TEACHING MATTERS
newsletter
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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Thank you to Nathan McFarlane (4th Year B.A. (Engl)) for the drawings in this article.

TEACHING AND RESEARCH: THE TABLES TURNED

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Imagine, if you can, an academic universe in which the roles of teaching and research have been suddenly and magically reversed.

Faculty members emerge from the library or laboratory and heave a sigh of relief: "Thank goodness I've finished all my research for this year! Now I can get on with my real work!" Rushing back to the classroom, they throw themselves with relish into the job they have trained to do through years of graduate study, the labor for which they are recognized and rewarded by their peers and their institutions: the "real work" of teaching.

Committed research scholars, meanwhile, profess frustration at the inequities of the system, but their complaints fall on deaf ears. Indeed, their excessive attention to research is secretly regarded by their peers as a sign of intellectual deficiency. "If so-and-so were a truly talented teacher," colleagues mutter to one another at cocktail parties, "s/he wouldn't waste so much time and energy on research." Newly hired faculty who want to pursue cutting-edge research methodologies are actively discouraged by their department Chairs, who urge them to focus on their teaching instead: "You have to think about your career, you know!"

When asked by administrators and promotion committees to develop measures for demonstrating research competence, faculty rise up in anger. "How can anyone really measure or evaluate good research?" they demand. "Research is a private matter, a matter of personal style." These same scholars have no qualms, needless to say, about subjecting their teaching to collegial scrutiny and rigorous peer review. Indeed, they love to fly off to far-flung conferences where they can engage in lively disciplinary debates with teaching colleagues from around the world, leaving behind the drudgery of their research obligations.

Top universities maintain their international stature by offering generous funding for innovative teachers, with additional support from government and industry sources. Academic units devoted to the promotion of research excellence, by contrast, remain consistently underfunded and understaffed. University administrators do pay a certain amount of lip service to the importance of supporting stellar researchers; but under their breaths, they all recite the same mantra: "This is a teaching university!"

BY HELEN SWORD
CENTRE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
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PROMOTING STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING WITH CONCEPT MAPS

In nursing education and other academic disciplines there is a move towards student-centered learning as evidence of good teaching practice. This type of learning contrasts with the traditional content-centered approaches by focusing on the students as learners with unique learning styles and needs rather than a content-focused, teacher-directed model (Young & Maxwell, 2007). Paterson (2007) contends that teaching strategies to promote student-centered learning focuses on helping students to make connections on what they need to know versus what the teacher wants them to know. Within this model, there is an emphasis on promoting critical dialogue and reflection regarding professional nursing practice (Paterson).

In our nursing program we use various strategies to promote student-centered learning and enhance the critical thinking abilities of our students. One such strategy is the use of concept mapping exercises in both the clinical practice and classroom settings. In addition to promoting active learning, educators contend that concept mapping helps to promote critical thinking and problem-solving when used with individual students or small groups (All & Haven, 1997; Kathol, Geiger & Hartig, 1998; Schuster, 2000). The purpose of this article is to discuss both the process and outcome of using concept mapping in our nursing program.

WHAT ARE CONCEPT MAPS?

A concept map is the graphic representation and organization of an explicit set of concepts and propositions that allows visualization of concept relationships. According to Novak (1990), the process of developing and using concept maps assists learners' develop and enhance the critical-thinking process. In nursing education, we use concept maps to identify patient problems and/or concerns and as a guide to client-centered nursing care. Baugh and Mellott (1998) affirm that these graphic representations more closely resemble students thinking patterns than some of the more linear forms of course assignments. Subsequently, when reviewing concept maps, educators and learners are readily able to discuss conceptual relationships, share information, correct misperceptions, and easily identify missing concepts and linkages (Daley et al., 1999; Schuster, 2000). Organizing information, identifying relationships, developing plans of action and considering additional possibilities are all key components in the concept mapping process.

