

Focus on Faculty

From the Editor

In his March 30th presentation, visiting professor Vincent Tinto answered a



question all teachers puzzle over: what can we do in the classroom to most effectively promote learning? His answer, based on educational research, proposed the creation of learning communities: students work together in study groups that expose them to differing points of view and promote more time on task. He further suggested that teachers give their students frequent feedback, but not necessarily in the form of traditional tests. In this issue faculty describe ways they have incorporated many of these same proven methods in their classrooms. Look inside to learn more about communities of learners, assessment tools, and other ways to actively engage our MC students in the learning process.

--Helen Youth

Using Classroom Assessment

by Joan Naake

jnaake@mc.cc.md.us

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) has sponsored numerous Classroom Assessment workshops for both full- and part-time faculty this year. During this past year, over fifty-five faculty members participated not only in the initial workshop but also in follow-up workshops in which they implemented classroom assessment techniques (CATs) in their courses.

This raises the question: What is classroom assessment? According to Tom Angelo and Pat Cross, authors of Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers, classroom assessment helps individual college instructors obtain useful feedback on what, how much, and how well their students are learning. Faculty can then use this information to refocus their teaching to help students make their learning more efficient and more effective. In short, classroom assessment uncovers gaps in understanding before they become impediments to further learning and before students take traditional tests.

Classroom Assessment Techniques vary from simple to complex. One of the techniques, the Documented Problem Solutions, has students complete problems on the left hand side of the page and then explain the reasoning they used in solving the problem on the right hand side of the page. This technique can be used not only in mathematics courses but also in most courses requiring critical thinking. Instructors who have used this technique have found that students were much more successful on their tests and in their courses because they

(continued on page 2)

Inside This Issue

- Cable TV Schedule 2
- IDEA Conference Announcement 2
- Study Groups + Assessment + Cooperative Learning =
A Learning Community 3
- Ancient Method, Modern Application: Socratic Dialogue
in the Classroom 4
- Teaching Analysis with the Magazine Advertisement Assignment 5 & 6
- The Surprising Joys of Scholarship 7
- Capturing Generation 1.5 Students 8



(continued from page 1)

understood the reasoning and did not just mechanically solve the problem.

Another technique, the One Sentence Summary, requires students to summarize a complicated process or phenomenon in one sentence. This requires students to think critically in order to ascertain the key elements of the summary or definition. Yet another technique, the One Minute Paper, enables instructors to obtain feedback about how much the students understand or how effective their lecture was in a matter of one or two minutes. Since the responses are anonymous and ungraded, students tend

to give genuine feedback that the instructor can use to assist students in improving their chances of success.

Of the fifty-five instructors who participated, the majority found classroom assessment techniques to be quite valuable in enhancing their teaching and their students' learning. In reply to the question "Has Classroom Assessment helped you to teach more effectively?"—one faculty member responded, "Absolutely. Taking this workshop has made me more critical of the way I deliver instructions to my students. I think any improvement of their learning is worth my time."❖

Mark Your Calendar for IDEA Conference

Professors Sandra Ridgely and Carol Decker of the Computer Applications Department, Rockville, recently attended a stimulating conference entitled, "Getting Creative About Critical Thinking" in Savannah, Georgia. Teaching techniques to get students actively involved in the learning process were presented. Participants had several opportunities to discuss and develop ideas to help students think critically about course material.

The conference was hosted by IDEA, the Individual Development and Educational Assessment Center from Kansas State University.

Another similar conference, "The Energy of Synergy: Involving Students Effectively in the Classroom," will be held in San Diego on October 29-31, 2000. The focus will be rethinking how students can interact more effectively in college and university classrooms. The cost is \$495, which includes five meals and extensive resource materials. To register on-line, visit *workshops* at www.idea.ksu.edu.

Cable TV Schedule

The CTL Show airs on Mondays at 8 p.m., Tuesdays at 9 p.m., and Thursdays at 9 p.m. on Cable Channel 51.

April 17, 18, 20	International Education
April 24, 25, 27	CS/CA Internship Program
May 1, 2, 4	Macklin Business Institute Jeff Schwartz
May 8, 9, 11	MCCT/Ron Liss MOL/Noreen Lyne
May 15, 16, 18	DL/Buddy Muse ATQ/Lee Alley

Guidelines for Contributions to

Focus on Faculty

The deadline for submission of articles for the fall issue of Focus on Faculty is September 18, 2000. Please submit typed, double-spaced, hard copies of your articles of no more than 800 words and a disk copy in Microsoft Word to:

Center for Teaching and Learning
Room 008, Humanities
Rockville Campus

or send by e-mail to ctl@mc.cc.md.us

This publication was produced by Betsy Becker and Pat Speir for the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Study Groups + Classroom Assessment + Cooperative Learning = A Learning Community

by *Ostein Truitt*
ostruitt@mc.cc.md.us

I have been fortunate to participate in three fellowships, one with Critical Literacy and two with the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). From these experiences I have learned teaching techniques and technology applications that have allowed me to encourage cooperative learning in the Microbiology course I teach on the Takoma Park Campus.

