The Teacher's Edge
A Publication of the Center for Teaching Excellence

Georgia Gwinnett COLLEGE

In This Issue...

Fridays at the FIDL!

Fine Tune Your Course at the FIDL

Faculty Instructional Design Lab

Drop-in assistance with the CTE staff Fridays from 1-4 in C-2230.

Contact Information

- Stella Smith, Director
  ssmith2@ggc.usg.edu
  678-407-5720
- David Robinson, Course Content Manager
  drobinson@ggc.usg.edu
  678-407-5111
- Susan McKinnon, Instructional Designer
  smckinnon@ggc.usg.edu
  678-407-5823

How Can We (or You) Help Improve Teaching and Learning at GGC?

We invite you to send us ideas for workshops or programs you might be interestred in doing or having us organize. We are also willing to work with individual schools to help develop discipline-based programs. Contact Stella Smith to discuss any ideas (ssmith2@ggc.usg.edu).

Special Thanks: Dr. Jason Mosser, Editorial Support for *The Teacher's Edge*

From the Director
By Dr. Stella Smith

Jerry Farber describes the classroom as "something unwieldy, not entirely comfortable, perhaps even unsettling: an irreducible minimum of interference, distraction, psychological 'noise'." He points out that this "unwieldiness" can't be separated from what gives a learning group its potential educational power.

Farber sees the challenge for teachers as learning not to take the classroom for granted, to resist turning it into merely one more screen in their students' lives, and to find ways of teaching that help to realize, rather than ignore, its extraordinary potential. He suggests that where we go wrong is in failing to be fully present at every step along the way. Perhaps that explains why my students are not as engaged in online discussions as I would like them to be. I need to create questions that are compelling and to maintain an online presence that convinces students I'm reading and reflecting.

He points out that he has no technique for presence. "Still I've come to realize that presence is more likely if (a) I'm unwilling to settle for less; (b) I stay as aware as possible of the people in the room and of how they, collectively and individually, seem to be engaging with what's going on; and (c) I stay in touch with my own interest, with the sources of my own energy *on that day and at that moment*."

Farber acknowledges that because faculty feel pressures in service responsibilities, in scholarly research, and in other commitments, we may want teaching to be something that we can acquire and lock up. In his words, "On any given day of any given course we would like to be able to pull something out of the file drawer, walk into class, and run it. No sweat, no hassle. We want to own our teaching as though it were so much real estate… But the act of teaching is nothing we can lock up, nothing we can hold on to, nothing we can simply pull off the shelf and run. The very next time I walk into class, I will be, once again, somewhere I've never been."

Reference: Farber, J. (2008). Teaching and Presence. *Pedagogy*, 8(2), 215-225.

Happy New Year!

The CTE Staff would like to wish you and yours a happy and prosperous 2009!

Teaching Topic:
4 Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) Concepts Applied to Classroom Management

Express Empathy: Communications that imply a superior/inferior relationship between the professor and student are avoided. The student's freedom of choice and self-direction are respected. While clearly the professor is in a position of power, encouraging change happens through active listening rather than talking or simply developing a counterpoint argument. Attitude change attempts are gentle, subtle, and always with the assumption that change is up to the student.

Develop Discrepancy: Change occurs when students perceive a discrepancy between where they are and where they want to be. It may be necessary first to develop such discrepancy by raising the student's awareness of the adverse personal consequences of their negative

Vista Focus:
Standing on Platform 8 ¾
by David Robinson

In addition to our upgrade to Bb Vista v8 in January, this Spring GGC is piloting Blackboard's Next Generation (NG) product, *Blackboard Learn v9*. One of the unique features of *Bb Learn* is that it allows "Co-Production," which can deliver our v8 courses through the v9 interface. Because of the blended v8-v9 platform, and with a nod to *Harry Potter*, we are calling the beta project **Platform 8 ¾**. GGC is the *first college in the world* to test co-production of the Bb NG platform with live Vista classes.

In this pilot, a number of our Information Technology faculty will deliver their Bb Vista v8 ITEC classes via Platform 8¾. Their v8 classes are identical in interface and functionality to our other v8 classes hosted by the USG. The only visible difference is that the *My GGC* (formerly *My WebCT*) page has more customized drag and drop modules.

