"? Or go to the professor and blow the whistle?

The autocrat had been instructed to convince his group that this was an unethical practice, that Bob should not participate, and that Bob should inform the professor. The democratic leader was instructed to help the group arrive at a solution that everybody could live with. The laissez-faire leader was told to simply go with the flow.

Each group's discussion was different. There was heated conflict in the autocrat's group. At one point, a student suggested that they needed a new leader and asked the other students to vote the autocrat out of his position. All the students voted to oust the autocrat, but he held strong, as instructed. The autocrat could not convince any of the students that Bob's behavior was unethical.

In the group headed by the democratic leader, one very assertive and opinionated person suggested that Bob was only using the resources available to him. Other group members agreed that consulting the GTA and getting the test questions beforehand was not cheating. The democratic leader personally disagreed but the group saw the situation in "pragmatic" terms: Bob would lose his scholarship if he didn't get a B in this class. The group concluded that the

end justified the means and worked out a compromise position where Bob would consult the GTA but not get the exact questions and answers.

The group with the laissez faire leader was frustrated and complained that their leader didn't give them enough direction. Ironically, this group explored the ethical issues more thoroughly than either of the other groups and was the only group to agree that the practice was unethical, that Bob should not participate, and that the professor should be informed, anonymously, that this practice was occurring.

After the two groups had come to a decision (the autocrat's group was deadlocked and probably would have stayed deadlocked through the next semester), I asked the students to describe the characteristics of their leaders. The group described the autocratic leader as dogmatic, domineering, disrespectful, and insensitive. The democratic leader was praised for seeking input, encouraging the group to consider all aspects of the problem, providing direction, and for influencing the final decision. They were satisfied with their leadership and characterized it as an effective style. The group led by the laissez faire leader described him as being "out of the loop," noncaring, too laid back, and as having a "whatever goes" attitude. They were very frustrated and suggested that they would not want to work under that type of leadership again.

I initially designed this exercise to clarify these different leadership styles, and as the students were leaving the class they told me how much they had enjoyed the class period. Theory had been brought to life. I left that class feeling as if I had done something important, something innovative. I even bragged to my department head about my wonderful teaching experience. But the glow of that class soon dimmed as I began to think about the conclusions my students had reached. I had made the differences between leadership styles very clear but the majority of my students had concluded that cheating was okay. While I was patting myself on the back for being a good teacher, I was missing a much larger issue and, I believe, failing my students.

Much to my discomfort, Chancellor Coulter diagnosed my failure during his Life of the Mind Lecture in April. As he talked about the need for university representatives to act as agents of social change and for faculty to teach citizenship and values, I felt like the sinner on the front row of the Methodist Church awaiting confession. Dr. Coulter suggested that the teaching of values and ethics had been left to the church and the home, but he reminded faculty that we share this responsibility and need to be exemplars of higher standards.

I missed a wonderful opportunity to be an exemplar of a higher standard for my students. In the discussion about leadership roles, I could have said in no uncertain terms that Bob's behavior was unethical. I could have emphasized that ends do not justify means. I could have made sure that my students understood that cheating is not the right way or the best way to get ahead. But given my students' response to an autocratic leadership style, would these declarations have been successful or counterproductive? The democratic style would apparently have pleased the students but would not have communicated what I wanted them to understand. And adopting a laissez-faire leadership style might have had led to the right conclusions, but the students would have rejected the teaching style. Did I do the right thing by not voicing my opinion?

As a community of scholars we need to emphasize ethical practices in the classrooms, but how must we go about it to be successful? I know that many disciplines have specific courses in ethics, but I think we must stress that ethics is not a class you take and then forget about after the class is over. We need to make ethics a part of every class; students need to be reminded that ethical behavior is expected and that unethical behavior will be punished.

The group exercise on leadership was probably as important for me as it was for my students but for different reasons. My eyes were opened to a very disturbing attitude and a vexing problem about how to change it.

*Betty Farmer, Communication and Theatre Arts*

### **Comments or Questions?**

If you would like to make comments about this essay or ask questions of Betty please send your questions or comments by the 8th of the month to Terry Nienhuis (FCTE; phone: 7196; WP Mail/Vax: Nienhuis). Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

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## Can We Make A Computer Community?

There has been a lot of talk in the past few years about the "Community of Scholarship" in Cullowhee. But what is a community? The American Heritage Dictionary (electronic edition, version 3.0) defines "community" as both "A group of people living in the same locality . . ." and "A group of people having common interests." Let's consider both of these ideas for a few moments.

What does "locality" mean today? It used to refer to a geographic area, usually fairly small, which allowed for easy communication among its members. I would contend, however, that "locality" is, itself, no longer meaningful, as the computer and modem (or the Internet) have made geographic proximity no longer necessary for the easy communication which appears to be central to the notion of geographical "community."

So perhaps "community" might be better defined by common interests. Here we also find that the computer can provide the link to others who share our interests. I, personally, have correspondence (and sometimes just "lurk" and listen) with groups of people who are Macintosh users and who have an interest in the technical side of theatre (that being my "real" job). These people are located around the world from England to Australia and are only linked by their common interests and their access to the Internet. The questions and discussion flow freely and all are encouraged to respond, expert and novice alike . . . and they do. One of the great virtues of the Internet, I believe, is that all are equal and all can participate. The result is a kind of virtual "community" which corresponds closely to the kind of open, democratic community most of us would like to find in the University, but not all of us truly do.

The "Community of Scholarship" we have been discussing for the past few years should fit this definition, but often doesn't simply because we don't always get the opportunity to meet our colleagues from across campus as often as we might like face to face. The growing campus network and the on-line "community" it can provide can change all that. When we can all take advantage of this technology, our "community" can include greater numbers of active participants in more frequent and meaningful ways. Indeed, no one would have to be left out.

I believe that it is this sort of community which can and should characterize the University of the future. As anyone who has tried to schedule a committee meeting can tell you, the demands of teaching, service and professional development make it quite difficult to physically assemble a group of people for almost any purpose. The campus network could provide us with the means for having at least some meetings in an "on-line" format. The amount of paper used for distribution of general information can be drastically reduced when it can be "e-mailed" to everyone's "desktop" rather than placed in their mailbox, and we will know that the information was received. Discussions of interest to the entire campus (students, faculty and staff) could be held on-line through mailings lists and bulletin boards. [What do students really think about the Book Rental system? What do most of the faculty? What is a reasonable amount to require a student to spend on supplementary books and materials?] This sort of discussion could create a kind of community which included faculty, staff and students joining together to share ideas and information in free-flowing discussions which could have an impact in many areas.

This sort of community could even have an impact on what we do as educators and scholars. The "teaching" of classes might well be at least partially transformed to a "virtual" classroom which would be less dependent on physical proximity and face-to-face contact than on network access and video transmission. Such a "classroom" might well rely more on discussion than on lecture and require the instructor to be much more a facilitator of discussion than the source of information. Indeed, this is already something more than a "pipe dream" even on our campus. Marilyn Jody and others have been holding "class" discussions on WCU Micronet for some time now. Newt Smith and Linda Kinnear have been making extensive use of computers not just as word processors, but as networkable editing tools in Freshman Composition this summer. The Community Link site on campus already allows us to have discussions with and send presentations to nearly a dozen other sites in the immediate area via live, two-way television.

