



The Forum

Sharing Information on Teaching and Learning

Fall 1999
Vol. 8 Issue 1
IN THIS ISSUE...

FORUM

Student Voices
Page 1

Taking Learning and
Leadership Seriously
Page 2

Redefining the Learning
Environment
Page 2

A Win-Win Situation for
Everyone
Page 3

Challenging Beliefs
about Good Teaching
Page 4

Student Collaboration
Page 4

An Emphasis on Quality
Learning
Page 5

Involvement in the
Teaching Process
Page 5

Providing Support and
Motivation
Page 6

The Human Side of
Education
Page 6

Learning and Sharing
Page 7

No Place for Prejudice
Page 7

Learning at a
Community College:
An International
Perspective
Page 9

ASSIDERE

Getting Students
Involved in Assessment
Page 10

Students Sharing Their
Learning
Page 10

Maricopa
Center for
Learning and
Instruction

Student Voices—Insights on Invaluable Learning Experiences

JOHN NELSON, PVCC

Tucked away in last spring's issue of the *Labyrinth/Forum/Assidere* is an impressive piece written by student author Kathy Farrish. In her article, Farrish praises the instructor of her learning community class "Composition/Humanities and Technology Learning" for creating an environment in which students can listen to one another and share their unique cultural identities. She concludes by encouraging the instructors in her reading audience to likewise provide meaningful and life-changing educational experiences. We on the *Labyrinth/Forum/Assidere* staff couldn't help but remember the impact of Kathy's work. Her article was sincere, perceptive, and exciting. We were also moved because it conveyed so clearly a story of a student's pivotal educational experience; it provided a profound lesson about teaching that our audience needs to know.

Based on Farrish's story, this fall's theme, "Student Voices: Seeds for Meaningful Dialogue About Learning," was conceived with the intent that our students do the writing. All of us on the *Labyrinth/Forum/Assidere* staff agreed that Kathy had shared something significant and, although educating students requires effective delivery, it also requires listening—listening to the experiences that have so engaged our students. So, for this issue our goal is to open a dialogue in which we are involved in the dynamic of sharing and listening.

What exactly are these student insights?

Essentially, our writers touch on the fundamental issues of effective teaching and learning. While their perception is a little different than the way we have been conditioned to think after so many years of our own educational coursework, national conventions, and professional seminars, our writers' conclusions go to the heart of the matter. They address the very soul of education where learning objectives become reality and change is initiated.

Our student authors share their insights about the core values that emerge from the learning process. The highlights of only a few of our many student authors clearly reveal what is significant to them.

Paradise Valley Community College's Shelley Clapp tells us that education is all about her teachers' compassion, because it was this compassion and class involvement which provided the necessary support to motivate her into even greater educational goals. Brandi Jones, one of our authors from South Mountain Community College, says it is quality learning which motivates her. For Brandi, learning is not about grades, but it is all about acquiring real skills and understanding while meeting her own standards. In addition to the ideas of quality learning and confidence building, Pam Akina, a student at Chandler-Gilbert Community College, tells her story of the satisfaction she received while sharing her learning with others. Pam relates the discovery of her work's emotional impact and potential for contributing to the success of others.

Personally, I have shared in this dynamic and excitement as I worked with each of these students. This experience has been tremendously reassuring. It has helped me maintain my perspective about the teaching profession and reinforces education's central purpose—motivating and engaging our students in their learning.

Now, let's allow the students to take over in this essential part of the dialogue. We will do well to listen, for as Robert Conklin states, "People don't care how much you know, but they know how much you care, by the way you listen." ▲

Spotlight

Taking Learning and Leadership Seriously by Becoming a True Faculty Learner

NAOMI STORY, MCC

Today is September 17, 1999, my last day as the District's Director for Learning, Instruction, and Assessment at the Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction (MCLI). John Nelson has asked me to write a final piece for the *Labyrinth/Forum/Assidere*. So, on this day of very mixed emotions, I thought I would try to "tick" this off of my task list as I reflect on my journey to Mesa Community College (MCC) with MCLI as my "trail head."

The Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction has been my "base camp" for years now. It has been a starting point for many faculty who have needed support. It is also a place for respite, a gathering of resources and ideas among colleagues who want to do majestic changes. The All-Faculty Convocation, Faculty Dialogue Days, the *Labyrinth/Forum/Assidere*, the MCLI web site, the monographs by faculty, experimental project opportunities, and other aspects of the MCLI have helped many, including me, to do those things that impress many colleagues outside of Maricopa.

The staff at the MCLI have always been attentive and willing to do the things that are cumbersome for those of us who dislike details, need our hands held, or want to explore with experts. From the inside, I have been privileged and fortunate to work with this creative and energetically warm staff. And on this final day, I am feeling like I did the first time I came to the "Mainland" from Hawaii. In fact, like my mother who packed me an "o-bento" of comfort foods from Hawaii for my first plane ride from Maui to Iowa, the MCLI staff gave me a basket of office comfort goodies for the journey to my new position as faculty director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at MCC.