The purpose of the pilot is two-fold. First, we want to test the co-production model. We want to be sure that our Vista v8 courses do not suffer any loss in functionality or performance when served via the *Bb Learn* v9 system. Second, we want to test the viability of *Bb Learn* as a more modular platform that promises to offer us greater interoperability between our course management system and other GGC (and external) content and services. Course related information -- like NEW Assignments, Quiz availability, and past-due notifications -- can be tuned to be available in other customized sites like FaceBook or iGoogle. Similarly, GGC content -- like activity calendars, club notices, and campus news or external content like our Outlook calendars, Class Climate course evaluations, weather, and Google Scholar -- can be displayed directly in the *Bb Learn My GGC* interface.

In the short run, we will be testing the system and developing interoperable content in the background, with the gradual addition of features, content, and services. Platform 8 ¾ may just help us get where we want to go. ◊

Want More? Additional Resources
Playful Strategies

Games promote teamwork and engage students, as Dr. Marty Thomas, Assistant Professor of Math at GGC, pointed out in his October workshop *Games in Education: Can Learning Be Fun?* The challenge is to willingly give up some control in the classroom, provide necessary scaffolding, and expect the unexpected.

Playful strategy games can include activities such as role-plays, case studies, constructive controversies, simulations, jigsaws, scavenger hunts, labs, group presentations, projects, group panels, and peer grids/frames.

Other popular activities include Classroom Millionaire, Classroom Jeopardy, Ultimate Game Show, Classroom Quiz Bowl, Classroom Feud, and No Whammies. Additional online resources are available at sites such as:

- http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/PPT-games
- http://www.ppt4teachers.com/testcreation.html
- http://webquest.sdsu.edu/. ◊

A Teacher Speaks:
No Reading Required...NOT!
by Dr. Ruth Garber

Do you wonder why your students have difficulty reading their assignments for your class? Does it seem that they don't know how to read a textbook with any depth of understanding? Although these things may be true to varying levels for students, there are strategies that you can teach regarding reading in your discipline that will help them successfully navigate the textbook. What are these strategies? The first is to capitalize on schema theory and help your students instantiate their prior knowledge. The second is to provide clear purposes for every reading assignment. The third and final technique is to provide organization/processing tools to help your students actively engage in reading their assigned texts.

Students often come to the learning task with either a spotty or minimal background for what is being studied. One thing teachers can do to improve learning is to assess what students already know about the semester's topics. There are a variety of ways one might approach this assessment, but the first step is clear. As the professor, you must take the time to answer the questions, "What does a student need to know to be successful in processing information in my discipline?" "What should a student know when s/he has completed my course?" To answer these questions you will need to think like a novice in your subject while contemplating your semester instructional plan. Ask yourself, "To complete these tasks this semester, what must the learner understand?" Once you have answered this question you are ready to construct a tool for assessing your students' discipline-specific knowledge.

The assessment of prior knowledge must be completed by the student alone. No group work here! You want to know what each student knows independent of one another. How might you gather these data? One method might be to construct a cultural literacy test (a la E. D. Hirsch) relative to your discipline. This construction is no easy task, and your assessment tool will probably change every semester as you evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and make appropriate adjustments. A less daunting start might be to begin with one of the simpler tools I will describe shortly and design and refine your "cultural literacy test" as you teach and interact with the students over a number of semesters. To see some examples of cultural literacy tests, go to http://www.readfaster.com/culturalliteracy/ and take a test or two.

A quicker and simpler, although hardly as elegant, solution to determining what your students know about your subject is to ask them. There are two approaches you might take. The first approach is to provide them with a list of single-word concepts that define study in your field. Ask the students to write everything they know about each of those concepts and how each is related to the other. The second approach is to give students a blank paper and have them list all the concepts they can think of related to the subject. After they list the concepts, ask them to define how these

---

Two Important Questions to Ask

"What does a student need to know to be successful in processing information in my discipline?"

"What should a student know when s/he has completed my course?"

concepts relate to one another. In both instances remind them that you are conducting a pre-assessment and do not expect expertise yet. That expertise will come with the post-assessment at the end of the semester.

Once you have collected this information from the class group, you can evaluate your instructional plan relative to their preparedness and make whatever adjustments you deem necessary. I think I can you hear your voices saying, "They are supposed to be prepared. I should not have to work with underprepared students." In an ideal world I would agree, but that is not the world in which we work. Many of our students have never read a book from cover-to-cover. I believe that if we bend a bit, they can make up for lost time and become very well prepared for the tasks we assign. It is not that they cannot do the work; it is that no one has ever asked them to perform at maximum output, and no one has shown them what this performance looks like.

