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# EXCHANGE

New England Faculty Development Consortium

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## Message from the NEFDC President

“The times they are a changing”...still. It seems almost impossible to comprehend that Bob Dylan coined that phrase in his song almost 50 years ago in 1964. And, it seems that things have not stopped changing since. This rapid rate of change in our society and (life in general) seems very close to Moore’s Law of Growth which predicted that computer power will double every two years until about 2015-2020. I’m not expert on the subject but the growth curve has been pretty accurate over time and is sustained by innovation and economics. It will slow down when innovation basically runs out of “feasible” ideas. (Things can only get so small and light can travel only so fast). I wonder if this is what will also happen to our society and life? Will change in our lives continue until we can’t think of anything else to do? Twenty years ago I began my teaching career after a career in video production. I had spent all of my time using specialized hardware that had computing power but were not computers. I spent precious little of my time on a computer. Now however, I spend almost all of my time on a computer including the video production that I used to do on the video gear. What a ride! And what of education? Will we run out of great ideas too? Will we continue to try new ideas, new teaching techniques, new pedagogical avenues only to reach some sort of metaphorical roadblock where we can’t think of anything else? Well, I don’t think so...we are not in a “business” where we can run out of feasible ideas. We are definitely not bound by the same laws of physics. We run on a different set of rules and thank

goodness we do as we are continually asked to come up with something new to deal with in the classroom, the campus, the state...and the most amazing thing? We do. Over and over again our experience has been that regardless of institutional politics, culture, economic conditions and educational trends, faculty always comes up with fresh new ideas that address the issues that confront us in the classroom.

We are not always successful in our quest. We have made some mistakes along the way but we have had our successes as well. We have simply not stood still, nor stopped trying to improve learning outcomes, challenging students, and motivating them to do better.

So what’s next? I wish I had a crystal ball.

There is certainly a list of challenges:

- *Accountability*
- *Assessment*
- *Policy changes*
- *Student readiness*
- *Student diversity*

At the NEFDC we decided to start with policy changes. Policy changes required for accountability, assessment, student readiness and diversity, and a host of other issues in current higher education.

Our fall conference will be held on November 18, 2011 at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. Our conference theme is “Designing and Documenting for Student Success” and our keynote speaker will be David Bergeron, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning and Innovation, Office of Postsecondary Education, U.S. Department of Education. In this capacity, he has led key policy groups working on reauthorizing the Higher Education Act, researched market-based approaches to loan

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subsidies under the guaranteed loan programs, and approved program regulations and policy guidelines for higher education.

This newsletter addresses a number of areas in which faculty can make changes and suggest policy changes and practices that result in more positive learning outcomes. Reva Kasman from Salem State University gives us an interesting perspective on a holistic approach to assessing writing with feedback and portfolios. Dorothy A. Osterholt and Katherine Barratt from Landmark College give us a collaborative approach to teaching and learning that can improve student understanding and retention. Kathryn Linder from Suffolk University shares a process of course re-design that uses the backward design model that

makes course goals and outcomes the most important part of the process before course content. Gouri Banerjee, from Emmanuel College uses Universal Design (UDI) to address student diversity and the changing academic landscape we face. Finally, Frank Bellizzi from Quinnipiac University compares the classroom to a business model to increase student engagement, trust, reliance and the belief in student potential.

We hope that you will enjoy our newsletter and join us at our fall conference on November 18th.

If nothing else....enjoy the ride.

*Tom Thibodeau*  
*NEFDC President*

## Creating student engagement in the university classroom

*Frank Bellizzi*  
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Why don't students participate more in the classroom? Why don't they seem interested? What does it take for students to become passionate about learning? What's missing in the instructor-student engagement process? These are questions that have been asked perennially and I have little or no adequate answer. In this paper I will examine some areas of psychology, educational methodology, and business models which may lend us some clarity and direction towards answering these critical pedagogical concerns.

For starters, the classroom, like a business, can be seen as an organization in which the basis for growth rests in the level of trust that persists among the participants. Trust is the foundation for individuals to feel safe enough to allow them to work creatively, innovatively and expressively.

In addition, as in organizational life, the work performed by individuals also needs to have relevance to who they are.....their needs, interests, passions and need for fulfillment.

Finally, the attitude created by the instructor in the classroom has as much relevance as that created by the manager....namely, what you believe about the individuals' capabilities ( positive or negative) is translated in the way you act towards them, and they in turn behave that way (self-fulfilling prophecy).