...Here I am at Mesa Community College. I am learning much. For example, yesterday I learned from a brief meeting with some of the members of our Distance Learning Committee led by Steve Budge that it is not easy work to teach via Internet. The complexities and disconnectedness of the systems and tools can exacerbate the needs of dozens of students who expect instant individualized feedback. I

am also challenged by the creativity of faculty and their diverse content and instructional design needs. However, the joy is that the group learns and grows laughingly with their pains and tribulations as pioneers of change. In addition, as part of the CTL, I get to interact constantly with our Student Technical Assistants who are applying their skill and knowledge directly with faculty clients and real projects to develop and manage.

It's only been a month since I landed here at MCC. So, like the many student voices you will hear in this issue of the *Labyrinth/Forum/Assidere*, my senses of learning and leadership have heightened as a unique and active participant. My hopes are that more people—faculty, administrators, and staff—see themselves leading the Learning movement and not just defining learning as something that occurred in their past lives.

Perhaps, as I continue on my journey, I can share more with our Maricopa Learning Community.



Learning Communities—Redefining the Learning Environment

NANCY SIEFER, GCC

Learning communities combine two or more courses around interdisciplinary themes or common questions. Last semester Ann Brandt-Williams and I offered a learning community linking PSY240 "Developmental Psychology" and ENG213 "Introduction Language." Laura Kinney, a student in this learning community, exemplifies how learning community students assume responsibility for teaching and learning with their peers and instructors, learning not only to synthesize concepts from both courses but to apply them to their lives and future careers. Her experiences have caused her to redefine her requirements for an effective learning environment.

Learning Communities—A Win-Win Situation for Everyone: A Student's View

LAURA KINNEY, GCC STUDENT

Recently, I experienced a new learning environment that allowed me to flourish as a student. The environment was a learning community which linked developmental psychology PSY240 with the study of language ENG213.

After having been a member of a learning community, I believe traditional courses short-change students. Let me explain why. Traditional courses typically consist of one teacher dispensing knowledge to a passive group of students. In contrast, the learning community I participated in was team-taught by two teachers who truly facilitated learning. I was exposed to many methods of teaching that enhanced our community members' various learning styles. The teachers also structured the learning community to encourage class discussion, which enabled the community members to learn from each other. It was during these discussions that I discovered the diversity of our community.

Although age and race differences are outwardly visible, life experiences, personality, and learning styles are not. Our community shared these differences and used them as resources for learning, as well as opportunities to open our minds to others' viewpoints. For example, during a discussion on adolescence, my peers explained the experiences of being a bi-racial teenager, a teenager growing up in a rural community, a first generation American teenager, and what it was like being a teenager during the last five decades. The discussions also bonded us together. I spent time outside of class with my peers participating in study groups in which we discussed personal issues and worked on joint assignments. I seldom connect with other students like this in traditional courses.

Traditional courses tested my short-term memory skills and focused on preparing for the next test. The learning community, however, showed me the "big picture"—the interconnectedness of learning and subject matter. Since I am the parent of a young child, I found our discussions on child development and parenting helpful and timely because it helped me move toward a parenting style that is better suited for my child. The opportunity to discuss what I was learning and apply it to my own life experiences helped put into practice what I learned.

Not only is a learning community the best environment for students, but I also believe teachers will benefit from learning communities as well. I have been through many traditional lectures and witnessed the body language of teacher burnout—the heavy sighs, the fading voice, the slumped body held up by the podium, the frantic race to "cover" material as opposed to making sure the students are learning the material. In the learning community, I witnessed teacher satisfaction. The teachers did not separate themselves from the community—they were part of it. During the discussions, the teachers got instant feedback on whether or not we understood a concept.

And, it was obvious the teachers were joyfully learning from each other and the students.

I hope that more learning communities will be offered at Glendale Community College. They offer a win-win situation—students are truly learning both inside and outside the class by connecting with other students and interacting with teachers. Teachers are reaping the benefits of knowing their students can synthesize material, as opposed to just memorizing it, and teachers get a rare opportunity to actively learn from one another. I know the restructuring required to implement more learning communities will cause some administrative groans, but the benefits to students, faculty, and our community outweigh the challenges.

I am currently enrolled in an Art History class, and I can't help but think about the awesome possibilities as a learning community this class would provide if it were combined with ENG101. As a future teacher I am looking forward to designing and implementing my own learning communities.



Spotlight

Dynamic Learning: Challenging Beliefs About Good Teaching

JACKIE JAAP, SMCC

Teacher education programs cannot effectively prepare tomorrow's teachers using yesterday's mental models of teaching and learning. These programs must move beyond instruction in the method of "delivering" content and skills, controlling student behavior by using punishment and rewards, and testing and grading students. They must, instead, focus on an understanding of the ways people learn and the ways of creating a collaborative classroom. Also, they must focus on methods of connecting students with the joy of learning. Understanding of genuine systemic change, with an emphasis on interconnectedness and complexity, should be the exit goal for every prospective teacher.

In the Dynamic Learning Teacher Education Program at South Mountain Community College, a team of faculty members spends

four semesters with a cohort of future teachers. During this period of time, our faculty team challenges their assumptions and deeply entrenched beliefs about "good" teaching. Through questions, research, collaborative projects, and field experiences, our students gradually make connections between theory and educational practice, and they build their own educational philosophies based on how human beings learn. In this article, three Dynamic Learning students share their thoughts about the teaching and learning process.