And there is no reason to limit this community to Cullowhee, for it extends across lines of state, nation and, even, continent. The resources of this community are as vast as its geography. Many libraries have "on line" card catalogs, there are large numbers of databases available at little or no cost and there is, literally, the expertise of the world available, as well. Imagine being able to have your students examine the holdings of the Library of Congress, or see the latest pictures from one of NASA's probes, or discuss a book with its author. These are possible today, and will only get easier as the network grows.

Computer networking seems to offer the best way to truly create the "Community of Scholarship" many of us desire. As faculty, we need to actively encourage the speedy completion of the campus network, including the dormitories, so that we can fulfill the promise of allowing everyone to participate for the benefit of all who share a common interest in scholarship. This means that we must encourage the use of such technologies in our classes and research work and, perhaps more importantly, we must demonstrate to our department heads and deans that we have an interest in supporting this network, this community, as it becomes available to us. It won't all happen at once. But it won't happen at all if we don't support its creation and use.

**Richard S. Beam, Communication and Theatre Arts**  
(beamr@wcvax1.wcu.edu)

### **Comments or Questions?**

If you would like to make comments about this essay or ask questions of Richard please send your questions or comments by the 8th of the month to Terry Nienhuis (FCTE; phone: 7196; WP Mail/Vax: Nienhuis). Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

# *Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

Response to "Can We Make A Computer Community?"

by Richard Beam, 10/1/94

Richard Beam is certainly right about the great potential of computer networks; they can obviously increase our interactions with colleagues and students and increase the access we have to information. As I offer this demurrer, I do not want to be overly negative or discourage anyone from becoming "connected" because I have personally benefited from these resources. However, I do want to suggest some cautions relevant to our concepts of "community" and "scholarship."

1. I have been struck by the degree of thoughtlessness frequently displayed on computer networks. The ease of participating in network discussions by using the "reply" option is two-edged. Yes, we are more likely to "reply" than to send a letter or even make a phone call. But, as a result of this ease, I find people are all too willing to respond without too much thought. I am not referring only to "flames" but also to reflexive speculation, passing on of unedited thoughts, and even the passing on of rumors or urban/rural myths.
2. A related concern is that the network community tends to deal mainly with simple things and to simplify very complex issues. Some discussions on the net are stimulating and informative. Yet I receive a very high proportion of trivia. More important, I have found that people on the net are no more likely than before to take the time to read and process complex contributions or to take care that their responses are "scholarly." To me, the power of the concept of a community of scholarship as opposed to a community of scholars is the notion that all we do should be characterized by high standards of thoughtfulness, evidence, and reason. Much of what I see on networks has none of these characteristics. Truly conceptual contributions are often responded to with simple dismissals and even derision.
3. Something about the nature of discussions on the nets seems to lead to a rapid application of the law of diminishing returns. A few useful interactions appears to me to run quickly to frivolous responses and the wasting of time, perhaps due to what I have suggested above. Information in itself is not an unqualified good. We can be overwhelmed by information and lose the ability to discriminate between dimensions of quality. For example, on one extremely active network I subscribe to, I find myself deleting 95% of the contributions without a pang of remorse.
4. Most of the discussions on the net are missing something that is important in my own sense of "community." I cannot easily pinpoint what is missing, but it has something to do with the richness of truly "human" interaction. Perhaps it is the affective or nonverbal side of communication or the lack of context in most discussions. This may be especially important when we start thinking about teaching courses on the computer.

I am delighted that we have this new resource. We can all gain from it, and I do believe that it has features that will make it a more useful innovation than many of our past educational "reforms." But as we move in this direction, I hope we can keep a critical eye on the effects of the computer network and on what it adds or subtracts from what we understand as a "community of scholarship."

**Bruce Henderson, Psychology**

## Let's Talk First and Foremost about Good Learning

Don't get me wrong. I am delighted that we are talking more these days about teaching than we are about research; I believe we are getting closer to our professional responsibility. But I am afraid that all of our talk about good teaching is going to prevent us from getting to the heart of the matter. We need to focus now on what makes good learning.

When we emphasize good teaching, we imply that the primary issue is "what is the teacher doing?" But shouldn't the main issue be "what is the student doing?" For example, the topic for the next Faculty Issues Forum is "Risk Taking" and the talk is likely to be about the risks that teachers must take. Let's also ask whether the students are taking risks. If they are not and should be, we should be talking about how we can encourage students to take risks. Is risk taking necessary for good learning? Why are students reluctant to take risks? What kinds of risks will the students be taking in the world of work and how do those risks relate to the risks we ask them to take in school? If we spend too much time talking about teachers taking risks, encouraging each other to be more bold, we are likely to fall into the assumption that education is teacher-centered rather than student-centered, that education is primarily about what the teacher does rather than about what the student does as a result of the teacher's intervention.

I believe that in our present emphasis on good teaching we are trapping ourselves into thinking about teacher performance. Is this teacher a dynamic lecturer? Can this teacher lead a discussion with Donahue-like electricity? Are the students excited in class? Do the students respond with raves? We applaud when teachers put on a good show, assuming that a good performance must necessarily lead to learning. But we are setting ourselves up for disappointment. Our students have been entertained by experts. They may treat our performances with respect and even applaud from time to time, but when it comes to real fun they will take the entertainers of popular culture every time. We need to convince our students that reading can be as exciting as watching movies, that thinking precisely and elegantly is as satisfying as making a lot of money, that the slow and steady pursuit of an educational goal is more likely to succeed than sudden luck or overnight brilliance. As teachers we are in a life and death struggle with popular culture to save our students' minds and souls. When we talk so much about good teaching we are likely to lose track of our objectives as educators and fall into the trap of seeing ourselves as entertainers competing for the students' entertainment dollar.

What will change if we focus on good learning? We will see that it doesn't matter what the teacher's style is, only what results the teacher gets. It won't even matter as much if the students are pleased by their teachers. Our only concern will be whether the students grow in significant

ways. Our "research" will be focusing on students rather than on our disciplines and what we are "sending" to the students. Much more important than what we are "sending" will be what the students are "receiving" and whether or not they are capable of "sending back," creating new knowledge and understanding rather than parroting what we send. We will ask questions like "are the students in this class active or passive? Are the students thinking or dozing? If the student is increasing an information base, will this information be retained for a significant length of time? If the student is learning a skill, will this skill be useful for the rest of the student's life?" And when we talk about good teaching we will not be talking about good performances; we will be talking about what teachers can do to create good learning in students. The emphasis will be on student results, not teacher performance. The old philosophical conundrum says "if a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it really fall?" If a teacher puts on a good performance and nothing really significant happens, was it really a good performance?

I feel strongly about these observations because I have spent most of my adult life introspecting on my own struggles with the learning process. For over twenty years I have consciously set out on programs to learn things so I can introspect on learning itself. I have enrolled in classes at Western as a student to remember what it is like to meet educational demands rather than to create and evaluate them. I have taken on numerous personal learning projects to feel the dynamics of the learning curve. In some cases I have succeeded as a learner and in some cases I have failed, but in all cases I have learned more about what it is to be a learner. For example, I am now a competent bridge player because I have spent the last four or five years teaching myself how to play a game I once was afraid to attempt. I now "study" bridge every day. But when I contrast my own experience with the learning behavior I see in my students, my conclusions are frightening: my students are not very good learners. So I go back into the classroom trying to figure out what I can do to make them better learners. As you know, it's quite a struggle.