This article examines these three areas by comparing the classroom environment to the work environment, and exploring how

we can create a classroom which allows students to feel safe, trusting, and convinced of their potential to perform optimally. It is this author's belief that these components, when activated in the classroom, will allow for more student engagement in their learning process.

Probably the single most critical ingredient needed to foster greater student engagement in the classroom is trust. Students need to feel that the learning environment is a safe place to express their thoughts and feelings without being rejected by their peers or the instructor. Therefore, creating a climate that invites and honors student involvement in classroom interactions must be a high priority for the instructor early in the semester. This dynamic is achieved through validating student comments as right for them at their level of development. An easy way to accomplish this is to react to student comments with respect, "let me see if I understand what you are saying....." followed by the instructor's response: "and what I believe or know, or what the literature suggests is....." It's critical that what follows when the instructor says. "let me see....." is an accurate reflection of the student's comment without judgment or correction. This type of non-judgmental active listening modeled by the instructor begins to permeate the class with a sense of trust...a trust that allows the students to express more and more what they believe and know.

As mentioned earlier, the instructor will have ample opportunity to share what he/she knows/believes by simply tacking onto the student's comment with "and what I know.....". It's a small distinction but a powerful one when instead of saying, "yes, but.....", the instructor responds with, "and what I know is.....". This feeling of validation, is vital to developing student trust. Without it, one can only hope to elicit sparse responses from the few who are fortunate enough to feel confident when they speak.

Learning flourishes in the classroom when the material studied/discussed has relevancy to the learner. We know from developmental theory that individuals enter a learning environment ready to learn according to their particular developmental level. Thinking appears to take place in any of the following areas: visual, auditory or kinesthetic. Most learners have dominant styles in one of these areas. Therefore, for learning to be meaningful, the learner needs to be exposed to a variety of learning modalities. Ideally, learning can be most relevant if the learner is invited to study/work/discuss in his/her dominant learning style. This poses a huge challenge to the instructor. However, by including an array of learning modalities in instruction, this can be accomplished. The Montessori teaching method creates individual learning opportunities for students, however, this might be less feasible to expect of college instructors. Relevancy in the classroom also pertains to finding a way to tie in the classroom instruction to the common experiences of the 18-21 year old group of students. Otherwise, students are asked to learn material for which they have limited or no outside reference points. Experiences like internships are an invaluable means of bringing life to classroom instruction and adding more stick-to-it-tiveness (lasting retention?) to learning. Another powerful dynamic that occurs in all classrooms, is the phenomenon referred to as the self-fulfilling prophecy. Essentially this concept suggests that what we expect to happen in a situation usually happens. Some instructors treat their students in a way that leads to superior performance; others treat students in such a way which promotes lower levels of performance.

How does this occur? If you expect the best from students, the instructor will reflect this belief in action. He/she will provide an atmosphere of trust, inviting and encouraging students to express themselves creatively and supporting their performance which in turn validates their confidence in whatever they are doing and allows this positive cycle to continue. As in management, what you expect from your employees, you will observe because your expectations result in behavior which confirms this positive expectation. It's a little bit like the saying, "If you have the name, you'll play the game." When you expect the best, psychologically you will engage in behavior that confirms

this belief. Students will be invited to be "in on" things, i.e., how the class is run; how much input they have on decisions which directly affect them; how decisions are made; how they are allowed to think and act 'outside the box'; and how they are encouraged to develop a learning community which meets their personal and academic needs. Setting unrealistically high expectations is not consistent with the dynamic of the self-fulfilling prophecy; rather it will cause performance to fall off. When classroom teachers (in public schools) are told that they have a classroom of gifted children, although, in reality these students have low average IQs, student performance in the classroom rises to astonishing heights. Their teachers acted in ways that conveyed the belief that these were gifted children, and the latter reacted accordingly, performing at high levels of ability and creativity. This is the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy. In George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion", Eliza Doolittle explains: "the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated."

