CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING COMMUNITY FACULTY: SITUATED KNOWLEDGE FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

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> *If we embrace the promise of diversity, of creative conflict . . . we still face one final fear—the fear that a live encounter with otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives. This is not paranoia: the world really is out to get us! Otherness, taken seriously, always invites transformation, calling us not only to new facts and theories and values but also to new ways of living our lives.*
>
> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*

LaGuardia Community College has one of the most diverse student populations of any community college in the United States, and its faculty have been designing and teaching in learning communities since 1976. LaGuardia also has a long-standing commitment to deepening faculty and student awareness of diversity issues. I will draw on this rich set of experiences to address the following questions, given a college with a diverse population and a range of academic preparedness, how do you help learning community faculty develop the skills necessary to be good teachers? What are the core skills and knowledge and how do you invite faculty to learn them?

Fortunately, for those of us teaching in learning communities at LaGuardia and for the college as a whole, the institutional commitment to diversity work, professional development, and creating purposeful occasions for reflection has always been strong. The college's commitment to expanding our learning community models, professional development, and dialogue about diversity and global citizenship is undergoing a renewal for a number of important reasons. First, in the spring of 2003, LaGuardia hired thirty-five new faculty, and we are in the process of hiring about forty more as part of a university-wide commitment to the City University New York (CUNY) community colleges (this means that by fall 2004, 25 percent to 30 percent of our faculty will be new). Second, in the fall of 2001, the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning was initiated to support professional development programs already in place and to create new opportunities for reflection about teaching—and diversity—across the

campus. Third, in response to student surveys that indicated a need for a greater sense of connection to the college and a more immediate immersion in the major, First Year Academies, which offer students one or more developmental courses, a course in their major and a first-year seminar dedicated to the major, were piloted in spring 2004. And, finally, as part of LaGuardia's strategic plan, and in response to an ongoing dialogue about diversity issues on campus, the president of the college, Dr. Gail Mellow, has initiated a task force on internationalization whose purpose is "to ensure that the structures and practices of the institution support an international educational experience for all students."

In what follows, I focus on the requisite knowledge and skills for learning community practitioners working with diverse students whose academic preparation is uneven. I will share some recent faculty dialogue and professional development work on diversity, including the self-critique we try to engage in, and what we consider to be "best practices." I will then develop these general ideas by offering some case studies of this work—in practice—in our learning communities.

Some Background

Located in Long Island City, Queens, one of the most culturally diverse boroughs in the United States, LaGuardia Community College opened its doors in 1971 to 500 students. Of our 12,000 matriculated students today, 65 percent are foreign born and 49 percent have been in the United States less than five years. Our students come from 160 countries and speak 116 languages. This means that a very high percentage of incoming students must complete ESL courses before beginning courses in their major. Faculty teaching introductory courses and also core courses in the major must continue to address second language issues. In addition, the majority of LaGuardia students need at least one developmental course (English, reading, or math). In terms of external issues relevant to student success, while 38 percent of our entering students are recent high school graduates, 47 percent have been working for some time and 63 percent will continue to work more than twenty hours a week. These students' financial responsibilities are very different from the traditional full-time college student in the United States: 19 percent have children; two thirds of these children are under six years of age, and some students help support families outside the country. In incoming surveys students say that their greatest concern is being able to keep up with their studies, given financial difficulties,

family responsibilities, and lack of academic preparation. Many stop out for a semester to earn the money to continue, and it takes five to seven years for the average student to complete a two-year associate degree. In spite of numerous obstacles LaGuardia students have big dreams: 85 percent plan to continue their education.[1]

