TEACHING MATTERS
newsletter

UNB Saint John

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

Kate Frego is presented with the Neil Scott Educational Leadership Award

Editor: Ken Craft

Designer: Mary Astorino

SO WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
TALKING ABOUT TEACHING
AT UNB SAINT JOHN

BY DAVID CREELMAN & ALLISON MCKINNON

Since 1999, the "Discussions about Teaching" group has been meeting for an hour each month during the regular terms, to discuss the craft of teaching. The group has included first-time lecturers and experienced teachers, full-time faculty members, part-time instructors, graduate students, and any other individual who is involved with teaching at UNBSJ. Since Neil Scott began the group, we have usually selected our topics in an ad-hoc fashion and in this way we have explored everything from facing the first class to composing final exams. This year we decided to try something different.

After the final VPETC meeting in the Spring of 2006, Dr. Creelman and Allison McKinnon, Secretary for the Department of Humanities and Languages, were trying to think up some new topics for the following year's "Discussions about Teaching." Ms. McKinnon suggested that professors from all faculties on campus could be asked if they would do a talk about how they teach their students in their individual areas. The hope was that if teachers spoke about the different types of teaching methods they used, it might give the attending members a chance to see how the other faculties within the university teach, and indeed, it may provide new tips or techniques which members could incorporate into their own teaching methods.

Thus the series, "So What Are You Doing Here?" was born. On six occasions through the winter, pairs of teachers came in from the different faculties as well as from Saint John College, to present a teaching model, a favourite teaching tool, or an effective practice which they have used and developed. Following the presentations many of the people submitted written versions of their presentations, which compose the core of this edition of *Teaching Matters*.

The wide variety of articles which follow reflect the diverse and practical presentations we enjoyed throughout the spring. Some of the presenters explore the issues of diversity in the classroom and examine some of the challenges we face on a regular basis. Lynne MacAlpine's paper on "Academic Writing in ESL," and Carol Ann Spencer's piece on "Listening Comprehension" both provide fresh insights into how students learn and use English as a second language. Ruth Shaw's thoughts on "Teaching International Students" are not only full of sensible observations, but these have been supplemented by two international students, Li Kang and Maryam Majedi, whose reflections on their experiences at UNBSJ are a welcome addition. Other presentations focus on how to effectively communicate our material once we find ourselves in the classroom. Paul-Émile Chiasson's discussion of "Humour in the Classroom" and Sandra Bell's exploration of "Acting Out in the Classroom," both remind us that university classrooms can

SO WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

provide students with fully engaging experiences. And of course, innovation in teaching also includes developing innovative forms of evaluation. Fred Donnelly's explanation of how he adapts the essay assignment in the electronic age, and Judy Buchanan and Anne Timms' use of role playing to fully prepare their students for the clinical experience, both emphasize the need to develop and improve our teaching techniques to deepen and sharpen out students' learning.

Throughout the series "So What Are You Doing Here?" and in these following articles the experience and enthusiasm of the teachers has been evident. Each presentation and paper reminds us that teaching is a lively and evolutionary process which is continuously developing on this campus.

INTRODUCTION BY
DAVID CREELMAN & ALLISON MCKINNON

"WHY DON'T THEY GET IT?"
SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENT LISTENING COMPREHENSION
CAROL ANN SPENCER - SAINT JOHN COLLEGE

Listening comprehension is a complex invisible process. Because of this, listening problems of second language students are not always apparent. These problems may become clear when marks on tests are low. Overall comprehension of course material, however, involves more than understanding the professor's lecture. The use of all four skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing - is necessary. This article provides some suggestions that professors can use to help improve the listening and overall comprehension of second language students:

Slow down your rate of speech. This can be a challenge. Remember that a speech rate that seems to be a comfortable pace for the class when reviewing material, might be too quick when new concepts are being taught. One suggestion is to videotape a class and hire a second language student to watch it and provide feedback. Another one is to ask a colleague to observe a class and calculate the number of words spoken per minute. This can be done at the beginning of the course and later on to determine if the speech rate has changed.

Record a short excerpt from the textbook and put it on WebCT/Blackboard (L. McAlpine, personal communication, 2007). Listening to a professor's voice, students will become familiar with his or her manner of speaking. This familiarity will allow the students to recognize the pronunciation of key words that they are reading in the textbook and hearing in lectures.

Add visual materials. Using visual aids before, during, or after a lecture also may improve student comprehension. One effective example is writing key words on the board during a lecture. Another example is providing class notes on overhead transparencies or PowerPoint slides. These notes seem to be popular with Canadian and second language students. It can be argued that providing class notes may discourage note-taking; however, they are valuable.

Encourage note-taking. Second language students are carefully instructed in the value of and strategies for effective note-taking. However, it seems rare for either Canadian or second language students to take notes in class. One suggestion for professors is to include some of their lecture content on exams. This might encourage note-taking (D. MacAulay, prs. comm., 2006).

Explain references, when feasible. Second language students often do not understand examples provided by professors (Flowerdew & Miller, 1994). Even after being in Canada for a few semesters, students may not be aware of many concepts such as the difference between being paid a salary and an hourly wage.