Instructors can be positive Pygmalions in the classroom by creating a climate and culture which manifests to students the instructor's belief that students have the potential and personal power to achieve their dreams and passions. It's all about the climate. Think about the analogy of growing a garden wherein the gardener does all in his power to develop a bed of soil which will promote the growth of beautiful and fruit-bearing plants and vegetables. The gardener can't force the growth of these plants, but can only provide the setting and nurture which encourages plants to grow according to their own unique potential. Trust, relevancy and belief in students' potential are critical ingredients in fostering student engagement in the classroom. All of this needs to occur in a place where students feel the respect, acceptance, validation and caring from an instructor who sees as his/her mission the development of the potential of each student. When students' dreams and passions are energized (validated?), the motivation and need for achievement is enhanced and learning becomes a natural by-product of this engagement. Engaging a student necessarily starts with where the student is developmentally. Like the gardener, nurturing and promoting passions, dreams, ability and achievement. In the end, how we engage students is a direct function of the instructors' belief about how learning occurs.

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# Ensuring access and essential learning for diverse students

*Gouri Banerjee, Ph.D.*

Associate Professor Math and IT  
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Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) is a powerful model for instruction that ensures greater access and essential learning for the success of diverse students. Increased use of UDI principles is reported across higher education as a way to promote deeper student engagement and improve learning outcomes. The guiding philosophical principles underlying UDI are teaching environments promoting: 1) equitable use, 2) flexibility in use, 3) simple and intuitive learning materials, 4) perceptible information, 5) tolerance for error, 6) low physical effort, 7) size and space for the approach, 8) a community of learners, and 9) an inclusive instructional climate.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that students in the US are becoming increasingly diverse—more students today have jobs, families and financial responsibilities, and many attend college not just for the pure love of learning. Only fifty-four percent of the students in four year private institutions now attend full-time, a large number work part-time or even full time. Degree completion in four years has declined noticeably since the 1980's and many complete the baccalaureate in roughly five years at private four year institutions. Women outnumber men, Black and Hispanic students attend college in much larger numbers, many students are first generation college-goers, and a significant number are dealing with a variety of medical, emotional and psychological barriers to learning.

While most faculty acknowledges that students have changed, fewer have varied teaching styles, learning activities and assessment methods. We therefore must ask, how can faculty ensure that all students—and especially new majority students—have equitable access to high impact educational practices that help prepare them for work, citizenship, global interdependence, and a fulfilling life?

Like faculty nation-wide, faculty at smaller institutions (those typically served by the NEFDC), struggle with increasing student disengagement, higher drop-out rates and poor learning outcomes. Investments in faculty development, new pedagogies and teaching with technology has lagged, especially at smaller institutions, and responses to increased student diversity have been inadequate.

Generally, we see at least three broad responses to increasing diversity. Some faculty members have instituted changes in pedagogy, improved assessment techniques and invested time in integrating technology into instruction. Being intentional about active learning and deeper engagement, they have included case studies, problem solving activities, created constructivist learning environments and communities of inquiry. These transformations have not been easy requiring research, explicit learning goals and objectives, and challenging class activities. Many faculty made these changes without the assistance of faculty developers.

Secondly, some institutions have supported online programs and courses as a means to meeting the needs of diverse learners, and boosting enrollments, retention and graduation. Generous stipends promoted online programs, and many previously face-to-face courses have been transferred online using learning management software such as Blackboard. Sometimes, these changes have occurred without a sophisticated understanding about effective online teaching.

Third, and sadly the worst response, has been faculty who have made the assumption that diversity is not an issue on their campus. They have continued to teach as their own teachers did many decades ago believing that one style of teaching and assessing is sufficient; they have simply chosen to ignore the needs of struggling new majority students.

Increased attention to faculty development is essential as faculty have observed problems with attendance, academic engagement, cheating and mediocre test results. Students seem to require more structure, show less problem solving skills and creativity, and lack academic motivation; lateness and missed deadlines characterize their work and combine with an excessive focus on grades.

To compound these problems, faculty have a severe lack of time, face larger class size, heavy course loads, and rapid changes in discipline specific knowledge. There is little time available in getting to know students, even when we comprehend the diversity, we are unable to adjust teaching styles within the rhythms of short semesters and often lack skills in differentiated teaching methods and the use of technology. We, therefore, resort to the

tried and true methods, use ad hoc solutions to problems and deal with students on a case by case basis. We may know about the UDI literature but there is neither time nor help for a more inclusive approach.

Administrators are addressing issues of disengagement, mediocre outcomes, attrition and delayed graduation in many other ways—First Year experiences, sophomore year interventions, internships and service learning are popular today. An Association of American Colleges and Universities survey of chief academic officers at 433 colleges and universities (public and private, two-year and four-year, large and small) found that only 15 percent of colleges and universities use the traditional series of general education courses. Most are moving towards course choice, building peer-to-peer learning communities, first year experiences, and developing groups of thematic courses.