Estevan Rivera is a senior in the College of Education at Arizona State University. When Estevan entered Dynamic Learning in 1996, his first words were, "What do I need to do to get an 'A'? Can I get extra credit?" However, he was the first in our class to purchase his own

copy of Alfie Kohn's *Punished by Reward*, and he has found a constructivist school for his own children. Brandi Jones, a junior education major in the Honors College at Arizona State University, just completed an internship with the Department of Education in Washington D.C. Since joining the Dynamic Learning Program in 1997, she has become a strong advocate for abolishing competition and grades in schools and has acquired an extensive home library in current research on teaching and learning. Jenny Casselman is a sophomore in Dynamic Learning at South Mountain Community College. Since enrolling in the program in 1998, her field experiences have encouraged her to study bilingual education and dual language classrooms.

Dynamic Learning: Student Collaboration

ESTEVAN RIVERA, SMCC

"Quiet down, eyes forward, pencils down, now you will do as I say. Everything I say is right because I am the instructor and I am always right."

Maybe this scene is a little drastic, but in reality even in this day, teachers repeatedly drill and mold students into submissively regurgitating facts used to measure academic achievement. The students are not being prepared by quality of education, but instead by a quantitative form of education, one that can be measured to satisfy interest groups at the federal, state, district, and community levels. It is in this context that many educators fall immensely short of teaching students the "love of learning."

The source of my learning experience comes from several cities in three different states. I remember the traditional three R's as well as

the traditional classroom setting. It seemed as if the teacher was in an imaginary cubicle that could not be penetrated by the students. We were in the same classroom but in different areas. One could question, then, if my experiences of learning were so bad, how did I learn? My interaction with my fellow classmates had a lot to do with my gaining knowledge. Since my family moved around a lot, I relied on my classmates to bring me up to par on what the class had completed. The teachers I had also assisted (whether or not they knew it at the time) by placing me with a partner. You see, the student became the teacher, and I was more comfortable conversing with someone my own age.

Dynamic Learning reintroduced me to this philosophy of peer/students collaboration with a more hands-on, teacher-as-partner environment. At first, I was reluctant to let

go of my traditional beliefs about learning. This was understandable because I, like many others, had been drilled repetitively with the traditional methods. The Dynamic Learning Program takes learning and teaching to a deeper level, with real-world applications and stresses, above all else, the success of all students. It is this philosophy that has inspired me to achieve high academic standards, not for myself but my fellow colleagues, my community, and students I may teach in the future.



Spotlight

Dynamic Learning: An Emphasis on Quality Learning

BRANDI JONES, SMCC

I walked into class last week and overheard two girls talking. One of the girls was telling the other how she had spent six hours, the night before, studying for a test. As a result she was only able to get forty-five minutes of sleep. She seemed very proud of this fact and figured she would therefore get a good grade on her test.

My question is—had she really learned anything, or was she just studying for the grade? I'm willing to guess that she was just studying for the grade with no thought of wanting to learn about the subject. By stressing things that are “going to be on the test” and telling students what they must do to “get an A,” teachers lead students to believe that the point of school is getting good grades. By helping us to put grades out of our minds and

focusing on the topics, Dynamic Learning has shown me what school is really about. It is about learning.

I graduated from the Dynamic Learning program in the Spring of 1999. I began Dynamic Learning not knowing what I really wanted to do with my life but knowing that I love kids and wanted to do something that would make a difference. After discovering what real learning is about, I have found that teaching is my life's passion.

In Dynamic Learning there is no emphasis on grades. The emphasis is on learning. We do not study things because they will be on a test. We study them because we want to learn. During my second semester in the program, we were asked to write our educational

philosophy. The emphasis was not placed on the grade that we would receive for the project but on what this paper would hopefully mean for us. I was intrinsically motivated to write the paper thinking that this paper would be the best piece of writing I had ever done. After writing the paper, I finally realized what it means to have excellence in my work. It is important to have my own standards to work for, not those that grades supposedly reflect.

Up to this point, I had made good grades in my classes, but, I had not actually learned. I now have a totally different view on learning and formal education. This will help me with my students as I help them to learn.

Dynamic Learning: Involvement in the Teaching Process

JENNY CASSELMAN, SMCC

What exactly is Dynamic Learning? It is a method of teaching like no other. By moving away from the traditional classroom of boring lectures and pointless tests, these classrooms are full of group discussions and thought-provoking, real-life situations. Also, the students run the classroom. They develop a set of rules and consequences for the classroom, and they create a club for the future teachers. However, the best part of Dynamic Learning is the wonderful learning experiences.

I became interested in teaching after watching my two younger nephews enter school. I noticed how happy and excited they were to learn, and I knew that I somehow wanted to be associated with a similar experience. After hearing about Dynamic Learning, I knew that this was a chance to help me achieve my goals. Little did I know of the great opportunities that it would provide. Also, I had fun, interesting classes. As a second-year student in the program, I feel that Dynamic Learning has given me the experiences that other programs may not have offered to someone who is just

beginning. Also, these classes have provided me with an abundance of knowledge, strategies, and philosophies that will help me become a great teacher.

Walking into my field classroom on the first day of observation, I did not know what to expect. Because it was a bilingual classroom, I anticipated that many of the kids were going to be Hispanic and speak Spanish. To my surprise, this was not the case. The classrooms were racially mixed, and all of the children were speaking Spanish as well as English. This was a very valuable experience for me. I was able to follow a group of students for a semester and evaluate their growth as learners. Additionally, I was able to learn many different approaches to teaching students.