My personal learning experiences have convinced me that the key to learning is not intelligence but diligence, not inspiration but attitude. If you work long and steadily enough, you will learn what you set out to learn. As Donald Norman says in an essay entitled "What Goes on in the Mind of the Learner" (copy available from the FCTE), "something like five thousand hours are required to become an expert on any topic. Five thousand hours is two years of work, forty hours a week." Our students are not going to school to become experts, but they are supposed to be acquiring the behaviors that will permit them to become experts at something some day. Are they acquiring these behaviors? I think not. And we are the ones responsible because we are the ones who supposedly have high learning skills and know how to pass them on to others.

My impression is that our students leave us not much more adept or motivated about learning than when they came as freshmen. As seniors many of them still cannot read analytically, write effectively, solve problems independently, or generate much enthusiasm for learning. They are still more interested in "getting a good job" than they are in becoming more wise. They are still motivated more with getting good grades than they are with satisfying their curiosity and exploring their intellectual interests. They still see the classroom as their primary educational responsibility and their work outside the classroom between classes as a set of unpleasant obligations. They still "cram" for tests and write papers the night before rather than making

learning a steady and daily project. They still live for parties rather than for lectures. If given one wish, they would still wish for classes to be canceled. I think it is no wonder that employers in the "real world" are complaining that college graduates aren't worth much to them.

But we can change that. Our students are not "dumb." The genetic intelligence of a species does not decline in a matter of decades. Our students only need to be educated better. But this does not mean more electrifying performances from teachers. It means more skillful assessments of where students are, what they are doing, and how their behaviors can be changed. We need to get together and talk about what we see in the students. We need a seminar on student learning behaviors. We need a workshop on how to create in students the willingness to work diligently and joyfully on course objectives outside of class. We need faculty talking together about how to lessen student fear and frustration about failure. These and many more topics could consume our attention for the next ten years. Maybe then we will have become real experts in higher education and will be able to call ourselves a true center for excellence.

**Terry Nienhuis, English**

### **Comments or Questions?**

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## ***Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence***

**Responses to "Let's Talk First and Foremost about Good Learning,"  
by Terry Nienhuis, 11/1/94**

I like your thoughts very much. It seems that what you are saying is that teaching is important, but perhaps we are confused about what we are supposed to be teaching. Instead of feeling that I have to teach criminal law, I should be worrying about how to teach the students to "learn" about criminal law and should also consider whether some of the artificial "hoops" that I create in the class such as tests and papers are really hindrances to the student's learning about criminal law as opposed to learning a series of facts which will be forgotten in short order. This is not to say that we should not test but that we need to carefully examine everything we do in the class to see if it is accomplishing the longer term objective of teaching the student how to learn. If we successfully teach the student to learn, the burden of learning the relevant facts shifts to the student and we only have to guide them in determining what are the most important facts to know. It is a very exciting prospect but also one fraught with great anxiety because it requires us to teach in an unfamiliar area. I would clearly be less comfortable teaching someone how to learn than I would be "teaching" them criminal law, primarily because I have been trained in the law, not in how to teach someone to learn, and most of the literature I have seen deals with teaching subject matter rather than learning itself. I am delighted you are raising this issue.

### **Bill Hyatt, Criminal Justice**

Terry is right. The average Western student spends less than 13 hours per week in classrooms. Besides the excellent suggestions Terry made, here are some other things we can do to shift the focus from teacher as entertainer to student as learner:

1. For years, our general education students have reported spending 1-2 hours per week per course working out of class. We need to provide more challenging, intellectually stimulating out-of-class assignments that make students read, write, and think.
2. We can change the way we evaluate nominees for teaching awards and tenure and promotion. We should eliminate videotaping of candidates in their classrooms--a procedure that receives too much weight from evaluators. Videotaping of teachers could be replaced with videotapes of randomly chosen students or alumni being interviewed about the effects of out-of-classroom activities and interactions with faculty members. The effectiveness of out-of-class assignments could also be evaluated by peers in the discipline.
3. Instructional improvement funds could be designated for out-of-classroom activities.
4. We all could work to enhance the general intellectual climate of our campus. For example, we could make a decent daily newspaper available on campus. We could institute weekend colloquies on intellectually hot topics or topics that bridge the "academic" and the "popular." We could change student attitudes about books and their use by using fewer textbooks and more real books and by eliminating the book rental system. We could offer senior-level general education courses that emphasize the development of the intellect instead of preparation for jobs.
5. We could stop believing that native ability is more important than the quality and quantity of intellectual effort.

### **Bruce Henderson, Psychology**

# Responses to "Good Learning"

continued

I greatly appreciate your thoughtful commentary in the *Faculty Forum*. My experience has primarily been in the public schools and I was often fatigued by reading and hearing about how poorly our schools were doing. There was little mention of the student's responsibility. Here's another wrinkle to your commentary. I believe too many people in this country get an opportunity to attend a four year college. They simply are not ready and the college experience may actually delay their developmental progress. Some sort of marriage between a system which requires students to earn the privilege to attend the university and our present system may be worth considering. We assume that our present system, "public schools" and higher education, is set up to meet the needs of the vast majority of students. As a former school psychologist, I disagree. Many students are doomed to do poorly for many reasons yet we continue to plug them into the conventional system. If the students' motivations and/or scholastic aptitude are weak they should have reasonable alternatives (pre-vocational training within the elementary school setting and beyond, for example).

## Chris Tuten, Health, P.E. & Recreation

1. People learn best when they have a need to know. Of all the things we know about learning, this fact is probably most basic and most often overlooked. We expect students to need to know what we want to teach them--or if they don't, they should! Rarely do we make much effort to discover student needs and relate teaching to them. The genius of good teaching lies not in providing information but in helping students to discover a new need to know.

2. Learning is a deeply personal, affective experience. Modern brain research tells us that our brains are not switchboards or computers but marvelous organs for the discovery of personal meaning. Any information will affect a person's behavior only to the degree to which the learner discovers that this information is personally meaningful. And emotion is an indicator of the degree to which any experience is personally meaningful. The more personally meaningful, the greater the degree of emotion and the more profound the learning effect. What is learned without personal meaning or feeling is unlikely to have much effect upon behavior.

3. All behavior involves self concept. How people relate to any experience, including schooling, is inevitably determined in large part by what they believe about themselves. People who believe they can, try; people who don't believe they can, avoid the confrontational experience or defend themselves against it. What a student learns about self in the classroom, moreover, may be far more important to growth and development than the subject matter he or she is confronted with.

4. Learning is governed by the experience of challenge or threat. People feel challenged when they are confronted with problems of interest to them which they believe they can cope with. They feel threatened by problems they do not feel they can handle. The experience of threat is destructive to most learning while challenge enhances learning. Whether students feel threatened or challenged by teaching experiences, however, lies not in the the teacher's conceptions but in the eye of the beholder.

5. Feelings of belonging and of being cared for have vital effects upon learning. People who feel they belong and are cared for are likely to be excited, interested, motivated, and involved. People who feel rejected or alienated are likely to be turned off, discouraged, humiliated, disillusioned, and apathetic, seeking to escape the scene or to attack those who have made them feel bad.