Students, too, are moving to online programs that offer convenience, faster completion time and suit lifestyle needs. They often prefer to use open courseware, find apprenticeships, learn as they work, and use online courses to fill specific gaps in credentialing.

The recent book *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* noted that more than a third of college seniors are no better at crucial types of writing and reasoning tasks than they were in their first semester of college. Sociologists Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, after surveying more than 2,300 undergraduates at twenty-four institutions, noted that 45 percent of these students demonstrate no significant improvement in a range of skills—including critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing—during their first two years of college. They believe that campus culture, student employment and co-curricular activities engage students on campus much more than previously and academic rigor has declined noticeably.

For faculty who want to be excellent teachers, course design has become extremely challenging where race and ethnicity are not the only issues any longer. English fluency, length of stay in the US, bi-racial and multi-racial family structures, is also very important. Diversity has increased significantly along gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, country of origin and socio-economic status. Traditional reasons for differences such as prior knowledge and experience, preferred learning styles and intellectual ability have become extremely uneven, increasing the complexity of course design. While many may agree that a single pedagogy no longer meets the needs of all learners they may still lack a more nuanced understanding of the layers of differences they are dealing with.

Designing courses was simpler when students were more homogenous. If students fell outside the majority, they were

expected to remold themselves to fit the teaching methods of faculty by using remedial and other supports. However, in a period of rapid demographic and economic change, successful course design requires us to know students better and ask what is good teaching for these new learners? We really do not know enough about students and what role economic motivation, race, ethnicity, gender, disability and prior knowledge play.

Innumerable studies of good teaching have shown that: diverse groups working together show enriched perspectives, consider ideas more deeply, have increased ability to deal with cognitive complexity, and develop better problem-solving skills. Employers prefer hiring these students because of their greater ability to deal with global and cultural complexity. Using technology in teaching can expand the range of tools available to faculty for making teaching more inclusive.

Using technology in courses can help with communication, collaboration and presentation. Faculty can explore how learning management systems, Web 2 tools and the Internet can be used to engage learners more deeply, provide options to vary teaching styles, explore the rich potential of online, blended and F2F teaching, and use mobile technologies, games and simulations. None of these new skills are easy to learn, but faculty development can play a positive role in promoting them.

In my own teaching at a liberal arts institution in Boston, I have found the literature on Universal Instructional Design incredibly helpful. The principles of equity, flexibility, intuitiveness and community have guided class activities and course design. Other frameworks for instruction I have used include the community of inquiry model, a way to use the didactic methods of face to face classrooms in an online environment. I use Blackboard, Web tools like wikis, blogs, social bookmarking with Diigo, and collaborate with Google docs and Reader. Students work with each other constantly, build knowledge, ask questions, find solutions and reflect upon learning. I have tried to create constructivist learning environments that involve discussion, debate, and reflection as an iterative process that engages students and promotes deep learning continuously.

*A number of resources are available for those who wish to explore alternative teaching methods:*

Tomorrow's Professor at <http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/cgi-bin/tomprof/postings.php>;

The University of Minnesota PASSIT program of Universal Design of Instruction at <http://mediamill.cla.umn.edu/mediamill/display/73622>;

The University of Washington-Equal Access Universal Design of Instruction at [http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/equal\\_access\\_udi.html](http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/equal_access_udi.html);

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The National Education Association's Understanding Universal Design in the Classroom at <http://www.nea.org/home/34693.htm>;

The University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching-Examples of UM Faculty Using Technology in Teaching at <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/inst/te-chexamples.php>;

The University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching-Creating Inclusive College Classrooms at [http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/P3\\_1.php](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/P3_1.php);

The Community of Inquiry Model at <http://communitiesofinquiry.com/model/>;

Faculty Focus at <http://www.faculty-focus.com/topics/> to name a few.

The professoriate faces multiple challenges and opportunities— a rapidly changing student demography, fluctuating economy, rising costs, integrating technology and greater accountability. There are also many opportunities – more effective teaching strategies for the new majority students using UDI principles. As faculty are held more accountable for learning outcomes it is now more important than ever that we ask what is good teaching and how can we meet the needs of diverse learners. Faculty needs resources and support to become better teachers.