The first day of class students begin to appreciate how their differences in perception can be used to promote positive learning. I present them with a problem, counting the number of boxes within a grid, which can be solved in a variety of ways. After they share their varying perceptions of the same material, students understand why collaboration will give them a fuller understanding of their microbiology work.



During the semester, in an effort to encourage cooperation among students, I assign a variety of collaborative classroom assessment activities. Assessments performed in class allow both the teacher and learner to assess and then improve the quality of learning. CTL associate Joan Naake presents many valuable seminars on the use of Classroom Assessment Techniques. I highly recommend that all faculty involved in classroom instruction take advantage of them.

I also encourage students to form study groups whenever possible as a means of cooperative learning. I began semiformal study groups in the Science Learning Center on the Takoma Park Campus. Students were required to attend at least once a week for about 40 to 50 minutes and were encouraged to meet on their own whenever possible. It is a documented fact that students who engage in conversation and discussion of class material outside of the classroom increase their learning and perform better in the class. Students often use the assessment

techniques we used in class during their study group sessions.

With assessments and study groups, students learn cooperatively to accomplish shared goals. Cooperative learning is a process in which students work together in small groups on tasks that are prepared by the instructor. It is imperative that all students be held accountable for both their individual performance and their contributions to the end product. The students

benefit by working together in small settings that are low risk, learning to depend on each other and not just the teacher, learning interdependence, and enhancing their problem-solving skills. I believe the greatest advantage of all is that students are engaged and active in learning. With cooperative activities,

students develop an attitude of caring for one another and a desire to see everyone in their group succeed. From these experiences, friendships are established that often continue after the semester has ended.

Technology gives yet another opportunity for students to collaborate and thus enhance learning. I am currently using an on-line education company, Blackboard.com, to accomplish this. Blackboard provides a platform for teaching and learning on the Web. This service allows for effective use of technology to enhance the learning experience. Eventually I plan for students to form study groups on-line, providing yet another opportunity to collaborate on class material.

Students working together collaboratively will create an environment that is positive and encouraging. One definition of a community is a body of people working to accomplish shared goals. A classroom environment that allows for students to work together on educational goals, sharing and caring for one another, could certainly be considered a learning community!❖

Ancient Method, Modern Application: Socratic Dialogue in the Classroom

by *Laura Mentz*
docljm@aol.com

In college level composition classes, a collective groan is heard. “Why do I have to learn expository writing? . . . I’m an engineering major; none of this will ever matter.” But as any teacher will tell you, the ability to explore topics, question and examine information, and suspend hasty judgments about those topics is essential to writing across the curriculum.

I sought some way of helping my students enjoy the curiosity, exploration, and careful examination of a subject before leaping to a conclusion. I wanted them to see analytical writing as an inviting opportunity to explore what mattered to them and experiment with its meaning and implications. I found success in the Socratic dialogue.

Modeled on the dialogues of Plato, Socratic dialogues as I use them in the classroom invite students to question and respond in pairs to an issue or topic of interest to them. The topics of dialogues are suggested by the students, while I merely create characters and compose the first one or two exchanges. The dialogues are not at all about defending oneself and defeating an opponent; they are about honest inquiry in the search for probable truth. Exploring the meaning and implications of an issue, focusing on the heart of a matter, and drawing reasonable conclusions are what the Socratic dialogue facilitates.

I introduce the Socratic dialogue about the fourth week of the semester, after students have written in their journals and thought about topics that might interest them. Then, about midterm, the dialogues become forums to examine and defend a position on some subject. Although I don’t require it, students often want to continue with the same subject or subjects they worked on the first half of the semester, since they feel excited and confident about the expertise they’ve gained. I certainly don’t discourage that!