The Dynamic Learning program is much more advanced than any other teacher preparation program available. In only the first semester, students are entering the classroom to be passive observers of different teaching styles. During the second semester, students actually

become teachers' aides. They can do small group activities, work one-on-one, or they can present a lesson. Since this program is based primarily on what the student wants, the teachers place you in classrooms based on what specialization you choose i.e., elementary, secondary, bilingual, or special education.

Because it is not a typical classroom, Dynamic Learning has become an exceptional program. It is an advanced way of teaching and learning. Instead of tests and lectures, our instructors discuss real problems, and we are taught different methods of teaching. By allowing students the opportunity to be in the field, they are given an advantage to succeed. Dynamic Learning is building a better future for students and teachers. ▲

Spotlight

Learning Communities—Providing Support and Motivation

SALLY RINGS, PVCC

In Spring, 1998, Sherry Adams and I offered a learning community that integrated reading and writing for developmental students. We wanted students to experience reading and writing as interwoven processes rather than as separate entities.

On the first day of class, sitting among a sea of young faces, was a returning woman with “eager” and “scared” written on her face. As the weeks progressed, “scared” evaporated as Shelley Clapp came to understand not only that she was growing as a reader and writer but also that she could effectively support other students in their work. The collaboration among students and teachers that is characteristic of learning communities proved to be fertile ground for Shelley’s re-entry into college. Her confidence grew, and she became involved in other campus activities, notably student leadership. In the year-and-a-half since Shelley first came to PVCC, she has become a student who has made significant contributions to the life of this campus. She is a personification of the theme for that learning community: “Transitions.”

The Human Side of Education—What Really Matters!

SHELLEY CLAPP, PVCC

At age forty, and after working as an X-Ray Technologist for twenty years, I decided it was time for a different career. I knew it would require going back to school and a lot of hard work. At my age, school seemed like a frightening idea. I was venturing into a world of fast-paced, youthful minds, and this was extremely intimidating to me. Due to a long absence from the educational arena, most of my basic classes did not transfer. Therefore, I was required to take a placement test. Well, much to my dismay, I was placed not in an advanced reading class, Honors English, or ENG101. No, I was to begin my venture in a combination English and Reading class titled ENG/RDG092. My heart sank; I immediately felt defeated. Surely, there must have been a mistake. At that moment, I began to question my worthiness as a person and as a student. Would I truly be able to accomplish my college goals?

One can only imagine the emotional roller coaster I was riding as I questioned my abilities until the first day I walked into my English/Reading class. The class was comprised of a wide range of ages and ethnic backgrounds. They all appeared to have the same look of fear as I. Little did I realize at the time, Dr. Rings and Mrs. Adams would not only teach me proper sentence structure and important thinking skills, but they would also express their genuine interest in me. Dr. Rings’ and Mrs. Adams’ compassion was vital in

promoting my self-worth and provided me with the motivation I needed to continue my education.

Through my daily commitment of class attendance, I quickly realized that returning to the world of academia was not just about learning the discipline. The once formidable task of maintaining a household, working at the hospital, shuttling children off to their athletic practices, and finding time for me, now became an even more rigorous task. However, there was a benefit I had not counted on. I began learning more about myself through the discipline of my studies. Dr. Rings and Mrs. Adams helped me do this. For example, one of their most important writing assignments was a short paragraph designed to help me discover myself. Even though I revealed to Mrs. Adams and Dr. Rings my feelings of fear, personal transparencies, and vulnerabilities, I realized that, in order to learn and grow as a person and student, I needed to look inward and evaluate my strengths and weaknesses. Dr. Rings and Mrs. Adams seemed to always understand my vulnerability; this understanding exerted an incredible amount of influence on my education. Their cheery “hellos” and soft pats on my back silenced my fears as they continually challenged me as a student. As a result, they changed my educational destiny.

Not only did they understand my inner turmoil, but their compassion was also expressed for personal situations, which sometimes controlled my life. When I was unable to attend a class or complete an assignment because I was taking a sick child to the doctor or addressing a high school discipline problem, their compassion was demonstrated. As a student, these are tremendous gifts from an instructor. Dr. Rings and Mrs. Adams both took a genuine interest in me as an individual first. Then by getting to know me, they helped nurture me as a student.

These qualities of understanding and compassion could be observed by their methods of involvement in the classroom dynamics. Their participation became the moving force directing the class. Through their participation, they demonstrated respect and compassion for the students’ progressive stages of academic development. For instance, the class was once having difficulty understanding the concept of a preposition and a prepositional phrase. After repeated attempts of writing sentences on the board, Mrs. Adams asked the entire class to stand. She then said we were to pretend we were a mouse. She used the analogy that if the mouse could do it to a mountain, it was a preposition.

continued on the next page...

<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/labyforum/>



Spotlight

As silly as it sounds, I continue to use that analogy to this day. For the first time, I understood that learning a new skill could take on a variety of forms and functions.

Teachers play an important role in the lives of their students: mentor, instructor, and counselor. Oftentimes, it is not the academic discipline which matters most; it is the five minutes of an understanding ear and a kind face that is enough to get a student through tough times. If this is done, the academics will follow.