## Without a pen: reflections on an experiment in typed assessment

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I love a great pen. My favorite bold red pen is perfect for grading – circling errors, pointing out confusing statements, and filling margins with comments. Though my standards are high, I have always reassured students that a large quantity of red on the page did not indicate a negative judgment of their work. Moreover, my comments were intended to be helpful and informative, and I was proud of the time and effort that I spent providing students with ostensibly constructive suggestions for improvement.

Despite my well-meaning goals, it was always clear that most of my students did not use my comments in the ways that I might have desired. With a numerical score emblazoned on the top of the page, and the next homework deadline already looming, students had little motivation or time to carefully comb through their finished work, interpret my feedback, correct their errors and incorporate my advice into their next submission. While it was easy to believe that a truly dedicated student would make the effort to work through my scrawled observations, I sometimes wondered if it was simply too overwhelming for someone to figure out where to start swimming in the sea of red.

What would happen, I wondered, if I graded without my beloved red pen? What if I graded an entire course without touching a pen to paper at all? After teaching a short summer workshop during which my co-teacher Linda Ruiz Davenport and I provided only typed feedback on assignments, I decided to see what it would be like to try this in a semester-long class. Instead of marking up assignments with hastily scribbled comments, I would read through each one, jotting down quick notes to myself on a separate sheet of paper, and then type up an organized response. Subsequently, students would be expected to submit a portfolio in which they used my comments to revisit problems from earlier assignments and reflect globally on their growth and development.

I chose for my experiment a graduate course on Patterns, Relations and Algebra for middle school teachers. My class of twelve students met weekly in 140-minute sessions, with much of class time spent working in small groups on activities designed to encourage student discovery of key concepts. Between sessions students completed homework assignments which allowed them to gain facility with the new topics, but were not exercises that could be accomplished by simply mimicking solutions from class. The following instructions were included at the start of our first problem set: While having the correct final answer is desirable, it is significantly more important to explain your thought process clearly and to organize your ideas in such a way that someone else can follow them. This may mean that you do a lot of scratch work first, and then decide how to present your solutions on paper.

I provide similar directions to students in all of my courses. The difference in this class would be the ongoing “conversation” that I planned to have with each of them through

individual feedback. As the semester began, I was eager to see what, if any, the effects of this change would be on my students' work, and whether the benefits were sufficient to warrant the increase in time that this type of assessment would likely require. Interestingly, the first apparent shift was not in my students at all, but in my own attitude. It had always been easy for me to casually transfer my thoughts to red-inked paper as I graded, thinking nothing of pointing out error after error with terse fragments like "awkward sentence" or "invalid logic". Now when I pictured my students reading a page of typed correspondence alongside their graded homework, I couldn't imagine giving them just a laundry list of criticisms. I became more aware of what I was really prepared to say to a student, and how to phrase my comments in constructive and respectful ways. Though I wanted to be sure that errors were acknowledged, I began to think more holistically about the tone and content of my critiques.

A standard template for my feedback soon developed. Each response began with a salutation and a few sentences about the assignment as a whole. Following this casual introductory paragraph was the bulk of my evaluation, listed under the heading "Some things to consider..." Here I typed bulleted comments, both positive and negative, about the specific content of the assignment. My observations concerned the validity of the mathematics and logic, as well as the clarity and organization of the assignment. As needed, I would also include a category called "Brief points", which was reserved for minor errors, like repeated misspellings of a word. A (fictional) sample of student feedback would look something like this:

*Hi Sasha,*

*I really appreciated the way you incorporated diagrams into your text this week – it made such a difference in clarifying your thoughts. You seem very comfortable using the numerical data to identify patterns, and I think that your next goal will be to increase your facility using the algebraic notation to describe what you are seeing.*

*Some things to consider...*

*There are several instances where you haven't told the reader what your variables stand for. You'll want to fix this everywhere – one place is in #3 where you are calculating the cost of the books.*

*In #2 you've created a great formula and verified that it works with several examples. Now you need a more general justification – I suggest looking back at our definitions of triangular numbers for a place to start.*

*I think you should check your calculations on 4b.*

*Rather than copying the questions from the book and then putting your answers underneath, try having a conversation with the reader. For example, instead of writing "How many clothespins are required?" you might say, "We are going to determine the number of clothespins."*

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list of the types of comments that I would make, it is fairly representative of my tone and style. I often pointed out general categories of errors but did not list every instance of this mistake. Had I been circling errors on the assignment itself, I would have worried that the absence of a circle inadvertently gave the message that there was no error to be corrected. Not only did this save me time, but the responsibility for identifying errors was transferred back to my students. That said, I gave more concrete suggestions for how to improve the work than when I simply noted problems in marginal critiques. Within a few weeks I noticed that I was giving significantly shorter lists of feedback regarding presentation, and my comments were more focused on the mathematical content of the assignments. Moreover, my easy access to previous feedback meant that I was able to explicitly acknowledge improvements.