For LaGuardia faculty, learning communities and diversity practice have always been deeply connected. Our first learning communities, the liberal arts "freedom clusters," were faculty designed and initiated in the mid-1970s. Today LaGuardia has a variety of integrated learning community programs. Entering liberal arts and science majors choose from a menu of six to eight clusters. All clusters are organized around a theme and all have four courses from the core liberal arts and science curriculum (introductory courses in music, philosophy, theatre, journalism, film, sociology, psychology, biology, biochemistry, anatomy, and physiology), along with an English composition course, a research paper course, and an integrated seminar hour that is team-taught. Topics for the research paper course are interdisciplinary and based on materials in all the other courses. Current cluster titles give an indication of the diversity of themes and courses offered: *Reefer Madness: A Philosophical Inquiry into Drugs and Society*; *Truth, Lies and Videotape*; *Names, Labels and Stereotypes*; *I Am What I Am: Identity, Performance and Poetic Justice*; *Fighting for Our Rights*; *Women and Society; The Sociology and Culture of the Family*; *Exploring the City Through Music, Literature, and Theatre*; *From Movies to the Internet*; *Harlem on My Mind: The Harlem Renaissance*; and *Science: Beauty or Beast?*

A developmental cluster, the New Student House, was initiated by faculty in 1991 to create a learning community for LaGuardia's most at-risk students, those who needed basic skills courses in reading, writing, and speech. Today the House offers basic reading, basic writing along with a college-level content course, and a Freshman Seminar. In the 1990s, faculty in LaGuardia's ESL credit program began offering an ESL version of the New Student House and a variety of ESL courses paired with college-level content courses throughout the curriculum. Approximately twenty-five such pairs are offered each semester: ESL courses are paired with sociology, human services, computing, accounting and business, humanities, and reading. Institutional data indicates that ESL students who take college-level courses paired with ESL courses are outperforming students taking the same courses independently, even though the latter are, technically, two courses "above" them.

In response to student frustration about being able to take courses in their major, LaGuardia piloted *First Year Academies*, which in spring 2004 offered entering students one or more developmental courses with a course in their major. It is hoped that all first-year students who need at least one basic skills course will enter one of four academies: business, technology, liberal arts, or natural and applied sciences. In each academy, the basic skills course and the first-year seminar are focused on the major, as well as additional activities on campus such as orientation events, career workshops, study skills workshops, and virtual interest groups. LaGuardia's learning communities reflect a truly integrated practice: each is organized around a theme and faculty plan, refine, and evaluate their curriculum and pedagogy.[2]

Faculty Dialogue and Professional Development

> *It is important to go beyond the 'nod': we need to do more than acknowledge diversity.*
>
> Paula Nesoff, LaGuardia Faculty

Hand in hand with diversity work in learning communities, the college as a whole has been engaged in discussions about diversity and pluralism in the classroom for much of the last three decades. A task force initiated in the late 1980s worked to infuse pluralism throughout the curriculum and continues to offer a variety of seminars on diversity issues. Annual opening sessions for faculty and regular instructional staff meetings have been devoted—in whole or in part—to diversity issues. The Center for Teaching and Learning invites faculty and staff from across the college to present at weekly brown bag lunches on pedagogical and diversity issues. LaGuardia's Declaration of Pluralism, which is a part of the college catalogue and is used by faculty as a teaching tool in both learning communities and stand-alone courses, sums up the spirit of this work. (See Figure 1)

In response to the question, "What do we mean by diversity at LaGuardia?" faculty at an Instructional Staff Meeting held in fall 2001, volunteered many aspects of diversity in addition to nationality, language, ethnicity, and gender, including educational background, level of acculturation, age, sexual orientation, disability, traumatic background, ideological beliefs, maturity, religious background, economic status, citizenship status, health, learning styles, and attitudes about diversity. The ensuing discussion (How does diversity affect your teaching and what issues would you like to explore further with

FIGURE 1

Declaration of Pluralism: LaGuardia Community College
We are a diverse community at LaGuardia Community College.
We strive to become a pluralistic community.
We respect diversity as reflected in such areas as race, culture, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability and social class.

As a pluralistic community we will:
* Celebrate: individual and group diversity.
* Honor: the rights of people to speak and be heard on behalf of pluralism.
* Promote: intergroup cooperation, understanding and communication.
* Acknowledge: each others' contributions to the community.
* Share: beliefs, customs and experiences which enlighten us about members of our community.
* Affirm: each others' dignity.
* Seek: further ways to learn about and appreciate one another.
* Confront: the expression of de-humanizing stereotypes, incidents where individuals or groups are excluded because of difference, the intolerance of diversity and the forces of racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, disability discrimination, ageism, classism and ethnocentrism that fragment the community into antagonistic individuals and groups.