Therefore, the simple act of empathy and kindness must never be underestimated. I

think these gestures of compassion are what make the memories of my ENG/RDG092 class so special to me. It was the willingness of Mrs. Adams and Dr. Rings to listen to my fears and their expressed concerns about my day-to-day family situations which eliminated the self-doubt that crept into my mind. It was their human compassion combined with the ENG/RDG092 content that made this class most rewarding for me. These gestures were extremely significant in my eyes, and it has been a tremendous motivating factor as I continue to strive for my goal: a degree in dietetics.



Learning and Sharing

JUNE KRAFT, RSC

Andrew Bullion attends classes at the Perryville prison campus where he is a continuing Rio Salado College student in both the Chemical Dependency and Computer Technology programs. In addition to continuing his education, he works as an aide to the substance abuse counselor at the prison. Andrew maintains, "The knowledge I gained from the Chemical Dependency program is paying huge dividends for me already. It made the difference when the job I now have became available. The Level I Certification through Rio Salado gave me a clear advantage. Also, I am able to share that knowledge with others, which means a lot to me." Andrew has taught as an education aid both literacy and GED for about seven years in the Department of Corrections. His main teaching areas are Science and Mathematics. His teaching experience has been with adult students from varying backgrounds, cultures, and economic status. He explains the diversity of his students as being similar to the different types of herbs. "Each herb or student has unique qualities and characteristics, but neither is solely special. Yet, when they are blended together — What a delight!" Andrew's views on the classroom environment are indicative of his desire for success and excellence.

No Place for Prejudice

ANDREW BULLION, PERRYVILLE PRISON CAMPUS

When I walk into a classroom for the first time, I am excited about the wealth of knowledge and understanding represented by the total experiences of my classmates and our teacher. The potential for learning and growth is immeasurable. So, why all of the grumbling in the back when I'm speaking, and why doesn't Pablo ever get to finish making his point? Well, there could be many reasons; because our diverse society regularly highlights differences in people. These differences can cause major conflicts if we do not promote tolerance for one another. It can be said that many prejudices are easily recognized, but others are obscure. My life experiences have permitted me to see the varying degrees of prejudice; indeed, I am guilty of allowing prejudicial thoughts creep into my mind from time to time, and I'm sure that I am not alone. My life experiences have also taught me that there is a greater likelihood of prejudice where there is diversification. Accordingly, diversification among students and teachers in America's

continued on next page...

Spotlight

classrooms lends itself towards prejudice; therefore, it is our obligation, as students and teachers, to prevent the ills of prejudice from diluting the educational experience. Prejudice in the classroom severely limits the mutual exchange of ideas and limits the potential for educational growth.

I am not so naive that I would suggest we can live without prejudice, but we can learn to channel prejudicial energies into positive streams. To do that, however, we must be aware of differences of race, sex, age, and perhaps national origin. But, there are many inward or invisible points of prejudice also. These points are only discernible as a class progresses over time. When sharing ideas on religion, political ideas, sexual preferences, economic status, geographical biases, and marital status finally emerge, additional prejudices also surface. For example: homosexuality is not widely accepted in this country, and those who practice that lifestyle are often forced to do so away from public scrutiny. During a class in which the course material focused on cultural and other differences in mainstream America, a discussion was prompted by a student who wanted to learn more about alternative lifestyles. After some serious discussion about various lifestyles, he stated, "If different races are allowed to intermarry, then gay men and women should be allowed to marry." At first there was laughter, but the room grew quiet as the young man repeated his statement. A heckler insultingly commented, "Save your speech for the gay parade." Immediately, our instructor sprang to his feet and demanded order. He then reminded us that we were in class to learn. He talked about the validity of opposing viewpoints and the importance of challenging our prejudices. A new theme was born that day, and it made our class more profitable. From that point on, all ideas were considered equally, and many controversial issues were openly shared. How is that for channeling prejudicial energies into positive streams? For the remainder of the semester, the instructor's closing words were for us to "challenge our prejudices."

As an inmate at Perryville Prison, I attend Rio Salado College. Here our world is a microcosm of the real world, except that social woes and rules are more pronounced. Disease, poverty, illiteracy, oppression, and other problems are doubly bad in this environment. Social rules, also known as the "prison code," can be grossly brutal if violated. The prison code is enforced by convicts—those prisoners sentenced to long sentences for violent crimes and who have a history of opposing the prison administration. What the convicts dictate as being right or wrong is the prison code. It should be noted that respect and honor are the backbone of the prison code. One of the things allowed by the prison code is respectful racism or respectful prejudice. Surprisingly, however, the education

subculture has overcome most of the dictates of the prison code. Perhaps it is because the students and faculty strive to keep the classrooms free of the common prejudices deeply ingrained in the population due to the enforcement of the prison code; otherwise, no one would learn anything. The prison code slants gender bias; it demands racial separation; it esteems longtime convicts over other prisoners; and its rules are extremely rigid. All of these are based on one form of prejudice or another. And, this code could hurt the educational process here.

Our instructors are often faced with the task of maintaining cohesion among the students. In classes where student interaction or grouping is required, the residual effect of the prison code is most prominent. Again, creativity helps to channel negative energies into positive streams. One such display of creativity occurred in a "Models for Growth" class taught by Mirka Rogalski. She abandoned the traditional methods of assigning students to groups or allowing groups to form on their own. Instead, she used the clever technique of requesting the students to stand beside one of several tables which were labeled with different character traits. Each student was asked to stand beside the character trait that best described him. Ironically, the character traits were not specific to any particular cliques, races, or age groups. What was left was several groups with similarities based on something other than the prison code. It was an effective technique because it helped to break through the walls of prejudice.