In addition to affecting their weekly progress, the feedback was used by students in the creation of portfolios, which included three basic components: a compilation of technical skills, a critical analysis of growth, and a final reflection. The critical analysis section was the most substantive portion. Guided by my feedback, students revisited assignments and improved their work, highlighting their growth with narrative text. Without my red scribbles, students were able to easily look at their original work with the perspective of an outsider.

From a pedagogical perspective, I have only positive things to say about my experience using typed feedback and portfolios. Obviously from a logistical standpoint the main drawback is the required time commitment. I did become more efficient as the term progressed, and could occasionally cut and paste notes that were relevant to several students. But even with a dozen students, the weekly grading was a significant investment of my time. With a slightly larger class I would likely decrease the frequency of graded assignments. Also, while I would use this with undergraduates, I would endeavor to choose a class where I expected the effort that I put into grading to be matched by a similar effort from the majority of the students. Regardless of whether I type feedback to students in any other course, I believe that my grading has been enhanced by this experience. I am much more conscious of the influence that my written communication has on students. Simple changes can make the difference between them seeing grading as a terminal exercise in evaluative assessment, and one that facilitates and inspires continued learning.

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# Bringing a dialogue into the classroom

*Dorothy A. Osterholt*  
Landmark College

*Katherine Barratt*  
Landmark College

In today's educational arena, our collective attention is focused on meeting the complex and diverse nature of the students who are currently entering college. Colleges and universities are increasingly challenged to meet the needs of underprepared, learning disabled, returning adults and a multicultural student body and to support their persistence to graduation. Faculty are under increased pressure to reexamine their teaching approaches and the content being covered in order to address the changing profiles of students without compromising academic standards and rigor.

We can no longer rely on the standard lecture format as standard practice whereby students are given a "feast of facts" only to be purged on the test later to make room for the next academic "meal." For many students, this pedagogy does not help their ability to retain essential content and related basic cognitive associations necessary to move to more complex levels of understanding. It is time to embrace a range of pedagogic practices to support students' depth of understanding and present them with opportunities to stretch their knowledge beyond a superficial level.

Smith and MacGregor (1992) cite several essential components that can activate comprehension and memory necessary for learning to occur. First, active constructive work helps learners integrate the new material with what they already know or use to assess and reconstruct their existing knowledge; second, problem-oriented activity encourages students to "marshal pertinent facts and ideas" on their own to reach solutions; next, recognition of diverse learning styles helps students to utilize their strengths and honors multiple perspectives; finally, construction of meaning, which according to Golub (1988), is inherently social because learning best occurs when we allow students to talk out ideas with others in a give-and-take dialogue. These components reveal that both teaching and learning require the teacher to connect content

Authentic retention then does not result solely from being exposed to the material through lecture. Rather it must be connected to present knowledge, and allow the learner sufficient

practice to manipulate and reframe to create meaning. This provides the time for associations to be made between old and new data which enables the brain to merge this information for efficient and effective use later. One highly effective method to accomplish this process called consolidation is through a collaborative learning process.

**Collaborative Learning** The best collaborative learning provides a structure, paired or small group, that can be directly integrated into the content which can dramatically expand the active role students take as peer constructors of knowledge. We have experienced this in our own teaching. For instance, pairs of students were given a specific "lead-in" question to the day's lecture that drew from a personal experience that required them to integrate the content into their answer. The collaboration time needed no more than ten minutes to activate attention and engagement with the class. For some reluctant students, participating like this at the start of class "broke the ice" and increased their willingness to speak up a second time. This activity helped students connect the relevance of the content to themselves as well as learn different perspectives from their peers.

We have also used the end of a lecture period to assign a follow-up question requiring the same pairs (relating to the example above) or small group to critically think about their initial ideas and together reformulate their answers integrating the new lecture content. When more time was needed, the activity became homework and their collaborative product was used to introduce the lesson on the following day.

Collaboration can also be inserted during the lecture itself by asking students for a quick summarization highlighting the key ideas constructed in pairs. This technique helped the students' attention span by allowing them to break into a more active mode. Using collaborative strategies helped our students feel a real sense of continuity through a process that often spiraled back through previous material.