Try pair work. One suggestion is to provide students with questions that they can discuss with a classmate and then call on specific students to give their answer. A time period as short as four minutes can be given for pair work,

"WHY DON'T THEY GET IT?" SECOND LANGUAGE LISTENING COMPREHENSION

depending on the complexity of the question. Students could answer the question before the related material is introduced in the lecture. Students do not necessarily need to have the correct answer, they only need to be ready to hear it.

Motivate students to come to class prepared. Lack of preparation before class is likely the greatest barrier to listening comprehension and a source of frustration for professors. If students have not read the material upon which the class is based, they will probably not understand the lecture. One suggestion is to give a very brief quiz at the start of a class to test student knowledge of the assigned readings (S. Bell, prs. comm., 2005). Another option is to include a weekly discussion on WebCT/Blackboard before each class. The discussion could be limited to one or two concepts and could be included as part of the participation mark.

Set up a "Lecture Buddy" project. In 2002, Professor David Mendelsohn demonstrated the effectiveness of a "Lecture Buddy" project for an economics course. Two Canadian students were each matched up with six second language students in the same class. The second language students brought their lecture notes to meetings. The notes were discussed and the lecture material clarified. At UNB Saint John, a "Lecture Buddy" project could possibly be funded through the Work-study Program. This program will be accepting applications in September 2007. Student Services can provide detailed information for professors interested in applying for funding.

Provide extra resources. Resources that provide a basic explanation of the subject matter could be put on reserve or online for students.

Be creative. The use of psychology can have benefits in the classroom. In 2000, Professor Jane Arnold explained that using visualization-relaxation therapy before listening tests in an ESL course relaxed students and increased their level of listening comprehension.

Make use of professionals on campus. Both second language students and faculty can benefit from English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum. Students can be encouraged or required to register in a part-time ESL course. Saint John College (UNB Saint John) offers workshops for professors teaching second language students and can create customized workshops for students in a particular class or for a specific group of professors.

Saint John College facilitators are also available to work with faculty members individually.

Set up tutorials. Tutorials provide time for reviewing material covered in class. Their smaller size and informal atmosphere encourage quieter students to ask for clarification and to participate in discussions.

Add an introductory course. If a high failure rate of second language students occurs frequently in a course, an introductory course could possibly be offered. This would increase the students' level of subject knowledge and allow them to develop the required course skills before registering in the advanced level class.

There are many constraints on professors and on departments such as time, energy, and budgets. Therefore, not all of the solutions presented in this article will be feasible, nor will they appeal to every professor's style of teaching. However, for faculty members interested in improving the listening and overall comprehension of students, it is encouraging to know that a variety of teaching options and support is available.

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CAROL ANN SPENCER
SAINT JOHN COLLEGE

TEACHING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT UNB SAINT JOHN

Since UNB Saint John started a mission to internationalize the campus we have seen a significant increase in the percentage of international students in our computer science courses. In our computer science classes we find that at $50 - 80\%$ of our students are international.

These students come from 29 different countries. The majority of our students are from China and the next largest group hails from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. We also have representation from Iran and several Arab countries such as Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

What have we learned from this experience? Well quite a few things! Some of the pointers we have picked up come from discussions with our students and some relate to our own experiences over the past several years.

Keep it Simple

In most cases, vocabulary seems to be the most difficult part of taking classes in English. Even when a student seems to have strong English speaking skills, the level of comprehension can vary dramatically.
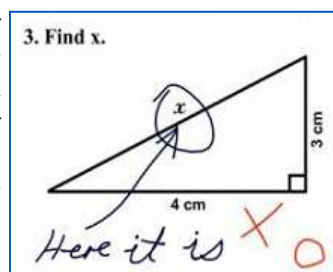
Students do not want us to sterilize our lectures but they would like us to try and use standard English. When many fancy words are used it is time consuming for the student to translate the words and then infer the concept.
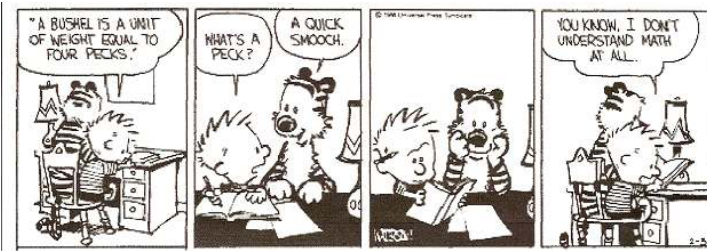
All of the students I spoke with said that courses with lots of definitions and fancy words were the most difficult. In computer science, some computer terms we would expect our students to understand can cause particular difficulty. Passing out a list of common words and their definitions can save the student some frustration.

Tests and assignments are another area where we need to be aware of our word choices. Even when we think we are clear with our instructions it can be confusing. Well, the student answered the question, right?

Maybe a better choice of word-

ing would be *Find **the value of x?***

During a test or exam I will often tell students to write down what they think the question is and then answer that. At the very least they may get part value for the question.

Another option I offer students is to illustrate what they are trying to say if they cannot find the words. This can work well in computer science but not all disciplines are conducive to this option.

Provide Written Instructions

Something else to keep in mind is that instructions during class can also be confusing … one example from even just last year is when I asked the students to place their books on the floor before the test started.

Several students did not do this.