As stated earlier, "It is our obligation, as students and teachers, to prevent the ills of prejudice from diluting the educational experience." Everyone in the classroom has something of value to offer, and we need to ensure that the exchange of ideas flows freely from teacher to student and from pupil to pupil; otherwise, we would make a mockery of the classroom environment. The classroom is a place in which there should be a free exchange of broad viewpoints and the collection of unbounded minds. It is good that America's classrooms have achieved diversity, and we need to protect them from the effects of prejudice because prejudice restricts academic freedom as much as any school or public official ever could.

We should not allow stereotypes, biases, or "group-think" to stifle growth in the classroom. Our classrooms should be like any other athenaeum—a place for the promotion of learning which requires the full use of one another's abilities, energies, and resources. "Let's be creative and challenge our prejudices in the classroom by learning to channel prejudicial energies into positive streams." ▲



The Forum is published by the Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction
for the faculty of the Maricopa Community Colleges.

Faculty Editor: John Nelson
Assistant Editor: Maria Harper-Marinick, Ph.D.
Layout: Christina Emmons

Learning at a Community College: An International Perspective

MARY JANE ONNEN, GCC, INTRODUCING GCC STUDENTS: CHRISTINA ÖRNEMARK AND DAN UTHOLM

Entering college can be challenging since it involves adjusting to a new schedule, new courses, and high expectations. For international students, another dimension is added as they not only make all the adjustments mentioned above but also have to filter their instruction through a second language. Two students from Sweden describe the many differences and a few similarities in instruction they encountered at Glendale Community College. These students were in my English 077 class in the 1999 spring semester and have since then spent an additional two semesters on the GCC campus. Here are some of their thoughts.

My name is Christina Örnemark. I'm thirty-six years old, and I moved here from Gothenburg, Sweden, with my husband. I have an economics degree, and I'm studying for an AA-degree in business at Glendale Community College.

My name is Dan Utholm, and I'm 27 years old, from Stockholm, Sweden. I have a language degree, and I'm studying for an AA-degree in Computer Information Systems.

Going to a community college is a mixed experience; some things are familiar, and others are new. Although the basic required courses are the same in Sweden such as freshman composition, math, and science, the education system in the United States, particularly at Glendale Community College, is a lot different from the Swedish school system. In Sweden, the education system is more formal in the sense that all students have basically the same classes. They do not have the same opportunities to choose the classes they are interested in until reaching "gymnasium," which is equal to the last three years of American high school. However, at that time, they can only choose a "general field of interest," which means they must remain with the program. Also, everybody in the same field of interest has to take the same classes.

This is both good and bad. It's good because there is never any confusion about which classes should be taken for the next semester. However, at the same time, it's bad since there is no opportunity to make a choice that fits each student. Here in the United States, you can study for a specific job instead of just studying a general field. There is a greater variety of courses. In addition, you also get the chance to take aerobics or tennis, which earn credits.

Furthermore, the expectations for students differ. In Sweden, most teachers don't really take the time to help students by answering questions, especially if the answers can be found in the course material. Here you can ask almost any question; whereas, in Sweden, you would appear stupid if you raised questions in class. Most teachers in Sweden take for granted that students know what should be learned before each exam. It's up to students to study. They are, more or less, left to understand their homework on their own, and it is not always assigned as clearly as here.

In the community college, the teachers try to explain how and why things work like they do. (But, of course, it's also individual for each teacher.) For example, this past summer, the teacher in my communications class had a very effective method of instruction. First, she wrote the essentials on the board, and when we were done copying them, she gave at least two examples of each concept. Another teacher made sure the concepts were clear by asking each student to present a concept. Five minutes were given for preparation. No one slept in that class!

The testing system is also very different. In Sweden, it is very rare to have multiple choice questions on a test. You have to study word-for-word to know the exact information in order to answer the questions correctly. With multiple choice tests, it is easier to get high grades. Extra credit, also something new to us, makes getting good grades within reach. The American system provides ample support for students to become successful.

The "concept" of having community colleges is excellent. Since the community colleges are open to everybody for a reasonable fee, it is a perfect way of integrating all kinds of different people. Even though you can study at any age in Sweden, you don't go to the same class as eighteen-year-old students.

There are also special programs for adults who want to go back to school and be separate from the mainstream colleges. The mixture of ages in a community college adds one more layer of education since students get a different view or perspective of different countries, cultures, and people.



Assidēre

Sharing Information on Assessment

Getting Students Involved in Assessment

MARIA HARPER-MARINICK, MCLI

"If assessment is ever to improve substantially the quality of student learning, and not just provide greater accountability and efficiency, both faculty and students must become actively, continuously, and personally involved." (Angelo, 1994). I wholeheartedly agree with Tom Angelo's statement. So, when I first heard that the theme for this issue of our publication is "Students Voices: Seeds for Meaningful Dialogue About Learning," my reaction was an enthusiastic "Yes, it is about time we let students have a say. Just think of the possibilities!" Then I began to think about ways in which we could truly get students involved in the process of designing and implementing assessment, and I realized that it is not as simple as it may sound.