USING CONCEPT MAPS IN THE CLINICAL PRACTICE SETTING

The concept maps used in nursing education are diagrams of patient health problems, typically organized in boxes with lines to demonstrate relationships. (Figure 1 on page 4 provides an example of a basic concept map highlighting concerns related to a patient that fell and broke her ankle.) In the clinical practice setting, the concept map exercise begins when the student receives a patient assignment. Students gather important data from the chart to help them understand the priority health problems of their patients and begin to formulate their concept map. When they assume care for their client, they collect additional data that helps them in the completion/revision of their concept map. Data collected is clustered into nursing diagnoses specific to identified problems (i.e.: pain, mobility, anxiety) and patient needs can be prioritized. When creating concept maps, students integrate theory to support the identified. Additionally, on a separate page, students can use the map to develop nursing interventions to specifically address each problem. Students' concept maps depict priority patient problems while reflecting the interdependency among patient needs. For example, pain might influence mobility, stress, sleep, and so forth. Educators play a key role in helping the student to consider gaps in their concept maps and stimulate their critical thinking and problem solving through ongoing questions.

BY SANDEE HICKS-MOORE & PAM PASTIRIK (DEPARTMENT OF NURSING)

Assessing and evaluating student learning using concept maps can take different forms. Educators can use concept maps as a tool to evaluate students' understanding of their patients on a day-to-day basis. This assessment process occurs through active dialogue with individual students regarding the rationale for their priority problems and plans for nursing care. In this format, the concept map provides a basis for day-to-day nursing care and requires ongoing revision as the patient's needs and priorities change. Evaluating and providing written feedback on individual concept maps can also be included as part of a course grade.

USING CONCEPT MAPS IN THE CLASSROOM SETTING

In the classroom setting, concept mapping can be used to foster critical thinking by using clinical case scenarios. Using detailed case studies, students work in small groups to formulate a concept map and identify the priority health needs of the patient and family. Students divide the workload among the members by investigating one or two priority health needs for the family. Students engage in independent study and bring their information back to the small group for discussion and application. In this format, students explore patient health problems in-depth and ensure that a holistic plan of care is developed. Following small group discussion and preparation, time in subsequent classes is allotted for presentation of the concept map.

STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR RESPONSES TO CONCEPT MAPPING

Student and instructor responses to the concept mapping exercises used in the second year of our nursing program have overall been very positive. In two recent studies in the clinical setting (Hicks-Moore, 2005; Hicks-Moore & Pastirik, 2005), students and instructors felt concept mapping was helpful in seeing the linkages between patients health problems, promoting critical thinking, assisting with clinical preparation and helping students organize vast amounts of clinical data. Moreover, in evaluating student concepts maps using a critical thinking scoring rubric (Facione & Facione, 1994), it was clear that concept mapping requires students to accurately interpret, analyze and evaluate clinical data, identify salient reasons for the identification of problems and justify the inclusion of relevant client health problems (Hicks-Moore & Pastirik). Some of the disadvantages of clinical concept mapping relate to acceptance; both faculty and student and consistent use of the method in the clinical setting. Interestingly, Daley et al. (1999) reported that faculty felt using concept maps increased student learning throughout the semester, however, student feedback indicated that concept maps were a tedious exercise that was difficult to undertake in a final nursing course. In our experience, orientation to the process of concept mapping early in the nursing program, including an explication of the pedagogical underpinning maximizes the benefits of using concept maps in both clinical and classroom settings.