I repeated the directive again using a variation on the words – no response.

Finally, I drew a picture on the board:

This brought several ah-has and lights of understanding – and the direction was followed.
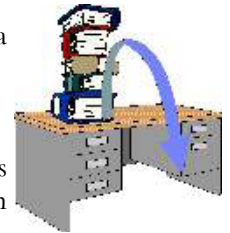
Students also like it when instructors used WebCT as a communication medium in the course – this allows them to go over notes and instructions at their own speed after class. I try to email or post instructions I have given in class. This also helps me to remember what I have said as well - the senior moments are getting more frequent each year!

Hands-on Lectures

Here is a snippet from one of my lectures:

> *In a parallel region, all processors execute the same code*
>
> > *call omp_set_num_threads(4)*
>
> *!$omp parallel*
>
> > *print*,'Hello from processor ',omp_get_thread_num()*
>
> *!$omp end paralle*
>
> *The order of the threads can vary depending on how busy each processor is …*

Well, isn't that nice and clear? Ok - not really ... so a better option is to have the students sitting in front of a computer so they can test the code and watch the result in real time.

TWO PERSPECTIVES......

RUTH SHAW - COMPUTER SCIENCE

Speak Slowly

One of my biggest problems - I walk fast and talk fast! International students who are not yet fluent in English will miss words if they are spoken too close together.

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TEST FRIDAY!

"Class, I've got a lot of material to cover, so to save time I won't be using vowels today. Nw lts bgn, pls trn t pg 122."

It is also important to ask students for feedback and be **patient** for an answer - it takes time for students to translate to their mother tongue, decipher meaning, formulate an answer, and then translate back again.

Facial Expressions & Body Language Matter

Our international students usually pay close attention to what we "don't" say. They observe our facial expressions for clues into our message.

> *"The recognized effectiveness of one-to-one communication is 7% in words, 23% in the tone of voice, 35% in facial expression and 35% in body language. Your thoughts definitely affect your tone of voice, facial expression and body language. Without saying anything, you still communicate a message."*

http://www.uregina.ca/tdc/Aug2000.htm Accessed Mar.20/07

This does not imply that we change our natural personality to fit some wax model of an unexpressive instructor or overact to become a caricature of ourselves. Rather, be aware that you can use your face and body language to get your message across without having to rely on just words.

Maybe the following examples of overt body language and the implied meaning are obvious. However, the next time I get an itchy nose I will think twice about talking at the same time!

tapping feet – impatient

hands clasped behind back – anger

hands on hips – aggression

rubbing nose – lying

patting hair – insecure

http://www.deltabravo.net/custody/body.php

Accessed Mar.20/07

Pair Programming

This may be obvious in subject areas where group work is part of the learning process, but in computer science students are responsible for writing their own programs – if they do not "get" the logic required to design a program they cannot pass the course.

This isolation process has probably been part of the culture of the discipline, however, there has been a recent trend toward having students program in teams of two – called pair programming.

> Research into pair programming shows that pairing produces better code in about the same time as programmers working alone. That's right: two heads really are better than one!

http://www.xprogramming.com/xpmag/whatisxp.htm
Accessed Mar.20/07

Several years ago I tried an experiment with pairing students. Students who had difficulty with some of the material and students who grasped the concepts were put into pairs - a "teacher" and a "learner". I offered bonus marks on a test after one week of tutoring. Problems were given to work on and additional sessions outside of class were optional.

After the week was over many students had formed great friendships and the entire class was up to speed on the material. I polled the students after the class had ended and 100% of the class thought that this exercise was useful - and fun!

Summary

Overall, teaching large classes of international students has been a learning experience for me and has hopefully improved my style of teaching. Many of the teaching suggestions we implement from our international students can enhance the learning experience for all of our students.

A Student's Perspective

In the course of preparing for my presentation and article, I polled several of my current international students and spoke with the International Office. I would like to thank these students and acknowledge the input from Boon Kek of the International Office.

Two of these students, **Li Kang (Jack)**, originally from China and just finishing his BScCS degree, and **Maryam Majedi**, a Master's student in Computer Science who

TEACHING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT UNB SAINT JOHN (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

arrived at UNB Saint John two years ago from Iran, have agreed to let me incorporate their talks into this article.

Both of these students have taken a variety of courses during their time at UNB Saint John and they generously agreed to give us a general idea of what we as teachers do that works and what we do that could be improved upon.

Li Kang (Jack)

The most difficult part of taking classes is the language, especially in first year courses. It takes time for us to adapt. Also, classes when the professors just read notes or slides are not helpful. The best approach is when the instructor takes time to explain things. It is also useful when we are given weekly assignments. It is more work but helps us to understand better.

The good thing from differences in culture is that we can talk and discuss things with our professors like friends. We are never afraid to speak with any professor. In China, it's kind of impossible to do the same thing.

It would be nice if we could have more social events with our fellow students and faculty. So, in that way, we can know more people in our department, make friends, and are not limited to only those people who have same course with you or in the same year of the program. Maybe we could even meet someone from a higher year, so they can help us in our studies.

Saint John is not a big city, it's very small, quiet, "cute". it's not like a big city such as Toronto or Vancouver, however this city can keep us away from all temptations, attractions and things we can play in a big city. Saint John is the best place for study.