A class like this generates two important characteristics: first, a routine is established and collaboration occurs at some point in that class on a daily basis; second, students are required to work actively with the subject matter which provides an embedded review and reflection of the key concepts. Collaborative pairs/groups can be allowed to demonstrate learning in a variety of ways suitable to the students' preferences so a more universal design is integrated in the class curriculum.

Collaborative learning can provide room for students to take risks in a safe environment. It also puts more emphasis on the learning process; not solely the content material. As an example, when our students were asked to review prior lecture notes, each pair was required to talk to each other about what was relevant and what was not in order to meet the conditions of the

particular tasks; this was also practice with the content. This process ultimately became far more encompassing to include social and emotional development, both important for the young emerging adult.

It is also important to note that use of collaborative learning did not sacrifice content but rather facilitated a deeper understanding of the material through the directed analysis and relevant application of the information. Collaboration can be started with pairs, then triads and finally, larger clusters. At any level, it allows students to practice and reinforce their academic skills; simultaneously it allows them to strengthen self-confidence by offering the opportunity to alter roles within any sized grouping.

Collaboration required our students to use the terminology of the topic, listen to others and then modify the associations made into their personal depiction of the material; in other words, practice! Likewise, it required each student to talk to each other to record the information and ask questions or correct as necessary. Since they had to review for accuracy, in some cases, it required reading aloud together to find certain ideas. One partner, for instance, pointed out an error and was able to explain the correction to his classmate, thus reinforcing peer-to-peer learning. Collaborative learning created a positive interdependence between students using face-to-face interaction to practice academics and specific social skills that touched on listening, alternating dialogue and sharing decision-making.

Another essential aspect included the opportunity to debrief and evaluate the effectiveness of the experience through a variety of reflective activities. The feedback can take any number of forms but generally makes it possible to delve into such things as the value of alternating roles, individual contributions and accountability to the “team,” the quality of the work produced and the significance of having worked towards shared goals as opposed to working alone. In our case, it was an opportunity to examine the progress made by each individual participant and how this was achieved through a comprehensive group process.

Our own experience transitioning to using collaborative activities in the classroom validated the findings of Wilkinson, (2009) who indicated three fundamental competencies for this kind of successful transition. First, the importance of the teacher’s knowledge about a collaboratively-based classroom; second, the teacher’s competency to model and provide critical thinking opportunities in content-based activities and third, the teacher’s ability to guide the students as they learn, apply and reflect on collaborative skills. Additionally, the teachers who are the most effective have an understanding of the emotional blocks and attitudes among the students in order to “help students enhance their emotional intelligence to become successful learners” (Wilkinson, 2009).

Our research of the literature and teaching experience in collaboratively-based classes has developed several fundamental beliefs about its integration into the college classroom. First, equity among students can coexist with the collaborative learning process because it can minimize some of the stigma for knowing less than another. The goal is that all students are engaged and involved in academic inquiry, without isolating those not as able, and participants are encouraged to support a peer as well as advance their own knowledge. Second, patience for practice is integrated into the collaborative teaching paradigm that accentuates the importance of incorporation of ideas, the creation of meaning and dialogue with the material. Next, the idea that each student is valued is uppermost so each will learn and experience the empathetic nature of human communication. Teachers’ skills are of critical importance and cannot be understated in developing an emotional tone that is directly modeled to the students. Fourth, self-accountability is as essential a factor as the shared goal and product as each student strives to contribute to his/her fullest. Students must learn about the degree of influence that he/she can wield that can promote or impede the process. Lastly, the dynamics of collaboration are transferable outside the classroom when problem solving and negotiation may be necessary to a peer group or work situation. We believe that, as postsecondary educators, we are in a position to make a real pedagogical shift that meets the needs of the current diverse college population. (Osterholt & Barratt, 2011).

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# Suffolk University Course Design Institute

*Kathryn Linder*

Center for Teaching Excellence,  
Suffolk University

The Center for Teaching Excellence at Suffolk University has begun a series of course design institutes for faculty in our law school, business school, college of arts and sciences, and school of art and design based on the course design institute model piloted at The Ohio State University. Creating programming where faculty can discuss teaching across their disciplines is a central goal of the center, so the multiple day Course Design Institute (CDI) model used at Ohio State was a natural addition to our summer calendar.