We believe by carrying out these actions we, as students, faculty and staff can achieve social change and the development of a society in which each individual can achieve her or his maximum potential.

colleagues?) also revealed that LaGuardia faculty, despite an awareness of the complexity of diversity, see the need for a deeper investigation of how to create a truly pluralistic community. Observations about what was still needed at an institution that takes diversity work seriously included:

• acknowledgement of faculty diversity issues: how can practices be improved; how can we be more sensitive to diversity issues among our peers

• awareness of our teaching styles in relation to student learning styles; knowledge and flexibility required; sharing of ideas about inclusive pedagogy
• recognition not only of diversity but cross-cultural commonalities
• recognition of different student expectations about classroom, teaching, and education
• value of diverse student experience at LaGuardia, but sensitivity (spokesperson issue)
• going beyond the nod: doing more than acknowledging diversity; ideas for dialogue; deeper investigation of pluralism
• reflections on how faculty position themselves in global classroom (openness, vigilance towards our own assumptions)
• think globally and bring a deeper knowledge about other cultures into our classrooms
• texts with explicit awareness of diverse examples, perspectives
• dealing with homophobia as the last "acceptable" prejudice
• reflections on ways diversity is an advantage at LaGuardia—for faculty and students—ways we do bridge cultures; time for reflection on difficulties and common experiences needed

It is important to note that this meeting took place directly after 9/11, and our college came together, purposefully, to connect our work on diversity to this tragic event. We realized we needed to go beyond places of comfort and to engage in difficult dialogues. Faculty noted that diversity issues among faculty were sometimes not acknowledged or understood, that faculty needed to be reflective about self-positioning, and that strategies for hiring and retaining diverse faculty needed to be improved. We agreed that recognizing diverse student expectations about education, teachers, and the classroom was important; that faculty should strive to be more aware of teaching styles in relation to student learning styles, and that a deeper infusion of global cultural issues into our teaching practice was needed. Finally, faculty indicated that commonalities as well as differences should be emphasized and explored, and that we should be reflecting on ways faculty and students at LaGuardia *do* bridge cultures and recognize and respect difference.

To show how our professional development workshops help faculty integrate theory and practice, I would like to describe two recent faculty seminars. At seminars, supported by the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning, faculty received either course release or a stipend for their participation. Faculty involved were not exclusively participants

in learning communities, but individual workshops and discussions within these seminars were devoted to learning community issues.

During the 2002–03 academic year, a group of eleven faculty participated in a Teaching Portfolio Seminar. The group consisted of both junior and senior faculty, and five members of the group were veteran learning community practitioners. This seminar was collaboratively designed and led by faculty. Our goal was to reflect on our teaching and to create online portfolios to share with our community. We were inspired, in part, by a student electronic portfolio project currently underway at LaGuardia. These teaching portfolios were not related in any way to our tenure and promotion process; they were designed to engage in reflective practice—to discuss the challenges we face and share effective strategies to address those challenges. We created several categories for our work, including "Community and Collaboration," "Diversity," and "Reflective Practice," and we designed reflection questions and student activities for each section.[3]

We articulated particular questions to consider in the "Diversity" section of our portfolios, including the following: How do specific cultural and social aspects of your identity influence your teaching? How important is it to consider issues of diversity in your curriculum design? How do you integrate issues of diversity into your curriculum? Describe some challenges and/or problems you have faced teaching in an institution with such a diverse student population. In addition, everyone was asked to describe a classroom practice that recognizes student diversity.