First, students are invited to peruse the subjects, posted on walls around the room. The subjects are suggested by the students, based on their majors and journal writings. I add my own if the class seems particularly undecided. In pairs, students choose one or more topics of interest and work on the dialogue for most of the

class period. There are no right or wrong answers, but students are expected to explore what they know – and don’t know – about the topic without leaping to judgments based on personal opinion. I model this activity by giving students, first, a dialogue from Plato followed by student samples. I often butt in on pairs, particularly if they get stuck or fall into a judgmental mode. This chain of reasoning is written (example below) and handed back and forth about 4–5 times initially, then grows as more information is added in weeks following. One stipulation is that each student write a minimum of four sentences per exchange. After the dialogues have continued for some time, students are asked to transform them into prose. Students find that organizing the material is easier, since

Sample Dialogue

Say Again? Official English Movement

You may be surprised to learn that U.S. lawmakers have never proclaimed English the official national language. That’s right: we have no official language.

In pairs, brainstorm for 3 to 4 minutes on why we don’t. Then, write a dialogue in which you explore the various reasons in detail.

NOTE: try to stay away from making a judgment or an opinion! (that it is good or bad) Just stick with exploring the probable reasons.

_____: Wow! I just learned that the United States has no official language. We must be the only one. Can you think why not?

_____: There are so many immigrants to this country, so maybe they think it would be unfair to force just a single language on them.

_____: But don’t you agree that immigrants should learn English? They’ll have a really hard time if they don’t.

the writing follows the natural order a reader would want the information.

Often, the dialogues continue for an entire semester, as students bring more information and evidence to add to the topics they’ve chosen. By the end of the semester, even my engineering major sees the value of the technique – he can show off what he knows, learn what he doesn’t know, and grow as a writer, researcher and, above all, a critical thinker. ❖

“What Works in the Classroom”: Teaching Analysis with a Magazine Advertisement

by Marjorie Raley
mraley@mc.cc.md.us

When I was working in a university writing center a few years ago, a student came in with an assignment that puzzled her. She was to do a close reading of a poem and didn't know where to begin. “Did you do the ad analysis paper in your freshman writing class by any chance?” I asked her. “Yes,” she said, “Is that all I have to do?” Well, no and yes: She would have to work with the elements and strategies of a different genre, but she could use the same process of analysis.



So many freshman composition teachers ask students to analyze a magazine advertisement that no one has to argue its usefulness in teaching this process. How effectively the assignment teaches analysis, however, depends on the strategies used. Two tools that I use and frequently retool in EN101 are a questionnaire and a schema I call the “A, B, C's of Analysis.” These tools correspond to the stages the students undergo in drafting: (1) brainstorming or making close observations about their advertisement to discover its elements, assumptions, and implied audiences, (2) moving from these observations to a discovery of function and meaning, and (3) organizing this analysis and getting it down on paper.

Writing the Questionnaire

I use the questionnaire first. Students are savvy about the wily ways of advertisers, but they need to be encouraged to look carefully, thoroughly, and thoughtfully at their ad. Close observation is often a new task for them, so the questionnaire—which is really a worksheet that the students help to create—prompts and demonstrates this process. The class period before I distribute the assignment packet, students discuss advertising, compare and contrast print ads (a smart classroom makes this part easy), and generate the items for the questionnaire. Unsurprisingly, the list of items—visual elements, verbal elements, themes, values, appeals, cultural myths and assumptions—is pretty much the same class to class. The benefit of the written questionnaire is that it organizes these items. I not only record the items generated in class, but I

structure them so that the students move from context questions to specific details to questions of theme and meaning.

I have rewritten the questionnaire many times, but the section headings generally include **audience, elements, appeals, and the real message**. Under audience are overview and context questions such as “Where does the ad come from? Who reads this source? What can the advertisers expect these readers to value, desire, need, and want to do? Do different groups read this source? Which group or groups does the ad seem to target? How do you know?” The elements category has subsections, including “figures or models,” which asks students to describe clothes, poses, facial expressions and gaze, race, gender, and position with respect to the product or product name. Based on their observations, students are then asked to make assumptions about the figures' social status, occupations, desires, values, and relationship. In other words, they begin to unveil the figures' “story.” In the last section, students are encouraged to explore how the observations they've made are important in defining and creating the ad's real message. “Now put the pieces back together. What story is developed through the various elements? What particular desirable image is created? What are the characteristics or components of this image? What does the ad promise will happen to the reader if he or she buys the product? What story will they participate in? What cultural theme? What is the ad's real message?”

Using the A, B, C's of Analysis

As you can see, designing the questionnaire is key. A common pitfall of this essay assignment is writing the “ad X is effective” paper organized as a list of elements. A worksheet with subsections should ultimately be designed to cut across visual and verbal elements to identify themes or “story” elements rather than to isolate out elements like “color” or “words.”