As a staff, we first revised the OSU model for the Suffolk community. Since we are a commuter school, we shifted from the five-day model used at OSU to a four-day model to accommodate people's schedules. The goal of the four-day institute remains the same, however. We work to assist faculty and staff in redesigning (or designing from scratch) courses using the Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe Backward Design Model. Wiggins and McTighe advocate for a course design process in which course goals and learning objectives are the foundation of the course design rather than content. Using this model, institute participants design courses that meet and assess student learning along pre-determined course goals and learning objectives and add in the content on the final day of the institute. Although some of the participants have struggled with the concept of looking at content last, others have found the focus on structure refreshing. As one participant noted, "in the past I have focused largely on content and this

has made it more difficult for me to think globally about the course, and to come up with a central overarching theme that could bring the different parts of the course together. The design focus will also force me to be more explicit about the connection between assignments and learning objectives."

### *Course Design Institute Schedule*

- Day One:** Design Course Goals and Learning Objectives
- Day Two:** Create a course Skeleton based on theories of how Students Learn
- Day Three:** Develop assignments and Assessments Aligned with Goals and Objectives
- Day Four:** Create and Showcase an Integrated Course Map

Capped at 10 participants for each institute, the daily workshops include interactive activities on designing course goals and learning objectives, presentation on theories about how students learn, training on assignment and rubric design, and discussions on topics such as teaching students with a variety of ability levels and how to pace a course appropriately. Additionally, the Course Design Institute includes opportunities for individual reflection and peer collaboration, the opportunity to interact with colleagues from across the university to share ideas about teaching and gather new ideas from peers, and a full set of course design

materials that can be used to redesign courses during and after the institute.

The collaborative nature of the institute has been a favorite part of the program for the participants. As one participant explained, "the content has been great, but the most useful thing is coming together with a multi-disciplinary group of enthusiastic, engaged faculty members to do intentional thinking about teaching." Another participant commented that she could "imagine running into the group members later on campus and having a good chat." This development of relationships between faculty has been one of the most rewarding components of the Course Design Institutes for our center staff.

An additional benefit of the institute is that it creates excitement for participants about their upcoming courses. "The Course Design Institute gave me the time and intellectual space to take my course and truly design it. I arrived with a syllabus that looked like an unsolved Rubik's cube and by the fourth day all of the pieces had fallen into place," participant Keri Iyall Smith of Sociology stated, "I can't wait to see the results in action this fall."

Based on the positive responses from institute participants, the CTE has decided to offer the CDI periodically throughout the next academic year. We are also running follow-up meetings for the participants at their request so that they can discuss how they implemented their ideas from the summer institutes into their fall courses.

## Colleges of Worcester Consortium Offers Certificate in College Teaching

The Colleges of Worcester Consortium offers a unique opportunity for faculty and aspiring faculty alike through its Certificate in College Teaching Program. The Certificate Program offers graduate credit courses in fully online, hybrid and face to face formats, and represents a collaborative institutional response to the ever-present challenges of promoting exemplary teaching in today's complex higher education environments. According to Dr. Susan Wyckoff, Consortium Vice President for Academic Affairs, "Most college professors are experts in their particular disciplines, but perhaps less well trained to be effective teachers. Preparation for the college classroom involves more than a solid base of knowledge in a discipline; it requires a systematic inquiry into the pedagogies and processes that facilitate learning. Our certificate program is grounded in the latest educational research of best practices in college teaching, and is designed to enhance the teaching and learning experiences for faculty and students within higher education."

The primary focus of the Certificate is to prepare graduate students, adjunct and full time faculty who aspire to, or who are currently engaged in a career in academia. The program is open to participants from within and beyond the Consortium's 12 member institutions. Research has shown that graduate students with some formal preparation in college teaching have a substantial advantage in the academic job market. Once hired, the new faculty members are better prepared to assume their teaching duties, and are consequently more productive in developing their research programs. Similarly, more experienced college faculty can also benefit from such teaching certificate programs, as they may be very well prepared in their disciplines, but desire formal training in the pedagogy of teaching.

*Full program information can be found at <http://www.cowc.org/college-student-resources/certificate-college-teaching>. Dr. Wyckoff can be contacted at [swyckoff@cowc.org](mailto:swyckoff@cowc.org)*

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# SAVE THE DATE!

## NEFDC 2012 SPRING CONFERENCE

### Friday, June 8, 2012

At the New England Institute of Technology  
East Greenwich, RI

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