In their final evaluations, faculty were asked how the Seminar helped them in their teaching and, more generally, in their 'lives' at LaGuardia. They spoke of the importance of "frank, open discussions" and a "safe space" for dialogue, and many indicated that the emphasis on reflection—in classroom assignments and for faculty themselves— was most valuable. One faculty member said, "The written contributions helped me to discover what I thought about my teaching." Another wrote that the seminar offered her an opportunity to think about what she wanted to change in her teaching, and that she reshaped activities in light of our readings and discussions. In response to the question, "What have you changed in your teaching as a result of the seminar?" several noted that they were incorporating more opportunities for reflective assignments and activities related to diversity issues. Our reading and discussion of Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* and Steven D. Brookfield's *Becoming a Critically*

Reflective Teacher were the foundation for lively discussion and offered concrete strategies—especially for reflective practice.[4]

A second example of the kind of professional development LaGuardia is currently engaged in involves the orientation and support of new faculty. This is our primary opportunity to introduce new faculty to our diverse students and their needs, to our learning communities, and to core practices we value in learning communities and beyond. In fall 2003 we welcomed thirty new faculty to LaGuardia, and a year-long seminar for this group was initiated, consisting of a two-day orientation, a winter one-day institute, and monthly workshops throughout the academic year. In the orientation institute for this New Faculty Colloquium, we asked new faculty to reflect on what resources they bring and what skills they would like to develop in response to a description of LaGuardia students (based on a variety of information from the institutional profile on students' essays). Responses gathered from this exercise became the basis for future workshops.

Since effective design and assessment apply not only to students in learning communities but to faculty as well, LaGuardia faculty are introduced to self-assessment models such as Stephen D. Brookfield's reflective teaching journals. Drawing on articles and workshop materials familiar to learning community practitioners including Peter T. Ewell's "Organizing for Learning" and Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's "Backward Design for Curricular Integration," we introduced new faculty to some of the foundations of learning community practice. Ewell reminds us that institutions need an "alternative design vision that starts with students and what they need to be successful as learners." Towards that end, we invite faculty to design learner-centered activities for the classroom, try them out, and create assessment occasions to evaluate their assignments. The faculty seminar itself models these learning practices as faculty collaboratively develop their activities and share concerns, and as seminar leaders assess the workshops. The core practices we have highlighted in our workshops for all new faculty—community and collaboration, active learning, reflective practice, and diversity practice—match those described in depth in *Learning Communities: Reforming Undergraduate Education* by Smith, et al. (2004).

To show how these general ideas about diversity and learning community practice are realized at LaGuardia, I will examine two learning communities—a liberal arts cluster and a capstone liberal arts seminar—where students return to a meta-learning community at the end of their careers at LaGuardia. Here they reflect on how their

learning in core liberal arts courses has shaped their understanding of global citizenship.

Lessons from the Learning Community Classroom

The decentering of authority through seminar work, collaborative learning, and active learning, a hallmark of learning community pedagogy, promotes shared responsibility for learning and, when properly shaped through collaborative ground rules, a responsible analysis of complex issues. In addition, the integrated curriculum of learning communities promotes a deeper understanding of different perspectives—and of the individual's responsibility to grapple with them. Learning community faculty not only work on curriculum together; they use pedagogies that acknowledge and honor diverse learning styles. Robert Ibarra's description of minority students as "high context learners" is repeatedly confirmed in the LaGuardia learning community classroom. Group projects and problem-based learning activities offered by faculty help students who have not had a successful educational experience in high school to develop analytic skills and cross-disciplinary understanding as well as social skills. Many of our learning community faculty are also very familiar with the benefits of classroom assessment techniques and use them as a way of identifying pedagogies that promote intellectual and emotional growth. One-minute paper responses to identify the "muddiest point" and longer reflective journals are assigned—often with questions designed to address meta-cognition (how has your thinking about this issue changed?)—as well as end-of-term assessments of the entire learning community program. Some questions might include, "How did the cluster themes relate to one another in all of the courses, for example through written assignments, discussion, field activities?" or "The purpose of the Integrated Seminar is to help you make connections among the disciplines. How did the seminar do this for you?"