Most of us listen to students' voices through surveys, interviews, and focus groups as we attempt to measure students' attitudes and opinions about their satisfaction with their educational experience. No other way exists to assess students' perceptions but to ask students themselves. Through participation, students become involved in the assessment process. However, what about "direct" evidence of learning and student development? Can we ask students to help us design the tools that would be used to determine if they have

learned (or not learned) a particular skill? Should we do this?

Some would believe that because students, for the most part, are not experts in courses they are taking or in assessment, they should not be expected to make decisions about what needs to be taught and/or assessed. Students may know their own learning style, how they prefer to have information presented, and what makes them learn best, but not necessarily what they need to learn for a given course. The same can be said for assessment. Assessment is an integral component of a course design. What is assessed and how it is assessed are determined largely by the nature of the course and the learning competencies, not by the material students like or want to be covered. What does it mean, then, to make students "actively, continuously, and personally" involved, as Angelo suggests?

We can begin by educating students about what assessment really is. Thus, we remove the sense of fear and punishment that are usually attached to it. We should make assessment a continuous, iterative process of checks and feedback instead of a one-time event, the "test." We should involve students in self-evaluation and reflection. We should

ensure that students understand that assessment is not about "passing the test and getting a grade," or about "submissively regurgitating facts," as student Estevan Rivera eloquently says in his *Forum* article. At the very least, we should communicate to students our standards and expectations.

In this issue of *Assidere*, we hear the voice of Pam Akina, a student at CGCC. Pam shares her insights about the connection between learning and assessment and the value of peer evaluations, portfolios, and webfolios. Pam's article illustrates how effective portfolios can be when used as an assessment tool.

If anyone is interested in receiving information about the purpose, design, and implementation of student portfolios, please send a request to Maria Harper-Marinick at the MCLI (maria.harper-marinick@domail.maricopa.edu) or visit the MCLI Assessment and Evaluation site: <http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/ae>

Reference

Angelo, T.A. "Classroom Assessment: Involving Faculty and Students Where it Matters Most." *Assessment Update* 6 (4) (1994) 1.

Learning Communities—Students Sharing Their Learning

MARYBETH MASON, CGCC

Pam Akina is the mother of five children and a full-time Chandler-Gilbert Community College student, who both lives and takes classes on the Williams campus. As a Family Resident Assistant, she is very involved in campus leadership activities.

In the spring of 1998, Pam was a student in a unique first-year learning community entitled

"Creating Community in a Changing World," which integrated composition, humanities, and computer technology. This class was team-taught by Maria Hesse and Marybeth Mason. As a student in the learning community, Pam kept a portfolio of all of her work for the three classes and posted her best work on a web site she designed. Pam's reflection on her experience in the learning community focuses

on the writing and assessment process used in this class.

Although Pam has since moved on to other classes on campus, her son, Kaulana, is now a student in the learning community.

assidere: to sit by (ad=near to; sedere=to sit)

Assidere is published by the Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction for the faculty of Maricopa Community Colleges.

<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/labyforum/>

assidere: to sit by (ad=near to; sedere=to sit)

Assidēre

Putting Our Best Foot Forward in the Learning Community

BY PAM AKINA, CGCC STUDENT

Upon returning to college for the spring semester, my academic advisor at Chandler-Gilbert Community College explained that I could fulfill my English and Humanities credits with one class—a “Learning Community.” Although “Learning Community” was a new concept to me, I was excited that I would be in this innovative “block” of classes. Knowing I would be able to integrate my learning in World Literature (ENH202) with my writing for First-Year Composition (ENG102), I would then be able to research and word process it all in an Internet computer class (CIS120).

I looked forward to less work. However, I had no idea what a learning community was really about. Looking back, the best advice I could have heeded would have been, “Hold on to your hat, honey, we’re goin’ for a ride!” The ride turned out to be a process—a process of assessment—where we, as a community of students, helped one another through peer assessment and, in helping others, we helped ourselves. This process of assessment through the medium of the Learning Community helped me build my self-confidence and raise the quality of my work.

In order to be a true community, we were asked to participate as community members, whether we were ready or not. Interaction was the rule, not the exception. I don’t think there was a class that went by in which we weren’t involved in some type of group activity and, much of the time, the activities were centered around peer assessment. We all know the far-reaching effects of peer pressure. Using this same type of emphasis in assessment was also very effective. It seemed much easier to take criticism from my classmates rather than from our instructor’s pen. Gradually, I saw the quality of my writing improve, and I felt better about expressing myself on paper. Our fellow community members acted as a catalyst that led to improvements in our work.

In a class period after a particular reading assignment, we would divide into small groups using some random method, such as counting off, “1-2-3-4-5, 1-2-3-4-5; all 5’s go here, 4’s go there” etc. Each student would move to where

their respective numbers were, and that group would become our assessment group for the day. We would trade our reaction papers and write positive comments about a group member’s reading log. Then, we would trade again and receive another response. Knowing my reading log would be read by my peers was another great motivator to have read the assigned literary works and to thoughtfully describe my impressions on paper for an audience other than just the teacher. It was important to me that my peers would see my best efforts; consequently, even the smallest assignments were more conscientiously written.