OK. The pep talk is over. Now to the second strategy, setting purposes for reading. Most students have no idea, other than it is assigned, why they are reading this "stuff." When done, they close the book and can barely remember anything about what they read. The key to this strategy is the quality of your purposes. Don't use lower level Bloom's taxonomy questions for a purpose. Think about the article/chapter/etc. in its entirety and what background you expect it to provide for your students. Ask questions that require synthesis and application of that knowledge. At least one of your purposes needs to be at this level. The other two could be less intimidating so that the students don't lose hope as they are growing

> **[Reading] is not a passive process. It must be active and fully engage the reader if insights are to be gained and imagination triggered.**

into scholarly consumers of information. Over time they will get better and better at acting and talking like scholars.

Finally, the third strategy, the most prosaic of the three, is to provide tools for guiding the students through the reading task itself. Provide a graphic organizer that requires them to analyze the information in the reading. The Center for Teaching Excellence faculty space has many examples of graphic organizers. I have created three very general organizers as examples to go with this article, but as you prepare your assignments and consider your goals for the students, you will be better able to design the tool(s) that will fully engage them in processing the information. Both PDF and Word documents of these organizers can be found at https://jovo.ggc.usg.edu/cte/.

Reading is thinking. It is not a passive process. It must be active and fully engage the reader if insights are to be gained and imagination triggered. I suspect that many of us teachers came to this process naturally and pursued the dialogue vigorously. Our students, on the other hand, read grudgingly and without delight, never understanding the world that can open up to them through reading. I make it my goal to find a book for each student that just might open that door for them. I know that once the door is open it is very easy to keep it open. If we make this reading process more accessible to our students, they will engage with us and maybe, just maybe, become the educated scholars that only focused, purposeful, imaginative reading can produce. ◊

Dr. Ruth Garber is Assistant Professor of Student Success at GGC.

behavior choices (e.g. having to leave class, losing points on an assignment). This is also a helpful tool when developing lecture and group exercises. First explore where the students are with regard to the content knowledge you wish to teach—then create the discrepancy around where you would like them to be.

Avoid Argumentation: Avoid direct argumentation, which tends to evoke resistance. The professor does not seek to prove or convince by force of argument. Instead, faculty employ other strategies to assist students to accurately see the consequences of negative behavior. The professor can then begin to devalue the perceived positive aspects of negative choices (e.g. you are paying for each class, and by missing class you are wasting money).

Roll with Resistance: Do not meet resistance head-on, but rather "roll with" the momentum-- with a goal of shifting student perceptions in the process. New ways of thinking about problems are invited but not imposed. Ambivalence is viewed as normal, not a sign of disrespect, and is explored openly. Solutions are usually evoked from the student rather than provided by the professor (e.g. "Since you missed this assignment, what do you think is a fair way to reach a resolution?"). ◊

Reprinted by permission of Brian Van Brunt, Director of the Counseling & Testing Center, Western Kentucky University

Looking Backward, Looking Forward

Looking Backward:

November and December 2008 were filled with Blackboard Vista v8 training as well as topics such as disability issues, scaffolding, intercultural communications, and conducting research. And let's not forget our always-popular Jingle Bells Brown Bag, which was held in the FIDL this year and featured food, fellowship, and a bit of fun watching people take turns playing various Wii games!

The CTE opened its satellite office (FIDL, Jr.), located in A-1044. That office is opened on Wednesdays for appointments and drop-in visits.

Looking Forward:

We will be starting up 2009 with a bang at the CTE! Upcoming events for January and February include topics on rubrics, the use of SPSS for research, evaluating and grading small group projects, use of debates in the classroom, enhancing presentation skills, teaching to different levels, and faculty showcases on partners in learning, classroom civility, and objective-based assessments. Plus, look for additional drop-in sessions co-hosted with Educational Technologies on various "Teaching with Technology" topics. ◊

Submission Guidelines

The Teacher's Edge encourages submissions on any aspect of college teaching and learning. The articles should not exceed two or three double-spaced pages, so as to conform to the intent of the newsletter: providing concise, thought-provoking topics that promote discussion among faculty and staff.

Articles may be submitted by GGC faculty, staff, and even students so that all voices are represented for our readers. Our web site gives us rich opportunities for posting ancillary materials to accompany submissions.

Submit manuscripts to Stella Smith, CTE Director. ◊