Maryam

I am Maryam Majedi. I am a Masters student in computer Science in UNB Saint John. I got my bachelor from Iran and since I was really interested in continuing my education I came to Canada in June 2005. In my point of view the Iranian and Canadian culture are very similar and I did not face any difficulty to adjust here. Especially because of the great manner and nice community of Saint John people and UNB faculty and staff.

Although the education system in Iran is the same as in North America, most of the teaching styles, especially when it comes to the facilities, are different. Here I faced the good use of facilities that makes teaching more effective and assisted me to understand the topics easier. Such as using slides, WebCT and so on. Also, the frequent use of labs made me to learn in a practical way which I found very interesting.

On the other hand, the language is always an issue. The classes with more mathematical concepts, logics or programming algorithms were easier for me. For instance, understanding 2+2=4 does not need too much language skills. Whereas, memorizing the descriptions is the most difficult part. Sometimes I face too fancy descriptions for some concepts that in fact have a very simple meaning. When many fancy words are used, it is time consuming to translate and infer the concept.

I would like to end my talk by mentioning two more experiences that I found useful during my education here:

The first one is having frequent assignments that guided me to study the materials steadily as well as getting back marked assignments on time and having a review and discussion about the weaknesses. And last one is the presentations that I had to prepare during the courses that helped me to gain the confidence and speaking skills I need to communicate in English.

RUTH SHAW
COMPUTER SCIENCE

THE WRITE WAY?

LYNNE MCALPINE - SAINT JOHN COLLEGE

Many of the students who enter the academic writing course offered in ESL support can parse, conjugate, and decline with an ease many of their native-speaker contemporaries would envy. Some have an extensive vocabulary. They are intelligent people, often accustomed to receiving high marks for their writing in their own culture. It comes as a shock to them to discover that traditional Western rhetoric has a pattern that is unfamiliar, and that the correct use of a grammatical structure or a vocabulary item is suddenly the least of their worries when trying to convey their ideas in written form. In her article "Rhetorical Structures for Students," Anne Bliss (2001) lists three styles of writing common among non-native writers: "the 'list discrete points in order to inform' … the 'think along with me even if I don't tell you the answer'…, and the 'storytelling without providing the moral or logical conclusion'" (in Panetta, 2001, p. 17). To these students, the Western style of writing seems overly obvious: readers are given, for instance, too many connections between ideas, implying that they do not have the intelligence to work these out for themselves. My Chinese students tell me that the reason they so frequently write in simple, and what are to me unconnected, sentences is because one word in Chinese has so many layers of meaning that, given the context of each sentence, readers can make the necessary connections for themselves. These students are unused to providing road signs along the way in order to ensure that the reader is following their train of thought. This problem may be further complicated when the writer's native language does not express time through changes in tense, as English does. The result is often an incoherent text and a mystified and depressed student when the paper is returned.

Students, then, must relearn how to present ideas through understanding how a Western reader views the relationship between a writer and a reader, and through examining the way in which we make connections between ideas. One of the ways in which I try to assist them with this initially is by explaining, in a highly simplified way, exactly what I mean by making a connection between ideas in a sequence of sentences. I use a connecting "formula" involving the old idea-new idea pattern of English:

Connecting Formula

- New idea – statement A

- Reminder of point A (using the connecting devices of pronouns/connectors/repetition in paraphrase) + statement B (new information on the same idea)

- Reminder of point B (using the same devices) + statement C (new information on the same idea, etc.)

Students review the use and choice of connecting devices, study a sample passage illustrating the formula, and then attempt to write a simple passage of their own. This is obviously, as I have said, and as I point out to them, an over-simplification of the way we write in English, but it is a starting point for those students for whom the editorial comment "Make a connection" means nothing. Later, students analyze carefully selected passages from real texts, that is to say, passages from textbooks or journal articles, rather than artificially created ESL texts, looking for elements of this pattern. As students do this, they become aware of how many connections and what kind are made for the reader in English. They also become aware that not only new information, but also more detailed information is frequently added with each sentence. Having got to this point, they find it much easier to understand what is meant by developing an idea.

For students to acquire a second writing style is a challenge, and it is important that students are not given the impression that their native style, so often both more courteous and more poetic than ours, is in any way inferior to the one required in their Canadian environment. The goal is not one of domination, but of empowerment.

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HUMOUR IN YOUR CLASSROOM; IT'S NOT A LAUGHING MATTER!
PAUL-ÉMILE CHIASSON - EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

*"Classrooms in which laughter is welcome
help bring learning to life."*[1]

Not much has been written in recent years about the importance of humour for the affective environment in public schools or at universities. However, the use of humour can help in creating a positive environment for discourse and understanding.

WHY HAVEN'T WE BEEN USING HUMOUR IN OUR CLASSROOMS?

For many the simple mention of humour conjures up notions and protests of, "I'm not funny, I don't use humour." "I can't tell a joke; let alone use one in class." For others it is something to be feared, synonymous with classroom disorder and chaos. "I'm not about to start telling jokes, it will mean complete loss of control."