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CONCEPT MAPS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

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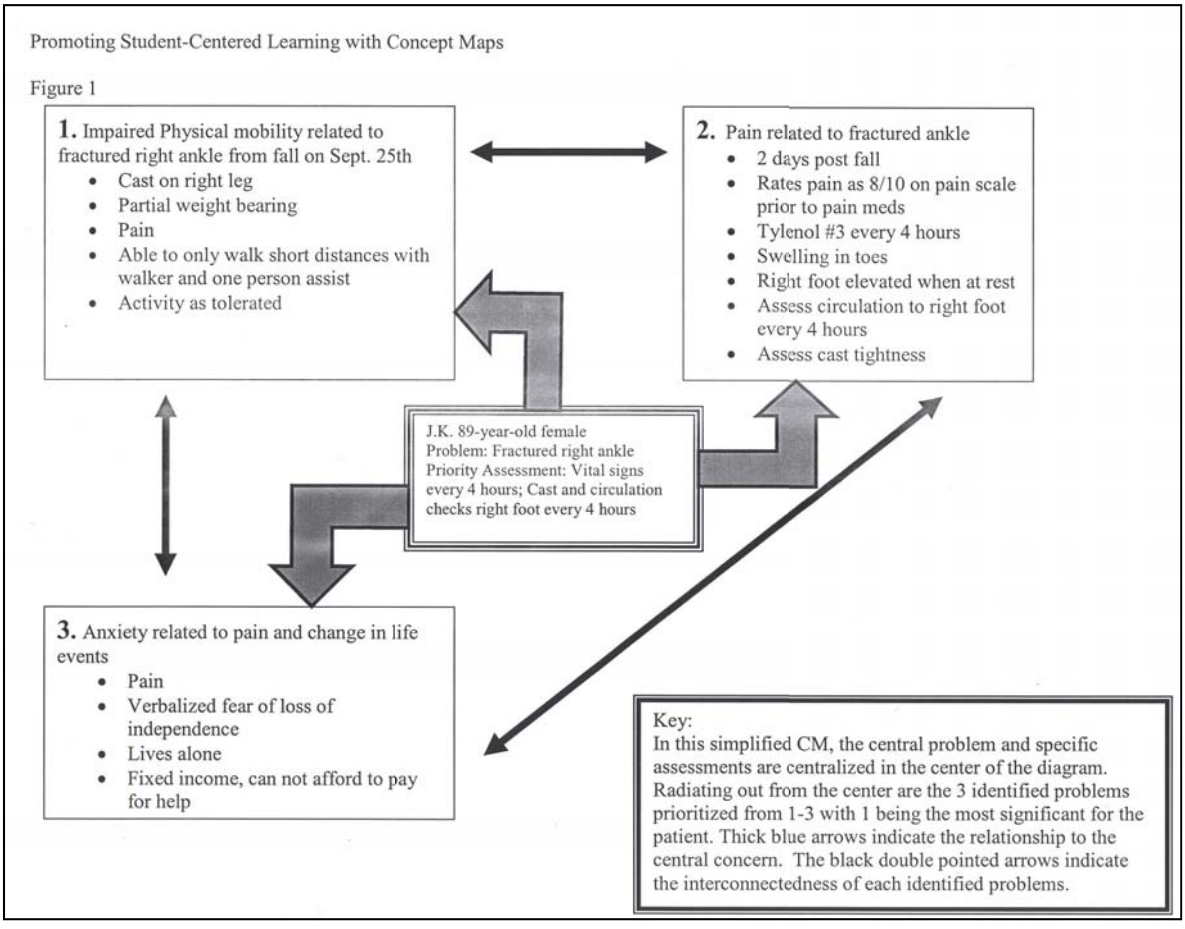
Promoting Student-Centered Learning with Concept Maps

Figure 1



TEACHING MATTERS STRAIGHT ACROSS THE BOARD

I once heard a teacher challenge a room full of students, "do not let anyone define who you are." The challenge this teacher offered her students accentuates the measure of a truly good teacher. The excellence of teaching is accredited to those who not only know their student body but who acknowledge that in every student there is unlimited potential. The good teacher acknowledges diversification and focuses on how to effectively accentuate the individual learner.

The necessity of effective teaching skills is apparent as one looks at the diversity represented through the collective student body. An educator must have an appreciation for multiplicity and the role that this plays in the larger social structure. The challenge for the teacher is to recognize and encourage individuality. When teachers recognize their students' uniqueness, they, in effect, affirm their importance. As students search for acceptance, a good teacher plays an important role in this process. Good teachers must be models for the idea of non-conformity.