Translating their observations to paper can also be problematic for students. Students may have a lot to

say about a visual or thematic component, but they may get little of this down on paper. Their essays may not have enough description, enough explanation of significance, or enough connection to the larger theme they are developing. Here's where the A, B, C's of Analysis helps. Each letter corresponds to a question. A is the "what" or the observation. B, the most frequently omitted step, is the "how" or an explanation of how the observed item functions. C, the final step, is the "why" or a statement of the larger meaning or purpose that this item contributes to. Students should be able to label the parts of their analysis with the corresponding letter and diagnose which steps remain. This schema, I tell my students, works very well for literature papers too.

Examples From Drafts

The following excerpts from my students' rough drafts show the benefits of these activities. This draft analyzes a magazine advertisement for a horse breeding farm's horse semen. In my comments, I asked the writer to add a bit more "A" to the paragraph and to discuss the importance of "moving on their own."

(1) "The bottom half of the page is dedicated to his offspring. All four horses have some white on them and are good movers, showing good extension. Traits which they obviously inherited from their sire. Three out of four pictures are of the young horses moving freely out in the field which will give you a good idea of how they move on their own. The fourth picture is of a horse being shown "in hand." When a horse is shown in hand, they are judged on their confirmation, their behavior, and their movement. These types of classes at shows are very competitive. You would usually only enter a horse that is almost perfect. The reason for showing his offspring is so that you can see that he has passed on his good traits. It is one thing to have a talented stallion, but it is another to have a talented stallion that produces talented offspring. Good offspring is what the breeding business is all about."

This draft analyzes a Camel cigarette advertisement. Like example A, I asked the writer to provide a bit more "A" in order to tell the reader what specifically about the clothing leads her to conclude it is Arabian

or kingly. I also asked if this group of women is supposed to suggest a harem and if that is the male utopia she refers to.

(2) "The people themselves and this float are the main focus of this ad. On this float there is one man surrounded by five women. The man is in the center and in front of the women. They are all dressed in elaborate and what seems like Arabian clothing. The women all have veils over their faces, which takes away from their individuality so that more attention may be focused on the man. You can still see, however, that they are all attractive women, and are all extremely decorative. The man is dressed in what seems like the attire of a king or some authority figure, admired by all. His arms are not only raised like the others but they seem to say—'welcome to my world.' And of course, we have to note that this powerful figure is smoking a Camel cigarette. All of these figures and their visual body language help to create this inviting male utopia."

On this draft, which analyzes a L.L. Bean advertisement, I asked the writer to provide more "A" about the boat.

(3) "The simplicity of the relationship between ocean and man is emphasized by the type of sailboat he owns. This is not an expensive cruise yacht or hi-tech pleasure boat. This is a simple down-to-earth vessel which require extensive sailing skills, courage in open sea and, what is most important, extensive experience. This man definitely lives in the ocean, not looks for pleasure. The ad does not give the idea that this man is rich, by contrast he uses an old boat. He is the part of the world where money is secondary to freedom. The one who buys L.L. Bean does not care as much about money as he cares about his equipment." ❖

The Surprising Joys of Scholarship

by Cynthia Drake

drakec@gusun.georgetown.edu

This is a tale of serendipity, of the unexpected treasures lurking in the borderlands of our curricula. I found myself last semester searching furiously for a text that would keep my more disengaged freshman composition students reading all the way to the end—in other words, a good story. The text that I used, Jon Krakauer’s *Into Thin Air* (a first-person account of a tragic expedition up Mt. Everest), yielded so much more than attentive readers; my students were pushed beyond their narrow points of reference, and, in the process, caught a glimpse of the satisfaction of intellectual inquiry.

I believe that we do a good job at Montgomery College of shaping our syllabi to incorporate the breadth of diverse cultures and experiences of our students. In English 101 they have ample practice writing about themselves, their histories, families, and beliefs, and they often gain deeper appreciation of the richness and complexities of their own lives. By English 102, however, we would like students to learn how to extend their gaze and start to write with authority about the world around them. The challenge we face as teachers is often convincing them that there are things out there, beyond their direct experience, worth knowing and studying.

I hit upon the idea of using *Into Thin Air* in a flash of inspired lunacy. I myself had not read the book and indeed had no real interest in doing so. But I was struck by the impact that the book had on people I knew. It seemed to have a magical force that turned otherwise sane and ordinary individuals into impassioned dreamers who had to read other books about Everest and mountain climbing. The book has everything a great story should: it’s got heroes and villains, tragedy and triumph, survival and death. It’s got science, adventure, sex, and spirituality. And, best of all for my purposes, it has all of the elements of argumentation that we study in the course.