For some this resistance to using humour may simply be a lack of knowledge as to how one may use it effectively in class. "I enjoy humour, but I don't know how to go about using it, so I don't. I don't want to look foolish." Others associate humour and its use with non-productivity. Students can't be learning if they are laughing. Yet humour is as authentic and as communicative a human reaction and social skill as is greeting and conversing with friends.

WHY SHOULD WE USE HUMOUR IN OUR CLASSROOMS?

Humour and laughter are areas that have not been closely studied recently. Their role in education and medicine has been briefly examined. For example, Provine (Dec. 2000) in, "*The Science of Laughter*", **Psychology Today.**

Loomax and Moosavi (1998) in an article on the use of humour in a university statistics class point out that anecdotal evidence in past studies consistently suggests that humour is an extremely effective tool in education. These same studies suggest that the use of humour in the classroom reduces tension, improves classroom climate, increases enjoyment, increases student-teacher rapport and even facilitates learning.

Regardless of what evidence there may be, we all have personal views on the value of humour, as depicted in the film "Patch Adams" and for years in Reader's Digest, "Laughter is the Best Medicine." Yet, there is little in literature that speaks of its pedagogical value.

According to Provine (2000) laughter is generally subdued during conversation. Speech will dominate and laughter serves as a phrase break creating a punctuation effect in language. Laughter therefore has a specific role in conversations and is not random. Therefore, as in authentic communication, humour in the classroom shouldn't be random. It shouldn't be used without preparation and a clear objective. It may be simple or complex in nature. It is your decision as to how, when and why you will use it.

One reason for using humour is that as a human trait it is a self-effacing behavior (Provine, 2000). It can allow the shy or timid student in your class to participate with the group. If it is used properly humour allows the student to feel a part of the class and possibly contribute without losing face, feeling exposed or vulnerable. It's a way of reaching out to those students who are too afraid or nervous to attempt expressing themselves. Humour is as human and as authentic as the need to communicate. As with other facets of our lives it plays a major role in our every day social interaction. We should therefore not ignore it but instead make it part of our everyday teaching.

Interestingly enough, Provine (2000) also discovered that even though both sexes laugh a lot, females laugh more. It might explain why the females in our classes seem to enjoy more the humour used in the classroom. Although, as Provine points out, males appear to be the initiators of humour in any culture, beginning in early childhood.

"Indeed, the presumed health benefits of laughter may be coincidental consequences of its primary goal: bringing people together."[2]

GUIDELINES FOR USING HUMOUR

"The job of the teacher is to get students laughing, and when their mouths are open, to give them something on which to chew."[3]

Although the above quote is an interesting and humorous way to describe the use of humour, it is not our role as teachers to be stand-up comedians. Nor will we all use humour in the same way, or use the same humour. With this in mind there are certain points to consider before using humour in your classroom. Proper preparation is the key, as in all teaching preparation. In so doing we really will have something for the students to "chew on."

Don't try too hard. Let humour arise naturally, encourage it, don't force it. Don't be discouraged if the first time it doesn't meet your expectations. As Provine (2000) states, your reaction to their non-reaction (to a cartoon for example) may be the most amusing part. Like all things, proper preparation is needed for proper delivery.

Do what fits your personality. Never force it, it won't work. You might want to venture outside your comfort zone and try a different genre, cartoonist, or style of humour. Remember you class is made up of individuals with different tastes.

Don't use private humour or humour that leaves people out. Your goal is not to become a comedian. The humour described here is through cartoons. It doesn't make fun of any particular group, nationality, etc ... Private humour, if you use it, should be for affective reasons as well, used carefully, never demeaning or sarcastic.

Make humour an integral part of your class, rather than something special. Humour works best as a natural on-going part of your class. Be careful not to over-use it, it could lose its value and effect. With practice you will develop a style and comfort zone with humour

The use of humour will depend on the content you are teaching and the availability of appropriate humorous material. Have specific goals or objectives in mind. Using humour, like teaching, has to be well prepared. With time you will become more and more at ease, or self assured with its use. Allow yourself time to experiment and see what works well.

Humour and cartoons should be related to what you are doing in the classroom. Humour may be used to solicit dialogue, conversations and develop vocabulary. At times you may want to use it as a break before going on to something else. However, the cartoon should always be of an appropriate nature and interest to your students.

The extent to which you use humour will vary depending on your class. Interpretation, discussion and analysis are possible uses. Use it to introduce a theme, review or draw conclusions

CONCLUSION

Humour can contribute a great deal to your class and lectures. It enables you not only to create an affective or positive environment, but is a source of enjoyment for you and your students. Humorous situations allow your students to express themselves without fear of ridicule and criticism.

Remember, it is important to keep it simple, with a specific objective. Try it and you will be surprised at the effectiveness of humour and cartoons.

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ACTING OUT IN THE CLASSROOM
SANDRA BELL - ENGLISH

When I first started teaching Shakespeare courses, I thought back to my own undergraduate experience: over a hundred students in a lecture hall reading twelve plays per term. Needless to say, I cannot remember much more about it than that. So when I began to teach Shakespeare eleven years ago, I was thankful I had smaller classes that allowed me more flexibility than a lecture format, and I have come to believe that seven or eight plays per term can still constitute a survey course, and yet students can remember the difference between the characters Pericles, Polixenes and Petruccio.