Within the educational system, student affirmation is foundational for the learning challenge. Before a student can embrace the banquet of knowledge that a teacher has to offer, they must feel unconditional acceptance. A good student-teacher relationship is the necessary condition for the scholastics of learning. Knowledge must be transferred to the student through the aesthetics of inspiration. Therefore, a good teacher must be a motivational speaker. Excitement is contagious and transmittable from the educator to the student. There is an intrinsic relationship between the ability of teachers to convey their subject matter and the student's desire to learn.

Teachers must be visionaries by encouraging their pupils to set goals and to stay focused on their dreams. The famous words, "I have a dream," still resonate. Dreams are not squashed by challenges, they are built from challenges. A well-rounded teacher knows that life's obstacles are merely character building elements. Although it is easy to focus on the momentary problems, such limited focus frustrates the educational process. When a teacher incites a student to challenge feelings of inadequacy, and dependency, they compel the learner to excel.

It is vital that students have teachers that can present them with a well rounded education; one that recognizes that academics are more than the recitation of facts. Excellent teachers are the back bone of society and must be recognized for their invaluableness. Every time a student is compelled toward achievement, the award of excellence is offered to their "teacher."

BY DAWNA KINGSTON
B.A. (PSYC) YEAR 3

"Do not let anyone define who you are."

DISPELLING THE COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

A large proportion of young adults in Canada pursue a university degree as a form of post secondary education immediately after graduation from high school. As a result, most introductory university classes are primarily composed of 18 year old students who have had little or no formal educational experiences apart from those encountered while attending public school. Because they have no model for the mechanics of an educational system other than the high school model, this creates assumptions among these young adult learners that the university learning environment is fundamentally similar to the high school learning environment. This assumption is not valid for many reasons. This article discusses ways that the typical high school learning environment differs from a typical university learning environment and discusses what I believe are three common misconceptions of first year university students that instructors of first year courses need not only to be aware of, but also to encourage their students to re-evaluate so they can become successful university students.

STUDENT MISCONCEPTION 1: I AM HERE BECAUSE I HAVE TO BE HERE.

The New Brunswick Education Act currently requires people to attend high school or a home-schooling equivalent until they are 18 years of age. While in high school, they are required to take courses in many diverse subjects in order to graduate. Students almost invariably don't enjoy every subject, and as a result, don't always have a desire to do well in some. Students complain about these courses that they are not interested in and protest having to take them since they know they do not want to continue on in a related area later in life.

In contrast, students attend university by choice, not by legal obligation. Students choose their field of study and many of the courses that they take during their years at university. From the university perspective, it is assumed that each student enrolled at the university has some form of desire to learn about their chosen area of focus, whether that desire stems from interest in the area, the need for a university degree, or wanting to live up to parents expectations. Similarly, professors must assume that every student enrolled in their courses has at least a small amount of desire to learn about the material covered, whether stemming from interest in the material or from it being a requirement for a desired degree. These are not unreasonable assumptions since every student chooses their own field of study and courses and since every student pays thousands of dollars in tuition to learn about their chosen area. Courses that are required for particular degrees deal with subjects that are relevant to the chosen degree. Students need to realize that desire is a prerequisite for learning at the university level, because students who do not care have no motivation to do well. It is therefore important for instructors of first year courses to stress to their students that they are here because, in one way or another, they want to be here, not because they have to be here. If students are repeatedly reminded of their motivation for attending university, they will be in a better frame of mind to receive the information that they are presented with.

ENTERING THE UNIVERSITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

BY JOE MUDGE M.SC. (BIOLOGY) GRADUATE STUDENT

STUDENT MISCONCEPTION 2: IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF INSTRUCTORS TO MAKE ME DO WELL IN A COURSE.