6. Effective learning requires feedback. To be truly helpful, feedback should be immediate, personal rather than comparative, related directly to performance, and point the way to future success. None of these things are accomplished by the grading system.

## Anonymous Student



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

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## **The Teacher as a Transforming Leader**

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt. What do these American presidents have in common? They are all considered models of what we in political science call "transforming leaders," those who lead with a concept or vision that transforms the society they are part of, changing the rules of the game and creating eras that have a lasting impact on our history. These leaders were able to get others to accept their vision and act on it, thereby creating a considerably different and better nation. These kinds of leaders are contrasted with "managing leaders," those who effectively maintain the status quo. I believe that we can better understand quality education if we see that the effective teacher is also a transforming leader, one who creates a vision for the student to strive for--a vision, for example, of the student as learner, scholar, or practitioner--a vision that the student then accepts, internalizes, and strives to achieve, creating a new persona who will face the future in an entirely different way.

We do not need more teachers who are managing leaders, perpetuating the educational status quo, because it is pretty clear that business as usual is not very effective education. What is the status quo in higher education? Teachers lecturing? Students passively taking notes? Courses based on information retrieval? This is the way it has always been done and the way it tends to continue unless a teacher has a new concept of how to conduct a classroom. And it is far too easy to manage a classroom without a clear sense of vision, with only a fuzzy idea of what one is trying to achieve because the students generally don't demand a vision; ordinarily, they seem to be quite satisfied to be treated decently and rewarded with an acceptable grade. In fact, attempting to organize a class around a vibrant and exciting vision of what the student might become at the end of the semester is often met with scorn, apathy, or even hostility. Some of the presidents named above were distrusted and hated as much as they were loved and respected, so it is often easier to maintain the status quo, tepid as it might be, than to create a vision of the future and attempt to make it happen.

What will this vision of the student's future look like? A teacher's vision must first of all deal with values. A professor will either consciously or inadvertently convey to the class certain values, and for the transforming leader these values are chosen consciously, skillfully, and systematically. For instance, does the teacher expect students to go to the library or is learning considered a closed system ending in the classroom? Does the teacher respect differing opinions or does the teacher suggest that there is only one way of looking at things? What about a student who challenges accepted scholarly wisdom? Some professors will reward such students while others will quickly let it be known that such students are wrong and the authorities are right. Some faculty value rebels in class and encourage students to challenge what they say while others convey the impression that students, like children, are to be seen and not heard. I am not suggesting that transforming teachers must adopt a particular set of values, but I am suggesting that a transforming teacher must have consciously and systematically worked out a set of values to inculcate in the classroom.

Student autonomy is part of my vision of classroom activity. I think that transforming teachers structure their classrooms so students will learn to think for themselves. Confucius made the observation that students must find the fourth corner of truth on their own. Faculty who value the

development of autonomy will encourage students to structure their own approach to class materials and assume more responsibility for their own learning because overly dependent students will have a difficult time in today's world. Perhaps our classrooms are all so different that there is no one way to stimulate more autonomy in students, but to maintain the status quo is to permit the students to be passive and dependent on the teacher for their learning. However a teacher does it, I suggest that creating student autonomy is a way to be a transforming leader in the classroom.

Closely related to the valuing of autonomy is the concern for problem solving in the classroom. Transforming teachers realize that the student is preparing for a future that most certainly will involve the ability to solve problems. Whether engaged in science, education, or even personal life, students must learn to select the appropriate variables or factors and proceed through a developed rational process to find solutions to a dizzying variety of problems. Through the development of analytical and rational skills, the student becomes more prepared to solve problems in an age of increasing complexity. The status quo is perhaps the model of information retrieval-- the student simply receives and reproduces information. Do we need more of that?

The age we live in requires, I think, that we place a great deal of value on second chances. Our students need to be reassured that we are sensitive to hidden, latent, or underdeveloped talent. Although many of our students are quite self-sufficient, in some students talent must be sought out quite vigorously because it is hidden by a cultural background that might not value learning, hidden in a web of mangled sentence structure, or blocked by serious personal problems. Outstanding faculty can see what is not immediately obvious, can envision what a future performance might be apart from present failure. These teachers encourage, tutor, and stimulate the underdeveloped but promising student, sometimes through advising and mentoring, sometimes simply through work in a classroom setting.

A final possibility for faculty vision is the concern for cultural diversity. Our students generally come from cultural backgrounds in which they have not experienced or critically examined diverse cultures or values. Their views are rigid and set, and universities are threatening places. Transforming teachers see the clashing of values, cultures, and views as an important part of a university education. In such a faculty member's vision, the examination of diverse values and assumptions will enable the student to function more effectively in an international age where diversity is the norm.

What kinds of questions can you ask yourself as you face next semester's classes? How about:

1. What values underlie my vision of my students' future classroom and postgraduate experience? Will I value, for example, autonomy, problem solving, courage in the face of failure, tolerance, or even the celebration of diversity?
2. How will these values be embodied in classroom activities and assignments? If students do library work, for example, how much help will I give them? What will my assignments require and what kinds of values will they imply?
3. Will the values I envision for my students last beyond their experience in my classroom? How can I be more certain of the survival of these values?

A teacher with a conscious awareness of what the future might hold for his or her students, a teacher who will attempt to systematically transform students into more effective adults, workers, parents, and citizens is a transforming leader, the kind we need in our classrooms at WCU.

**Gordon Mercer, Political Science & Public Affairs**

## ***Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence***

**Responses to "The Teacher as a Transforming Leader,"  
by Gordon Mercer, 12/1/94**

Thanks for such a thought provoking piece! Teachers at the college level should never perpetuate the status quo. While it may be desirable to help our students learn how things got the way they are, higher education should always threaten tradition, not foster it. I share the vision of student autonomy and allowing students to think for themselves. In the context of the classroom, we should think of ourselves as servants, not leaders. We should be serving or helping the next generation of leaders to transform themselves, even if we personally don't like what they become. Students are our masters, clients, or employers. We do not work for their parents. We do not work for the General Assembly or the University System. All of us--teachers, parents, legislators, administrators--work for our students. They are the buyers; we are the sellers. Everything at WCU should exist to serve their collective needs. Students hire us to help them prepare for leadership. When we take their money, we are obligated to them. Teaching classes is a small part of the obligation. We also owe them time for individual consultation and representation with those within the university system who sometimes lose sight of why Western operates. We must also fight to obtain whatever is necessary to help prepare our clients. We must also defend them against any attempts to stifle their learning. If push comes to shove, the students' interests are paramount. We must accept that or find other employment. To do otherwise is to commit a fraud.

**John Moore, CTA**

I enjoyed reading your article. These ideas will be valuable to us here at NCCAT as we plan our seminars.

**Dianne Lee, NCCAT**

The article on "The Teacher as a Transforming Leader" was excellent. If you don't mind, I'd like to share it with our Leadership Kennesaw group. They would find it full of suggestion points for further discussion.