As an English literature professor, I first approached Shakespeare as I approached other literature courses, with a focus on internal concerns such as structure, characterization, theme and figurative language; external concerns such as historical, political or social contexts; and the changing approaches of literary theory and research. It has since occurred to me, however, that Shakespeare—indeed, that all drama—is unlike a novel or a poem, and demands a different approach. Plays are meant to be performed, and the process of moving a play from the page to the stage is a very collaborative and imaginative one. Thus I am seeking more creative methods of teaching Shakespeare.

The idea of "creative" teaching or learning, however, brings with it the fear that the stringent academic standards that should be demanded in a university course could be weakened. How can I still cover the areas required by the discipline and level of study in a 'creative' manner? Or better yet, how can I teach those required areas so that students have a clearer understanding and a longer memory of them? The one thing I do not want to do is associate creative methods of learning with the less important or marginal aspects of the course, as if somehow the imaginative approaches are separate from and not as important as the academic side of learning.

The first step in the process is to differentiate between creative assignments and creative teaching in the classroom. I already incorporate creative assignments as course work; I allow students to write essays based on how they would direct a scene and why, for instance (in my poetry courses, I often allow students to write a poem in the style of a specific author, and include an essay that explains their choices). What I wish to do now is get the students to 'act out' in the classroom.

The second step is to assess what aspects of the course are fundamental, and what can possibly be dropped or rethought to make room for more creative methods. Because creative approaches demand class participation, they often take more in-class time than lecturing. Which of the many essential concerns can best be taught more creatively?

One obvious approach when working with drama is to have students work out a scene in class, but this could easily become a time-wasting exercise if I do not start with clear goals in mind. I can think of at least four important goals that would be accomplished by acting out in the classroom:

–Students often read Shakespeare as they do a novel, and having them acting out on the classroom 'stage' would emphasize for them the importance that choices about such dramatic concerns as blocking (placement on the stage), interaction, tone, gesture and props have on an interpretation of the text. The sense that there are a multitude of possible interpretations would hopefully stop students looking for "the right answer" (i.e. what does the professor want me to think?), and make them aware that they themselves are active interpreters of the text. It would also help them to think about drama as three-dimensional, and to visualize those sections of the text we do not have the time to act out.

–Students often balk at Shakespeare's language, reading the text simply to find out what the story is (or even worse, reading prose versions of the story in Coles Notes or online versions such as Sparksnotes). The problem with this is that "how" the story is being told is the main reason to read Shakespeare. Acting out a scene in the classroom would necessarily slow down the pace of reading, and students could concentrate more on breaking the speeches into meaningful phrases; together they could examine the patterns of imagery and figurative language.

–For many students, verse is difficult simply because it is verse, and this is unfortunate, considering that a large portion of Shakespeare's plays is written in "blank verse"—or unrhymed iambic pentameter. One method of familiarizing students with this type of verse is to act out the rhythm, clapping or stomping the iamb's unstressed and stressed syllables, and transferring it to the

text; what you end up with is an imbalanced sounding line of verse—"What's IN a NAME? That WHICH we CALL a ROSE / By ANy OTHer NAME would SMELL as SWEET"—but it gets the idea across. Students can then start to see where the natural stresses of the English language fit within this verse rhythm or, more interestingly, where they do not fit, and what effect this has on presentation and interpretation.

-Most of all, getting students out of their chairs and interacting with me and with each other helps them to relax and stimulates discussion in the classroom. It also allows those students who have not yet read the text to participate for at least a short time, and may even prompt them to be more prepared for the next class.

I may not have the time to incorporate such active teaching and learning in every class, but I think having students 'act out' within the first two or three classes will give them the tools to approach the other plays we read as dramatic texts, to slow down and focus their reading, and to recognize the collaborative nature of both the theater and the classroom.

SANDRA BELL - ENGLISH

THE NEIL SCOTT EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARD 2006

The very first Neil Scott Educational Leadership Award was presented to UNB Saint John biology professor Kate Frego during the seventh annual UNB President's Awards Ceremony on April 25, 2007. The Neil Scott Educational Leadership Award recognizes leaders who encourage excellence in teaching.

This award is all about Neil Scott, and about his legacy.

Neil was outstanding in too many ways to list. This award was created to celebrate and honour one of them: his qualities as an educational leader.

Neil had a remarkable gift for leadership, a style that was collegial, authentic, and effective. I think of him as the ultimate model for what "leadership" means….

He did not lead by herding people, or telling them what to do. In exactly the same style that he taught, he led by example – he saw what was needed and did what he believed to be the right thing, for the right reasons, whether anyone else followed or not.

*We, his colleagues, followed Neil because we chose to – because we saw what Neil was doing, recognized the value and the integrity in it, and were **inspired** by his example to raise our own sights to higher goals.*

We who had the pleasure and the honour of working with Neil hope that this award, in his name, will continue to inspire all who come after to aim for Neil's "gold standard."

Kate Frego 25 April 2007

I HEAR-I FORGET; I SEE-I REMEMBER; I DO-I UNDERSTAND ROLE-PLAY ANYONE?