As I look back through my portfolio of work, I smile while reading my peers’ comments on my free writings, reading logs, viewing logs, essays, paper copies of web pages and PowerPoint presentations, and final reflections. “I thought this quote was funny, too,” wrote one, with an added, “Great reflection and thoughts.” On another I read, “Good interpretation of these poems. You got a lot (more) out of the first one than I did. Great job.” This feedback meant acceptance to me since I was an older re-entry student, a mom returning to school. I wasn’t sure what these younger, more “modern” individuals thought of my writing and me.

The same process held true for the rough drafts of our essays. Much of the editing and revisions were influenced by peer evaluations. The final rough draft for the essay was turned in after making changes suggested by our fellow students. With the help of our fellow classmates, we were able to submit a piece of work to our instructor in which we felt confident of its quality.

Our instructor was the anchor in this process of assessment. We were continuously being guided along the way in the correct methods of assessing one another. In addition to group activities, we were given initial direction and instruction for writing our essays, including a handout entitled, “Essay Evaluation Criteria Sheet.” Written in a question format, we were guided through the exact steps we should take from the process of writing to the peer assessment activities. This criteria sheet made

sure we had included the correct parts of the essay in our writings. The criteria sheet also served as a quick reference to evaluate my essay and compare it to the instructor’s expected criteria. This handout was just one example of how our instructor was not only teaching us to assess ourselves, but also to apply these skills to better assess our colleagues in the classroom.

As our class progressed, the continuous circle of constructive feedback enhanced my self-esteem. With the help of my fellow students, I felt confident that my work was good, better than it had ever been. I was excited to be given the freedom to choose which of my works from my portfolio I would ultimately post on my web pages or “web folio.” Our individual web site included written transitions to make the flow from one work to the next smooth and consistent. Also, it included animations, backgrounds, graphics, anything that would reflect our personal self. Our best class writings were displayed within this self-stylized format. We also chose which of our works we would design into a PowerPoint presentation, based on our writing and research. It was fun to present our “web folio” and our PowerPoint to the rest of our class and to get feedback from them. Class members would pull up their “web folio” or PowerPoint presentations on their computers and take turns going from computer to computer to view and assess each presentation. We wrote notes giving feedback to help our classmates improve their work. After the first draft of my PowerPoint presentation, I remember some of the comments which included, “Watch for parallel sentence structure, also use capital letters on main points throughout presentation.” I was then able to go back and make revisions for the final presentation, which was presented orally to the class. This time the feedback notes from classmates were words of encouragement and approval. After looking at my Career PowerPoint presentation on teaching, Matt wrote, “Good presentation. I liked how you used the picture of molding and linked it to your career. Good job.” Once again my confidence was boosted.

continued on the next page...

<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/labyforum/>

assidere: to sit by (ad=near to; sedere=to sit)

Assidēre

Perhaps the greatest confidence builder and indicator of the quality of my work was the emotional effect I found my work could have on other people outside of our Learning Community. Because of the profound influence our study of Vietnam had upon me, I chose to write my Asia essay about the Vietnam Memorial Wall. Later, I put that writing in a PowerPoint presentation. It was complete with pictures that made my essay come to life. In developing my web page, I decided to include my "Vietnam Wall" essay and PowerPoint presentation. I did this with some trepidation knowing my feelings for the Vietnam conflict would be available to others who might not share the same feelings or may criticize my views. However, I was so pleased with the works that I posted them, and I was actually glad to have the opportunity to publicly share them with others! I called everyone in my family in Utah, Nevada, and Hawaii, gave them my web address, and waited for them to read and respond to the site.

It wasn't long before my sister called me at home and told me how moved she was by my writing on the "Vietnam Wall;" she cried when she read it. What an awesome feeling of satisfaction I had when she shared her reaction with me!

As the semester progressed, we as a Learning Community of active, contributing members worked together. We helped one another learn, and we helped one another put

our best foot forward. For us, the emphasis was not placed on the grade we would get, but rather on the quality of the work we presented to an audience which went beyond just our teacher. The tangible product of our learning became the focal point. We always asked ourselves, "How would our community of peers critique our work, and which of our works were the best?" By the end of the semester, we were able to confidently present a body of writing. This range of work was posted on the web for the world to see. It was a reflection of ourselves at our finest.

Because of my experiences in the Learning Community, I am no longer afraid of my classroom peers, but I rather look forward to getting to know them. I enjoy writing my thoughts on paper and know that my best writing is when I express myself, and I am able to share my thoughts and ideas with others. I know that if I put my best foot forward, even if I am uncertain, someone will step up and meet me, and things will be clear again. I feel that others around me want to help me, and I can contribute to their success as well.

The process of assessment in the Learning Community was a great ride; I'm glad I jumped on!



Mark Your Calendars!

Convocation 2000--C2K

**New Conversations About Teaching
and Learning for the New Millennium**



January 7, 2000 • 8:30 AM to 2:30 PM
Scottsdale Center for the Arts
7380 East Second Street
East of Scottsdale Road

<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/fsd/c2k>

**Faculty Editor
John Nelson**

**Assistant Editor
Maria Harper-Marinick, Ph.D.**

**Layout
Christina Emmons**

For information about this or any other issue of the
Labyrinth/Forum/Assidere, please contact the:
Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction
2411 West 14th Street
Tempe, AZ 85281-6942
(480) 731-8300 • (480) 731-8282 FAX

<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/labyforum/>