**Betty Siegel, President, Kennesaw State College, Marietta, Georgia**

## **The Web: The Revolution Is Here; Let's Join Today**

In a recent workshop, faculty were exploring ways to help students display a greater willingness to take risks in their learning. This led my thoughts to our own modeling of risk. What risks are we willing to take as faculty? As administrators? Here's a starting point. I suggest that beginning today we should risk a serious personal and university commitment to "The Web." This networking software has direct application to our research, to our teaching, and to our service.

The Web began as a software program for a group of physicists in Switzerland a couple of years ago. They were trying to integrate the thousands of interrelated articles on physics that existed worldwide. They found a way to access many of these articles using the concept of hypertext: they designed a program where they could click on a particular word in an article on the computer screen and a linked or related article could be pulled from yet another computer somewhere else in the world. A year and a half ago, a group of graduate students at the University of Illinois-Urbana announced that they had added another layer of features to the World Wide Web. By simply pointing and clicking on any blue, underlined word, users could now call up images, photos, digital video clips, radio clips, audio files, or any other Internet data. NPR radio dialog, scientific visualization movie clips, and NASA photos of Mars or Jupiter represent more specific examples of available information and services. On December 14, 1995, encrypted transmission enabled users to purchase services and products. Television's demise was now underway. When this multimedia software was placed in the public domain, its adoption exploded. Now, in addition to the sources being supplied by academia, commercial users and an ever growing circle of public and private participants are adding to the Web daily.

### **Research**

The Web now forms an entirely new information system that combines direct global commerce with Television and Telephone, Radio, and Publishing. Instead of TV, we can have TRP. The results are revolutionary. Compare the Web with the traditional library. How much does a library grow per year? Five percent? The Internet and its Web are growing between ten and twenty percent a month. Early in any research process, the Web lets you search thousands of library card catalogs, government agencies, and electronic full-text databases simply by clicking a button. But the Web delivers more than just a citation or abstract. It can deliver full text, that is the document or even the the image, the sound, or video clip. Since The Web also connects you with people and their problems, it serves as a generator of research problems. It gives the Web navigator the potential for immediate use (read it now or print it) or the luxury of saving materials to a disk for later use. Later in the research process the Web provides an easy and quick way to display your articles for feedback from your research partners. Further, as with the

original group of physicists, you can learn to link the documents that you use in your work. Finally, the Web acts to disseminate your research results, allowing others to add your work to their links in their Web. But fast and low-cost information access and management are but the tip of the iceberg.

### **Teaching**

The Web and its Web browser software tools make it an ideal choice for lecture and the presentation of ideas. It saves time by allowing you to link to files that already exist on the network instead of re-creating files from scratch. It also allows you to link to a wide variety of multimedia formats. Without going to the xerox machine, the Web helps my students connect with lecture outline notes, online textbooks, distant libraries, supplemental materials, online field trips into cyberspace, and even with guest speakers in real time typing conversation if a projection panel system is employed in the classroom. Other features of the Web will allow us to pretest student groups, survey interests, and conduct weekly course evaluations. But if there is any activity for which the Web and the Internet is made to order, it is to handle problems, their generation and their solution. The Web is numerous individuals gathering at a bewildering variety of electronic watering holes (LISTSERVs, MUDs, MOOs, MUSH, IRCs, netnews, etc.) to discuss, imagine, invent, and problem solve. Businesses may call it intelligence gathering, a scanning for new competition and new ideas. Government agencies may call it a thinktank. Schools may see it as collaborative or cooperative learning. In our classes we call these activities student assignments and often expect students to complete them independently. We can use the Web as a source of class problems and as an electronic library and information system for our students to employ in finding answers for our course problems.

### **Service**

Whether we see a place for commerce in academia or not, today it is as easy and as cheap to shop in Seattle or Paris through marketing on the Web as it is for your neighbor to turn the ignition key in his or her car. On the other hand, it is just as easy for our local businesses to go national and global. Equip even our smallest local paper or radio station or clothing store with a Web server, and it can scale up to national and international markets. Part of WCU's mission is to provide support for the communities of Western North Carolina. The Web can be an equalizer for our small local businesses as well as for our rural schools. More importantly, building regional electronic conferences can be a source of ideas for coursework that link us closer to the needs of our community.

### **What should You Do Now?**

Become Web aware. Make a personal field trip to the Media Center or to the Killian Lab, room 268, and ask a lab assistant to help you get started in exploring the Web. While online, visit the Whitehouse. Search for information on your favorite topic at Carnegie Mellon. Play a sound or video clip or two. Have your peers or the Computer Center install Netscape or one of the other Web browsers on your office Mac or Windows workstation and let them show you how to get started. As you gain experience, follow the links to my Web home page (<http://152.30.11.86>) and take the link to my LEAP thinking model that uses Web and local resources to address different stages of the problem solving process. Help the rest of the mountains become Web aware. Invite neighbors to your office for a peek through Netscape.

**What Should the University do now?**

Provide more networked seats. There are only 12 public access workstations on our campus, all in the Killian Lab. Do more to encourage and help students obtain their own workstations. Network classrooms and provide projection equipment for whole class activities to make this incredible new system visible. Reward risk and innovation with new technologies in the tenure and promotion process. Develop a team to assist the creation of local call access to our Western mountain communities. We must learn and lead.

**Bob Houghton, Elementary Ed and Reading**

**Comments or Questions?**

*If you would like to make comments about this essay or ask questions of Bob please send your questions or comments by the 8th of the month to Terry Nienhuis (FCTE; phone: 7196; WP Mail/Vax: Nienhuis). Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.*

## ***Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence***

**Responses to "The Web: The Revolution Is Here; Let's Join Today,"  
by Bob Houghton, 2/1/95**

This is really an incredible article that could change the way we teach. Keep up the good work.

**Bob Orr, Media Center**

I feel that Bob Houghton's essay was well done and will probably help to fuel the rapid pace at which our faculty are becoming Internet users. I think that the Web browser programs have done more to excite our faculty than all of the other Internet tools combined. I also believe that the installation of the campus network is aiding this growth.

While Bob challenges us in several areas that I agree with, I do question one area. I do not think that WCU can (or should) become an Internet provider for the surrounding counties. I agree that we should educate and lend our expertise whenever possible. Through these types of support many people will be ready to take advantage of the NC Information Highway when it reaches our public libraries, hospitals, community colleges, and public schools. In addition, through this education, the public could then support a local freenet or possibly attract a commercial service like America Online to place a modem within local calling range.

One area that Bob accurately identified as a problem is the inadequate access for our own community of users. This includes dial-up access for the VAX, dial-up access for the network (which is non-existent), and on-campus public access for the VAX and the network. Now that we nearly have the infrastructure for a campus network in place, I hope that this area of need will be seriously addressed.

**Joel McKenzie, Computer Center**

Bob Houghton has revealed one of the best-kept secrets in town and I attribute to him my recent success in using the World Wide Web to enhance my work and support of activities in the Faculty Center. Bob is a "believer" and quite often it takes a great deal of believing before the pay off.

I have been exploring the World Wide Web for some months now and am beginning to use it to make contact with people who know a lot more about what I am currently doing than I do. The other day I found information about two very talented people I needed at the next Wildacres Retreat by making three clicks to NC State University and the faculty directory. In another click I was writing these people a letter confirming their willingness to speak at the retreat. This all took about 15 minutes. Recently I found "Friends and Partners," a Russian/American information and linking service that promotes learning about our cultures and helps to introduce friends. I was interested in this because of Western's recent efforts to promote a greater international prospective. The "Web" is indeed a revolution.