Picture this: You are a 3rd year nursing student, and about to spend 20-minutes in a simulated situation with a professional actor and with a video-recorder running. Five minutes before entering the "patient's" room you are handed a briefing note. This is all the information you will receive. *Ms. Pauline Jones has recently been diagnosed with cervical cancer. She was admitted yesterday owing to a recent excessive fatigue. At this time Ms. Jones is unable to eat and her health is deteriorating rapidly. You are beginning an evening shift and are assigned to provide nursing care to Ms. Jones. You enter her room.* Intimidating? Absolutely, unless perhaps you've had opportunities to develop requisite competencies leading up to this role-play for skill assessment.

For our purposes we define role-play as simulated real world clinical experiences that allow for transformative learning to take place; that is, experiences which assist the learner to move from thinking about a concept or theory into the overt action of applying that new knowledge (Jeffries, 2005; Kuipers & Clemens, 1998). For example, in the vignette above, the learner must move from knowing about communicating with persons experiencing loss and grief, to actually moving within that person's world without getting lost in it.

What follows is a sort of 'Cole's Notes' guide to using role-play as an effective teaching methodology. First and foremost you must be clear on your reason for choosing role-play; it must make sound pedagogical sense in relation to the course and clear practical/learning sense to the students.

- Tie the role play experiences to a clear and measurable course objective (e.g. "Use professional relational skills in demonstrating and evaluating a goal-oriented approach to caring and culturally safe therapeutic nurse-client interactions in simulated situations.").

- Decide where to put role-play in the course; discern between development of skills and assessment of skills (Harbour & Connick, 2004).

Skill development in small group learning labs

1. Introduce mini scenarios throughout the term, building complexity in gradually so as to demystify the experience and to assist the learners to become more comfortable with role playing (Harbour & Connick, 2004). There is a fine balance between supporting the learner and challenging the learner; "push too hard and students resist; push too little and the opportunity for learning quickly fades" (McGonigal, 2005, 41).

2. Have a specific goal in mind when developing each scenario to make it as real to life as possible. Tying the scenario to the concept being taught and/or to their personal experiences in clinical practice can gain support of students who may be reluctant to role-play.

3. Time is important-the length of the scenario and the time needed for debriefing must be considered and adhered to (Jeffries, 2005; Kuipers & Clemens, 1998; Lyons, n.d.).

4. Decide how debriefing will be done; often debriefing happens during role-playing when learner receives help from peer observers and/or the instructor.

5. Ensure that all participants have the opportunity to switch character roles (as nurse, or as patient/family member or colleague), and task roles (observer or reporter).

6. There must be a safe atmosphere and yet at the same time one that is instructive. Questions are asked following a role play − it's important to get the student's self-assessment of how it felt, if there were uncomfortable moments, if there is anything that could have been done differently (Kuipers & Clemens, 1998). TRUST of the instructor and of the learning process itself are essential ingredients, since role-playing does involve risk-taking.

7. The observer role is crucial. Observers must have clear guidelines as to the specifics of their feedback; an essential is that feedback be timely, meaningful and achievable in order for the role player to act on it (Harbour & Connick, 2004).

JUDY BUCHANAN - NURSING
ANNE TIMMS- NURSING

Assessment of skills: a capstone project

1. Learners must be clear on the expected competency level and learning outcome (Jeffries, 2005; Harbour & Connick, 2004). In our example, the competency level is described within the assignment. Since self-assessment is a critical component of the capstone assignment it appears as a course objective.

2. The same level of challenge must be inherent in all scenarios and for all students at this point (Harbour & Connick, 2004).

3. Briefing notes for the student and for the actor must be bereft of ambiguity and contain the amount of information necessary to make the interaction meaningful (Harbour & Connick, 2004). Since in the context of a communications course the evaluator is assessing communication competencies (attitudes, skills and behaviours) then only basic information about the medical content per se is written into the scenarios.

4. Actors must be well prepared knowing the scenario that the student nurse has been given, and clear on additional information that the student should be able to uncover. For example, back to Ms. Pauline Jones: *The student nurse will find you despondent and tearful. You are devastated because your partner Sharon (age 27) left you once she found that you were ill and no longer able to go partying on the weekends and that you refused to go on a cruise that the two of you had been planning for the last year. The real issue for you isn't your cancer. You are desperately lonely and want to see Sharon before you die. You found out from a friend today that Sharon is already seeing another woman and in fact has left for a 1-month trip to Europe with her. You tell the nurse that you don't want anyone else coming to see you.*

Although there are certainly drawbacks (e.g., students may be reluctant or sense a loss of control, some believe it is not a proven method of learning), in our experience role-playing pays off. Role-playing has the capacity to increase retention of desired behaviours and even accelerates learning (Kuipers & Clemens, 1998; Nelson & Blenkin, 2007) because the activities are meaningful in nursing students' clinical day-to-day experiences. Lab times become more active and enthusiastic and generally speaking students gain confidence in facing difficult communication issues in clinical practice. Students often relate that they appreciated the experience: to quote one student after completing her capstone assignment "I hate doing this, but whatever you do <u>don't</u> take this assignment out of the course – I learned so much!"

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ADAPTING THE ESSAY ASSIGNMENT FOR THE ELECTRONIC AGE
FRED DONNELLY - HISTORY

The traditional undergraduate essay is still a mainstay of teaching tools in many Arts disciplines. At the same time both technological and institutional changes have placed pressures on our ability to employ essay assignments in our teaching.