In public school, it is the responsibility of each teacher to ensure that their students reach a particular level of understanding with regard to the subject they are teaching. If students are not understanding the information that they are being presented with, the teacher needs to find another way to present the information to them so that they understand it. Teachers need to ensure that students have learned important concepts before allowing them to continue on to the next grade or next level of the course. At the university level, the responsibility for learning is passed from the instructor to the student. The role of the instructor becomes one of presenting information concerning a particular subject in a variety of different ways for students. It is up to students to take advantage of these different resources and presentation formats to help them learn the material that they want to learn. If a student does not take advantage of the material presented to him/her and receives a poor grade on a test or in a course overall, the instructor of the course cannot be blamed as long as they have presented and tested material clearly and fairly. If a student has difficulty with the information presented, then it is ultimately up to the student to resolve these difficulties with the instructor before they are tested on the material. This means that it is important for instructors of first year courses to stress to their students that they are in charge of their own learning and that it is their responsibility to seek help when they are having difficulty. If students are repeatedly reminded that no one is going to make them learn their material, they will remain more focused and attentive during class and likely more prepared for test situations.

STUDENT MISCONCEPTION 3: I DON'T NEED TO THINK ABOUT WHAT I DO WITH MY TIME.

When students are living at home and attending high school, many of their decisions concerning their time are made for them (e.g. law dictates that students must attend school until they are 18 and parents commonly dictate that students must be home by a certain hour at night). If students do not comply with these time management rules, they face some form of punishment. Their priorities are influenced by the punishments they would incur if they do not comply with these time management rules. When most first year students begin at university, these time management rules are lifted and students must re-evaluate their priorities and fully manage their own time for the first time in their lives. Many students fail to carefully examine their priorities and do not successfully manage their time. Students need to be reminded that time management is crucial for success in tasks that they set as high priorities. Although instructors cannot set attending classes and learning material as priorities for students, there are ways that instructors can influence students' choice of these activities as priorities. Reminding students of their implicit desire to learn stemming from their choice to register for this class and reminding students that learning is their own responsibility are two ways to encourage study as a high priority. Giving grades for assignments is another way to encourage study as a high priority but the result of this method is often that students make the grade for the assignment the priority, rather than the process involved in attaining the grade.

continued on Page 8

"NOT ANOTHER GROUP PROJECT!"

WHEN AND HOW TO USE GROUPS EFFECTIVELY

Dr. Marilyn Laiken (OISE/UT)

Effective Teaching Institute (ETI)

May 16 and 17, 2006

For conference details, visit our website
http://www.unbsj.ca/vpetc

This conference will have something for everyone - from the novice to the expert group user!

RESERVE THESE DATES!

Sponsored by the Vice President's Excellence in Teaching Committee UNB Saint John

This workshop will address critical issues involved in using work teams in a classroom and helping them to sustain their effectiveness. In this workshop participants will:

- Review current research on using teams in the classroom
- Experience strategies for getting teams off to a good start
- Discover how personal leadership can help a team develop over time
- Understand ways to manage conflict, deal with difference, and develop critical thinking skills amongst team members; and,
- Explore issues related to team evaluation.

The workshop design combines theory and practice through small and large group discussion and structured exercises, the use of film and brief presentations, and the application of learning to participants' classroom examples. Participants will be provided with printed handouts and references for further reading.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

CONCLUSION

First year university students, who have a high motivation to learn, take responsibility for their own learning, and properly manage their time with learning as a high priority should have no problem being successful during their first, and following years at university. Learning the importance of these three skills is arguably one of the biggest hurdles that any first year university student must overcome in order to be a successful student. Presently, this is something that most first year students are left to figure out for themselves. Since knowledge of the importance of these three areas is a prerequisite for doing well in any subject at the university level, perhaps instructors should stress this information within first year courses along with course material that is covered during class. Doing this could greatly improve the learning environment of first year classes and decrease the failure rate of first year courses.