**Chris Martin, Media Center**



# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

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## **To Teach Our Students to Read Better, Let's Start By Eliminating the Book Rental System**

The recent SACs faculty survey of tenured and tenure-track faculty revealed that 63% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, "Having an undergraduate textbook rental plan is a good idea." What could be so wrong with a system that provides something as important as books?

I must admit that I have never been a fan of the typical college textbook. In fact, in one of the first issues of *Faculty Forum*, I argued that textbooks have too much influence on instruction. I suggested that textbooks were problematic because of their blandness and superficiality, but also because they constrained instruction. I felt (and still feel) that textbooks encourage instructors to "cover" the material and rely too much on lower-order thinking skills. At the time that article was written, some readers agreed with me and others vehemently disagreed. Little has changed in the nature of the average textbook in the years that have followed. Yes, computer software has made some inroads and there are now mechanisms for creating your own textbook, but these advances have yet to make much of an impact in many disciplines, including my own.

Regardless of the validity of my previous argument, the textbook remains central to a WCU education. But I don't think dissatisfaction with textbooks has anything to do with the SACs survey results. I believe our faculty's concern with the rental system has to do with its influence on our students' learning, with how our students read textbooks. Our average student's approach to textbook reading has several characteristics:

1. **Democratic reading.** Students assume that all words and sentences have equal value. There is no need to make thoughtful discriminations about those concepts or examples that are particularly important. This characteristic is most apparent in those books in which the ubiquitous highlighter has been employed. Whole paragraphs and even pages are covered by one or more color.
2. **Modified speed reading.** In order to finish the required reading as quickly as possible, certain features of the text must be ignored. At the beginning of the book, these features include the preface and the table of contents that provide overviews. In individual chapters, features ignored include any section headings, pictures, tables, graphs, or section or chapter summaries.
3. **Massed, not distributed, reading sessions.** Rather than distributing the amount of reading to be done over several time periods, most students try to read many pages at one sitting. Fatigue increases while reflection decreases. Memory processes are especially inefficient when a great deal of information is presented in a short time.
4. **Altered state of consciousness.** Students frequently admit to the experience we have all had of mechanically reading pages at a time without any conscious awareness of the meaning of what is read. So little consciousness is actually directed at the

content of the text that, as when driving down an interstate, there is room for planning, reverie, or song.

5. **Negative attitudes about reading and books.** Books are considered as a necessary evil, as means toward good grades, as paper to be recycled, rather than as ends, as an opportunity to increase knowledge, or as a record of intellectual effort to be treasured in a professional library.

In short, many of our students are passive readers.

What does all this have to do with the rental system? The textbook rental system is a major impediment to making our students more active readers. We need to teach them to summarize paragraphs, to generate questions about what they read, to develop examples of concepts, to draw connections between sections of text and between text, pictures, graphs and tables. Where should students do all of this? Obviously, the best place to do all these things is in the book itself. Then the student's active processing is available right with the text. The textbook becomes a permanent record of the reader's intellectual work, of the reader's personalization of what has been read.

But there is a problem. The textbooks our students are reading do not belong to them. They are rented. The first student to rent the book can fill the margins with summaries, questions, and examples, or can circle and connect related key words or phrases, but after that students are stuck with someone else's active processing, not their own.

It is time to do away with our textbook rental system. It is time to stop complaining about the poor reading skills of our students and do something. The rental system has been defended before as a marketing tool, as a means to keep student costs among the lowest of four-year institutions in North Carolina. In balance, the pedagogical costs are too high. Of course, eliminating the textbook rental system is just the first step. We also need to explore a variety of ways for making our students strategic readers, including approaches such as comprehension monitoring, elaborative encoding, tree-diagramming, and the venerable SQ3R method. But let's make the first step by encouraging our new chancellor to once again give students ownership over one of the fundamental tools of our business.

**Bruce Henderson, Psychology**

**Comments or Questions?** If you would like to make comments about this essay or ask questions of Bruce please send your questions or comments by the 8th of the month to Terry Nienhuis (FCTE; phone: 7196; WP Mail/Vax: Nienhuis). Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

# *Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

Responses to "To Teach Our Students to Read Better, Let's Start By Eliminating the Book Rental System," by Bruce Henderson and to "Teaching as Community Property," by Lee Shulman, 3/1/95

I strongly oppose the book rental plan for textbooks used in courses within a student's major or minor. Students need to begin acquiring a professional library, and faculty need maximum flexibility to make changes at any time to keep pace with their disciplines. We also need to be able to have more than a single text for some courses. Students may have less of a need to retain General Education texts, and if a compromise is needed it may be these texts which could continue to be provided on a rental basis.

*John Moore, Communications and Theatre Arts*

I find nothing to object to in what Bruce says about the effect of the book rental system on our students' learning, but my concerns with the rental system are more pragmatic. I spend an increasing amount of time helping students negotiate the process of applying to graduate schools. I am pleased that more and more of our students are interested in continuing their education because I think it speaks well of their academic experience here at Western. But I am concerned about the effect that renting textbooks has on what our students will not bring to their graduate studies, namely, a library. The faculty in sociology believe that this problem is serious enough that for students going on to graduate school we attempt to provide them with a basic library from our own collections of books. It is inconceivable that a sociology graduate student not own basic texts in statistics, research methods, and theory. While I applaud the generosity of my colleagues, this is not a great solution. Among other things, Bruce's point about how texts can be used rather than simply read is well taken. It would be far better for students to have access to the books that they had used in their classes. If our students are to succeed in graduate school, we need to be concerned about how well we equip them to do so.

*Anthony Hickey, Dean, Research and Graduate Studies*

I disagree with Bruce Henderson's opinion on eliminating our Book Rental System. First of all, buying textbooks would mean much greater expenses for students. Second, in other colleges that do not have the rental system students are still going to buy used books from people to reduce costs. These used books will be marked with highlighters and pens, probably more than the books in the rental system. Students might get the idea that no one would want to buy their books if they had too many marks in them. Students would tend to shy away from writing in their books and this would reduce their ability to comprehend what they are reading even more than if they had rented their books with writing and highlighting in them.

*Sharon White, student, Business Law*

The Book Rental System is also accompanied by a plethora of petty rules that are excessively dictatorial in terms of how we organize and offer our courses and curricula. I'm weary of nearly two decades of constant meddling in what books I can use, how many books I can use, and how often I must use them. This pernicious and persistent interference in my classroom goes beyond all reason. Scrap the system.

*Jeff Neff, Geosciences and Anthropology*

## Let's Throw the Book at Them!

"What could be so wrong with a system that provides something as important as books?" That appears to be a very harmless, open-ended question. But the more appropriate question might be, "What is so right with a system that mandates the purchase of books?"

I applaud the desire to help WCU students strengthen their reading skills and gain a greater appreciation for books and reading; however, forcing them to purchase undergraduate textbooks isn't the panacea to those ends, nor is it a prerequisite step. On the contrary, requiring the purchase of textbooks could very well be a negative reinforcement toward those goals.