Case Study #1
Integrated Learning in a Liberal Arts Cluster

In a liberal arts cluster offered fall of 2003, faculty in English, theatre, and philosophy constructed a joint syllabus where a set of key questions could be effectively examined in the three disciplines and compared across disciplines, throughout the semester.[5]

Key Questions for Liberal Arts Cluster

In this cluster, I Am What I Am: Identity, Performance, and Poetic Justice, *we will examine and debate fundamental questions about the nature of human identity. How can we characterize human nature? Is human nature inherently selfish? Are we determined to be what we are or are we free to create ourselves? How does society control the shape our identities take? In what ways are we not free to define ourselves? How do we know the "truth" about another person or even about ourselves? Is memory accurate? What assumptions do we make about others? What are these assumptions based on? To what extent do we construct, change, and perform our identities and is this a kind of "truth"?*

These introductory questions are used in a team-taught brainstorming session on the first or second day of class, and since answers to these broad questions take a semester, or a lifetime, to develop, the questions evolve into themes and issues related to readings and other activities throughout the course. The English and theatre professors agreed on four plays to be studied *(Oedipus Rex*, *Fences*, *Death and the Maiden*, and *M Butterfly*), and the three faculty chose several films that would complement the plays and address issues of identity in more complex ways. These included *Roshomon*, *Memento*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *The Laramie Project*, and the HBO film, *Normal*.

Many learning community faculty stress the importance of creating a foundation of openness and trust early in the semester. Only within this framework, often supported by collaboratively designed ground rules, will students feel safe sharing who they are. An early in-class online writing assignment asked students to respond to a series of questions about their identity. The online format made it possible for students to view and respond to each other's postings. Students were asked to respond to any two questions.

First Questions: Reflective In-Class Writing
(to be followed by group discussion and reflective writing)

1. What individuals have been most influential in shaping your identity?

2. What social institutions have been most influential?

3. Can you think of a powerful defining moment or an incident that shaped your identity in some meaningful way (good or bad)?

4. Can you think of a time you struggled against a definition being imposed on you?

5. Are there times when you are aware of performing an identity that is not truly you? Is this necessarily bad? Why do we do this?

6. In what ways do you feel that you are free to change your identity or nature? In what ways do you feel change is impossible?

7. Why is it important to believe you can change? What are the ethical implications of believing your identity is in process, not fixed?

The online writing assignment was given by the English professor, but with the students' permission, the theatre and philosophy faculty were "enrolled" in the course so that they could read the students' postings. This gives all members of the faculty team a common knowledge of the students as well as an awareness of the skills they bring to their writing and thinking. It was immediately apparent that the answers to these questions were "typical" of LaGuardia students in their diversity and poignancy. For a powerful moment or incident that shaped your identity, one student wrote about being imprisoned and educating himself; another wrote about being placed in a homeless shelter for the mentally disturbed by her parents who disapproved of her interracial relationship. A third described the arrest of his brother, the shooting and death of a friend, and his decision not to follow the path of selling drugs. As students responded to each other's stories, bonds began to develop and at the end of the semester, when asked to write about the learning community experience, many spoke of the importance of the personal revelations shared in our early classes. Against some traumatic personal experiences, questions of freedom and determinism were debated in philosophy and examined in relation to *Oedipus Rex* and August Wilson's *Fences*. Questions of ethics, personal responsibility, and justice initiated in our discussion of *Oedipus Rex* were debated in a contemporary context in *Death and the Maiden*, Ariel Dorfman's powerful depiction of the consequences of the Pinochet regime.

Perhaps the most complex and important segment of the cluster was the discussion that centered around questions of gender and identity, initiated by a critical analysis of David Henry Hwang's *M Butterfly* followed by screenings of *Boys Don't Cry*, *The Laramie Project*, and *Normal* and an interview with a transgender faculty member. What follows are two student responses that make explicit some of the intellectual and emotional growth that emerges through an acknowledged confrontation with values and a recognition of the way these values are socially constructed.