The sheer size of classes makes it difficult to manage the time-consuming marking so important to the successful essay assignment. Shorter terms or semestering put a time constraint on our ability to get essay work done as well. Meanwhile the literature in most disciplines has expanded beyond the capacity of any one instructor to be familiar with all of it. Then there is the problem of plagiarism whether by using essay bank services or downloading material from the Internet without proper attribution of authorship.

The heavy handed "solution" to the problem casts the instructor in the role of course "policeman" scanning essays for plagiarism with electronic aids, issuing dire warnings about the consequences of copying the work of others and checking up on student citations by traditional bibliographical search techniques. This can create an oppressive environment in contradiction of the process of student scholarly maturation I want to foster. It isn't the atmosphere I want in my classes.

The solution I have tried is to abandon the wide open free choice for undergraduate essay topics in favour of a stricter instructor control over this type of assignment. In its simplest form the instructor decides on the topic(s) and usually only one to two are offered. In addition the instructor supplies a mandatory bibliography of items on library reserve in hardcopy or e-reserve or online access via the Internet. This could be a dozen items or eight or less.

A question is set for students to tackle that is appropriate for their level. The instructor ensures that the bibliography adequately covers the subject, contains some elements of controversy or revisionist scholarship and discusses the framework of the scholarly debate.

Students are encouraged to think of the assignment as merely an exercise in which they hone their skills before going on to more sophisticated work in upper years at university. It is not a research project but is rather an analytical exercise requiring students to demonstrate scholarly ability.

Such an assignment has some basic parameters. The assigned question cannot be reduced to mere description. Moreover students must not only read all items in the required bibliography they must demonstrate an understanding of those readings.

Like all proposals of this nature the restricted essay assignment with a set bibliography has both an upside and a downside. The positive features include the constraint it places on the possibility of gross plagiarism, i.e. copying an entire essay from someone else. As the instructor has all the materials at hand and has set the topic(s), perhaps including some recently published or unconventional sources, students are less likely to plagiarize.

In addition all assignments have a set bibliography equally available to all students in the class creating a level field of competition in this respect. Marking is fairer as all students tackle the same topic or a set of topics. This ensures that assessment of student work is the same as opposed to situations of wide open topic choice for the essay topic. In the latter situation instructor expertise in one area might result in harsher criticism of one student's effort and lighter critiques where instructor knowledge is lacking.

Most important is the fact the instructor-marker has the assigned bibliography right at hand when papers are marked. This allows the marker to identify mis-quotes, mis-citations, mis-attributions of author positions on the subject, the mis-spellings of proper names and so on that are the hallmark of so many early efforts at scholarly work. By contrast I wonder how the marker fairly and uniformly detects such errors when dealing with a student paper on an unfamiliar topic selected in a free choice situation by the student.
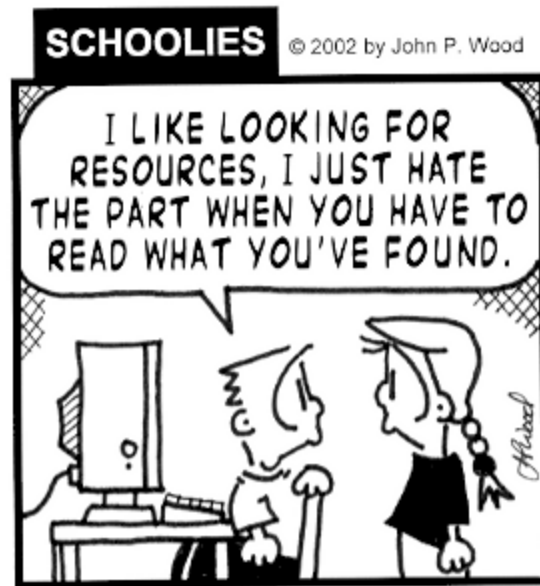
The negative aspect of this type of exercise is the loss of enthusiasm some students have for self selected topics for their essays. At the same time I don't mind taking away the illusion of doing "research" in undergraduate assignments where no such thing is going on. A further problem is that in large classes the instructor must mark a large number of assignments on the same subject.

On balance I like the trade-off gained by instructor assigned topics and a set, mandatory bibliography. This type of exercise hones student writing and scholarly skills, reduces plagiarism, provides a fairer marking situation and, hopefully, gets students away from the reduction of all topics to pure description. At the same time the undergraduate program still leaves room for student research projects.

These should be undertaken only after the more basic skills have been demonstrated in lower level essays. Undergraduate research should happen in the honours thesis, the senior essay or individual study project under faculty supervision.

My position is that the traditional undergraduate essay is still a most important pedagogical tool in many Arts disciplines. I'm not in favour of its demise in the face of its many challenges. On the contrary I believe the undergraduate essay can be rethought in a creative way appropriate to both student needs and university standards.

FRED DONNELLY
HISTORY

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I LIKE LOOKING FOR RESOURCES, I JUST HATE THE PART WHEN YOU HAVE TO READ WHAT YOU'VE FOUND.

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AT UNB SAINT JOHN**

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