The Book Rental program isn't the culprit that fuels (1) democratic reading, (2) modified speed reading, (3) massed, not distributed, reading sessions, or (4) altered state of consciousness. "What does all this have to do with the rental system?" remains a pertinent question. The only explanation given was that others had read the book previously and the student would be "stuck with someone else's active processing." The reader is already "stuck" with someone else's active processing, namely, the author's. If we aren't teaching our students to read critically enough to digest, interpret, and arrive at their own conclusions, then a previously highlighted paragraph is the least of our concern.

"What could be so wrong with a system that provides something as important as books?" Simple. It doesn't address the issue or the need. If reading comprehension and techniques are lacking in our students, then get back to the basics. The general education program currently is being re-evaluated for fine tuning. In the Foundations areas, incorporate a reading and study techniques course to complement the writing, mathematics, oral communications, computer literacy, and leisure and fitness areas. Attack the root of the problem; don't destroy a petal.

Look through the eyes of the students and parents. Find ways to make college more affordable. We have enough people out there looking for ways to increase costs. The book rental program doesn't "devalue" reading or books. Likewise, forcing people to buy a book doesn't instill within them a love for reading or books. In fact, the negative reinforcement might carry a heavier price tag. If, several years down the line, the "treasures" of our graduates' personal libraries are their undergraduate textbooks, then we have failed in our quest to help instill the value of lifelong learning.

*Phil Cauley, Admissions*

I do not agree with Bruce Henderson's suggestion that textbooks are inherently "bland and superficial," but I wholeheartedly concur that Western's book rental system has negative implications for the intellectual and ethical development of students on this campus. By the use of highlighters, students at WCU assume ownership of textbooks that, in fact, DO NOT belong to them. The markers force subsequent students renting a book to wade through a veritable rainbow of color before arriving at the printed information. As faculty and staff, we have all seen examples of the wanton destruction of reference materials in Hunter library. If students appreciated the fact that books do indeed come dear in the form of dollars, perhaps they might be less inclined to view library materials as being their individual property as well. Students at schools with book purchase systems have the opportunity to sell a specific text if they still see no value in it at the end of a course. This practice reduces their expenses while hopefully encouraging them to treat every book they use more gently. By providing textbooks for courses in the students' major, the rental system leads students to view each course as a separate and complete entity rather than as an experience related to subsequent upper-division courses and professional life after graduation.

*Joyce Baldwin, Human Environmental Sciences*

Bruce's comments are on target, and I agree that now is the time to help students become better learners by abolishing the book rental plan.

There are other good reasons for eliminating book rental. I have just attended my first WCU Family Night, where students were told that college is really different from high school. At every other college I know of, one of the differences the students experience is the expectation to assume greater responsibility for their own learning, including (but not limited to) the purchase of their own learning tools. High schools provide books to their students; Western, by continuing this practice, sends all the wrong signals about the locus of responsibility for learning.

Giving students the textbook (and note that it must be a single text) for the course feeds their belief that that is the only book they need. In my field, writers need a small collection of volumes within easy reach. I have never met a writer or a journalist who didn't have a dictionary, a style book, a copy of Strunk or Zinsser or Fowler (or some combination of them), and an almanac, at least. Many of my students here don't seem to see the need for these. Since Western doesn't issue dictionaries or almanacs, they must not be very important.

Finally, a textbook-purchasing system allows faculty members the freedom they need to change textbooks on short notice. A two-year moratorium on change makes bureaucratic sense, of course, but it's pedagogic nonsense. Let me give a personal example. When I was hired last spring, I was under some pressure to hurry and choose textbooks for my fall courses. For one of them, a course I had never taught before, I made a mistake. I chose the sixth edition of a popular text after making only a cursory review of the content. It turned out to be a dreadful book, the kind you can't really assign in good conscience. Anywhere else, that would have been a one-semester mistake, quickly remedied. But under Western's book-rental system I am condemned to live with my error, and four semesters of students will suffer with me.

### *John Slater, Communications and Theatre Art*

One of the advantages of age is that you become more aware of and more alert to the cycles of change because you have experienced them. For example, I was struck by the fact that the proposals in "Quotes" from Lee Schulman's latest article are remarkably similar to what was in place when I started teaching here at Western 29 years ago. Teaching was community property; it was disciplinary; and we would not have dreamed of trying to evaluate everyone with the same instrument. Everyone chose an evaluation which suited his/her discipline, his/her weaknesses and strengths, and his/her students best. We were constantly trying new techniques and sharing our successes and failures with each other, hoping we would get it right. Our goal was to provide the best education we could for the students, not to become model teachers who taught using model techniques. We were judged by how hard we worked and how well we did in the classroom. We had a good idea of how well we were doing because evaluation was a continuous process and because we listened to students rather than listening to experts. What caused the system to change was not an emphasis on research, but a push to make sure everyone got evaluated the same way and that the evaluation be used for everyone in tenure, promotion, and salary increases, etc. Once everyone used the same instrument, the only judgment to make was how well faculty members adapted their teaching to the evaluation. Then, many believed that the only important difference between faculty members was publication, and as usual most faculty members adjusted. It seems strange that we have expended all the time and effort we have to develop better methods and better evaluations, and the best that can now be suggested is a return to the past. I would be delighted if that occurred.

### *C. R. Lovin, History*

## Helping Students Become Intelligent Novices

Bruce Henderson's piece in the March 1 issue of Faculty Forum describes well the characteristics of the "passive approach" to textbook reading that is so common among our students. For Bruce, eliminating the textbook rental system is a necessary but not sufficient "first step" toward eliminating the problem of passive reading. He also urges us to "explore a variety of ways for making students strategic readers," and he lists a few of these ways. I share Bruce's position that the rental system promotes passive reading in our students. My purposes here are to characterize our passive students in terms of their expertise as learners and to present some thoughts about helping our students to become not only strategic readers but also effective learners.

In the early 1980s, John Bransford, a cognitive psychologist, tried to learn physics from a textbook with the help of an expert physicist. This undertaking was part of a study to determine the **metacognitive** strategies that could be most helpful when learning something new from a textbook. Metacognition refers to the ability to think about thinking, to be aware of oneself as a problem solver--to monitor and control the learning problem that one is trying to solve. While Bransford had originally learned and applied metacognitive strategies and developed expertise in the domain of cognitive psychology, he found that he also could apply metacognitive strategies as a novice when trying to learn a second domain, physics.

The work of Bransford and others reveals that the elements of expertise are not limited to the domain-specific knowledge that arises only after extensive experience and practice in the domain. In addition to domain-specific expertise (the performance of the chess expert is the classic example), there is a second form of expertise--that of the person who learns new fields and solves novel problems more expertly than the less skilled learner, regardless of how much domain-specific knowledge he or she possesses. This expert learner has been dubbed the "**intelligent novice.**"

Recently, Alan Guskin, Chancellor of Antioch University, visited our university to discuss ideas that appeared last year in his two-part article in Change, the journal of the American Association of Higher Education. Guskin calls for restructuring the role of faculty so that students must not only be more **active** but also more **independent** learners. While he does not use the language of cognitive psychology, Guskin suggests a conceptual framework for linking the design of our instruction to our knowledge of what expert learners do. If the goal of our instruction is to produce students who are able to learn and apply metacognitive strategies in order to develop expertise, then we must restructure the primary learning environment for undergraduate students--the fairly passive lecture-discussion where faculty talk and students mostly listen. A most difficult lesson for college instructors to learn is that students must do their own learning, must

map their own intellectual journey from novice to expert. Henry Steele Commager, the great historian who was enormously concerned about teaching and learning in higher education, cautions us: "There is a great delusion that everything must be taught instead of learned."