Within 50 pages, most of my students were as hooked as I was. They wanted to know who survived the storm and how. They got angry at the selfish and

incompetent climbers who might have contributed to the tragedy. They suffered through the bouts of altitude sickness with the climbers. And they began to construct arguments. Krakauer himself weaves an extended argument through his book about the problems and dangers of commercially guided climbing expeditions. The students start to engage with his argument even before they realize that this is what they are doing. Then, when we study the components of argument, we turn to Krakauer for examples of claims, support, warrants, etc. We go on to craft our own arguments about mountain climbing, about the people featured in the book, and about Krakauer himself.

One of the things that I find so compelling and satisfying in this experience of teaching *Into Thin Air* is that my students are so urban. Many of them have never spent any time in the wilderness, let alone on a mountain. And yet as they engage with the material, they become very informed arguers. They have a feel for the experience of hypoxia and hypothermia; they recognize the difference between being at 23,000 and 26,000 feet. This ability to converse knowingly about esoteric matters is one of the pleasures of academic work. I watch with delight as even the grumblers join the conversation. Despite their best defenses, they have become mini experts; they can feel the genuineness of their knowledge and confidence.

It felt very risky to assign this book. I suspected that many of my students would enjoy reading it, but I worried that they would not be willing to extend themselves beyond the immediate narrative. One of the great outcomes has been to see students coming to class with piles of books from the library, or having discovered a new web site that contains some useful information. It has turned the entire class into a place where resources are shared and where focused attention can produce an argument. ❖

Capturing Generation 1.5 Students

by Gail Schmitt

gschmitt@mc.cc.md.us

The current EL 103 course was designed a number of years ago when the typical EL student was a newcomer to the country, unfamiliar with the language and culture. Since then, however, an increasing percentage of EL 103 students are from “Generation 1.5.” These students come from families in which English is the second language, and they have graduated from U. S. high schools. Surprisingly, research done by Helena Wong, Roseli Ejzenberg, and Sharon Mandel of Montgomery College showed that these Generation 1.5 students are less successful in EL courses overall than are first generation, newer arrivals to the American scene. I was eager to find out if a change in course assignments might improve the performance of Generation 1.5 students.

My CTL/ Diversity Institute project was devised to add two major components to the existing course: introduction of computer-based activities and collaborative learning assignments, both of which are learning methods familiar to U.S. high school graduates. It was also important to choose high-interest, meaningful activities to engage jaded, unenthusiastic students.

In creating a computer component to the course, I found Sue Liggett’s suggestion to use Blackboard.com very helpful. I was able to make a coursesite with a page of assignments for our class which the students access by any Web-connected computer.

The first assignment was to compare and contrast the positions of Vice President Gore and Governor Bush on educational savings plans, presumably a high-interest topic to college students. The information was available at the candidates’ websites, which were hot links on the assignment page.

The second assignment was to contrast two occupations, an optometrist and a hotel and restaurant manager, as described in the Occupational Outlook Handbook from the U.S. Department of Labor, also a hot link on the assignment page. In this assignment each student was to choose his/her own two occupations and write a comparison / contrast paragraph about them.

Collaboration among students was an important component of both assignments to ensure students shared and understood the information prior to writing their paragraphs. The goal of these three assignments was to teach the techniques of comparison and contrast with text that would be personally meaningful to the students.

The last new writing assignment will be a persuasive argument paragraph based on something each student would like to see changed at Montgomery College. Collaboration will be an important component of this assignment as well, for students will brainstorm ideas about MC facilities, food service, academics, and social life. To make this assignment even more meaningful to the students, I plan to post each student’s paragraph on the coursesite, accompanied by his/ her photograph. The administration will be advised of this class project so that they may serve as the real audience for these ideas, in contrast to typical assignments in which the teacher is the only audience. To view the coursesite go to www.blackboard.com and enter course name EL 103.

The computer-savvy students in the class had no trouble accessing the coursesite. A few students were completely inexperienced with computers and needed help obtaining an e-mail account, a prerequisite for using Blackboard.com. One student out of 24 has not participated in either of the two essential computer orientation sessions and instead has depended on printed copy rather than the computer screen, as have a few others. Students inexperienced with computers have begun to catch up with others, and students experienced with computers have improved their academic skills using a medium they enjoy.

My hope is that by avoiding traditional writing assignments suitable for newcomers to this country, such as comparing and contrasting elements of two different cultures, Generation 1.5 students will become more engaged in meaningful, computer-based writing assignments. Newcomers still benefit by this reformulation of some of the course writing assignments because it hastens their familiarity with American academic materials and technology. ❖