No matter how beautifully organized and tailored a lecture, it **only** transmits or disseminates information to students. In the lecture, the information itself and not how it is acquired or how it might be used is focal. As we prepare to teach, **we** learn a great deal as we actively put information into our own words and formats. Our students typically learn much less, principally, perhaps, how to recognize cues as to what will appear on a test. (Rule 1: copy down exactly what the instructor writes on the board.) This does not in itself suggest that we stop lecturing. It proposes that we give careful thought to the types of learning or expertise we hope to promote and then consider the limited role the lecture can play. The lecture, along with technology--including textbooks--provides us with a means of transmitting and disseminating what is known. But the types of learning and expertise we hope to promote in our students require that they engage in an active process of knowledge **construction**, not knowledge recording or knowledge absorption.

Guskin offers suggestions for how we can make this kind of learning focal in our courses. He urges us to move from an emphasis on learning that occurs primarily in larger groups to a focus on smaller, more intimate groups and independent learning. He urges us to actively model our own learning processes, to participate in intense, small group discussion, to convene cooperative learning teams, to engage in more one-on-one interaction with students, and to establish peer-group, team-oriented learning settings in which students interact independent of faculty.

My impression is that the ideas of Bransford and Commager, along with Guskin's call for restructuring the role of faculty, Terry Nienhuis' proposal that we "talk first and foremost about good learning" (in the November 1, 1994 issue of Faculty Forum), and Bruce Henderson's listing of ways for making students strategic readers all contribute to a conceptual framework for linking the design of our instruction to our knowledge of what expert learners do.

If we conceive of the typical students in our classrooms as novices who make use of only a limited set of strategies to address the learning tasks with which we confront them, then it becomes clear that **how** we engage them in learning is at least as important as **what** we teach. Domain-specific knowledge and skills are necessary to the kind of expertise that we want our students to develop, but are they sufficient? Shouldn't we also pay attention to the metacognitive processes involved in our students' intellectual journey from novice to expert?

If teaching is the profession dedicated to helping students learn, then we can arrange the conditions of learning in our courses so that our students can learn to be intelligent novices.

**John Habel, Psychology**

**Comments or Questions?** If you would like to make comments about this essay or ask questions of John please send your questions or comments by the 8th of the month to Terry

Nienhuis (FCTE; phone: 7196; WP Mail/Vax: Nienhuis). Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

## **Avoiding Sexist Language: How Important Is It?**

Recently I received in the mail a copy of the WCU Loyalty Fund mailing sent from our Offices of University Advancement to raise funds for WCU academic endeavors. The quote on the front of the brochure caught my eye:

"The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life." PLATO

By today's standards this is clearly a sexist and exclusivist use of language--"The direction in which education starts A MAN will determine HIS future life." I was floored, sad, then angry. Probably half the students at this university, plus many of the faculty who are directly involved in helping educate ALL the students, are not men. The quote leaves women out entirely.

I believe that the choice of this quotation to represent the university's appeal for charitable donations was a mistake. I believe this is an extremely important situation because an issue is raised by this choice from which all of us can learn. The choice of the quotation was clearly an oversight rather than a conscious decision, but I think the "mistake" of language should be publicized, not to embarrass anyone but rather to use this specific issue in the present life of our community to guide the direction of our future life. Indeed, David McDonald, Director of University Advancement, responded immediately when I contacted him. Apologizing for the "error in judgment," he agreed that "by today's standards, this quote was a very poor choice for use in a mailing being sent to both females and males." He then went on to do what he was trying to do in the first place--to invite me to support an important and worthy fund, which I did.

In her article entitled "Sexism in English: a 1990s Update," Alleen Pace Nilsen, Professor of English and Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs at Arizona State University, argues that the plethora of sexist language in American English proves that sexism is firmly lodged in the minds of people. "Language is like an X ray in providing visible evidence of invisible thoughts. The best thing about people being interested in and discussing sexist language is that as they make conscious decisions about what pronouns they will use, what jokes they will tell or laugh at, how they will write their names, or how they will begin their letters, they are forced to think about the underlying issue of sexism. This is good because as a problem that begins in people's assumptions and expectations, it's a problem that will be solved only when a great many people have given it a great deal of thought" (287) [in Paul Eschholz, Alfred Rosa, Virginia Clark, eds., Language Awareness, 5th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990)].

Sexist language is a serious matter. Though many people around us laugh it off, many agencies, institutions, and publications take sexist language very seriously. For example, on the matter of sexist pronouns, the United States Geological Survey's writing guide begins its discussion with this strongly worded paragraph: "Variations of the pronoun 'he' are unacceptable to many people when [the pronoun refers] collectively to both masculine and feminine genders, and as a result ['he'] should be avoided in Survey reports. 'He' is inherently masculine, despite the remonstrations of some grammarians. 'He' can be avoided gracefully by careful grammatical construction."

Some might be outraged at the suggestion that Plato's quotation should be altered to make it inclusive of both genders. But if Plato's Greek word denotes both genders in the first place, then "man" is a poor translation because in contemporary English "man" is distinctly not the equivalent of "all people." Even though some people argue that "man," meaning "mankind," is supposed to be gender neutral, it manifestly is not. Thus, it is possible that we could accurately alter the quotation to read like this: "The direction in which education starts a person will determine that person's future life." --PLATO. If, as is more likely, the original Greek word was not gender neutral and really did denote only adult males, then the quotation has no place in a publication that represents the university--no matter how celebrated Plato might be.

Language not only grows out of society's values and its "reality," it also helps form those values and reality. The "Sapir-Whorf" theory of language and thought--so named for Edgar Sapir, a scholar of American Indian languages, and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf--addresses this reciprocal nature of language. Whorf taught that every language not only serves as an instrument to reproduce and voice ideas but also as a way of shaping the ideas, assumptions, impressions, and guidelines of an individual's mind. Language that continues to name, privilege, and highlight only one gender works against equality and the values of a late twentieth-century liberal arts education. Sensitivity to the language of such a quotation on a university fund-raising mailer is not merely an example of political correctness. It is an issue of morality, ethics, and social justice.

Other arguments for not using this quotation might be made. For instance, the quotation implies that education only begins at the university level. In fact, education starts just after a newborn yelps its first cry. Formal education starts with kindergarten (or preschool) and for most people ENDS with college. Robert Maynard Hutchins, for instance, comes closer to what WCU wants to say: "The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives." Hutchins may not be as revered as Plato, but he has said something very similar without raising the issue of sexism, which divides and distracts readers. Of course, by singling out "the young," his quotation raises the issue of ageism.

Whether sexist, ageist, racist, or exclusivist in any other way, expressions in public discourse intended to be inclusive raise a serious issue. As teachers and leaders who are constantly continuing to investigate, analyze, and contemplate "reality," we have a responsibility to help ourselves and our students form better linguistic habits.

**Alice Weldon Perry, Modern Foreign Languages**