> The film *Boys Don't Cry* helped me step aside and really see how society has molded us to become blind savages towards gays, bisexuals, cross dressers, etc. I was always told that the people that slept with their own kind were never forgiven for that sin. As a young child, I couldn't imagine how God could forgive the worst serial killer, just by him/her repenting, but he wouldn't forgive a person that had a natural attraction to his or her own kind. I never questioned it because I knew that I would never be answered; it was just the way it was. I never tried to interact with them because of the fear of never being accepted or forgiven by God. Now I am much older and thankfully, open-minded. I can finally stand up and say what I feel and why I feel that way. I now can cut my thread from the needle that has always sewn me to a certain patch.
> (Annette Gomez, student)

> Matthew *(The Laramie Project)* and Tina *(Boys Don't Cry)* were just expressing themselves in a way they thought they were comfortable. But we could not see their comfort; we could only see our comfort, and for us to be in a zone of comfort we must take them into a zone of discomfort. Tina and Matthew can both be considered modern day martyrs. They both died because of their beliefs. I believe that they were trying to find their identity, but, because of society, we ended their search early. I truly think that these two movies really changed my life. I am accepting a homosexual as just another person, another person that sheds tears just like me. This goes for everyone, from people of a different race, ethnic group, and even financial standing. I see them as another person who bleeds like me. They breathe, eat, sleep, and do almost everything like me. So why shouldn't I treat them the way I would like to be treated? (Jaime Stone, student)

For learning community veterans, these responses are powerful evidence of what William Perry describes as the integration of knowledge learned from others with personal experience and reflection.[6] Annette's description of "cutting the thread" is a powerful metaphor for what can happen in a learning community when new ideas and perspectives challenge what students have been taught. And Jaime poignantly describes the way others interfere with our search for ourselves. Unwittingly echoing Shakespeare's Shylock ("does not

a Jew bleed . . ."), Jaime, like Annette, describes and reflects on his own transformation.

Dialogue among faculty teaching in learning communities is an exhilarating blend of enthusiasm, creativity, and troubleshooting as we assess the progress of our students, refine connections among our disciplines, and look for learner-centered approaches to ongoing projects. We share the results of our most successful assignments (the philosophy professor's Socratic dialogue assignment, the theatre professor's identity improvisation assignment), and we marvel at the connections students make on their own (applying Plato's *Symposium on Love* to *Boys Don't Cry*; finding a connection between "blindness" in *Oedipus Rex* and *The Laramie Project*). We also touch base concerning those students who are having the most difficulty or who are not completing their work. Sometimes we make exceptions as we strive to support every student in the way he or she needs, but, overall, faculty feel it is worth it if we succeed in retaining and encouraging those students who are often anonymous failures in large public institutions. What we hope for, and sometimes observe, during the semester as we ask students to evaluate their experience, is that the core values we as faculty associate with learning communities have been incorporated into our students' approach to learning, and that at the end of the semester they feel confident of their ability to construct their own meaning.

Case study #2
Reflective Growth in a Meta-Learning Community: Capstone Seminar on Humanism, Science, and Technology

The capstone seminar at LaGuardia invites graduating liberal arts students to engage in the kind of dialogue and reflection that were characteristic of their beginning experience in the liberal arts cluster. They are asked to reflect on knowledge and perspective gained in liberal arts core courses by applying this knowledge to significant problems and struggles of the twenty-first century—situations where humanistic concerns are sometimes at odds with advances in science and technology. Faculty teach this seminar in highly individual ways, focusing on an individual theme such as disease over the centuries, or a particular part of the world, such as the experience of colonialism in Latin America.

Students in capstone liberal arts seminars are regularly asked to reflect on the way the learning community has changed their way of

thinking. What follows is an example of a final essay Max Rodriguez of the Humanities Department offers his students. He purposefully asks students to reflect on their own growth as thinkers.

Reflection is a deliberate attempt to reveal yourself as a learner to yourself and to others, to question critically your learning style, and to give examples that document your learning in a course or set of courses. The main goal of reflection is to think critically about your learning experience and to encourage connections between a body of knowledge and your own learning style.
1. Select a writing assignment that in your opinion demonstrates what you have learned in this course.
2. Write a short essay giving examples from your own writing to illustrate your points.
3. Use some or all of the questions below to stir your thoughts:
- Describe why you chose this item for your reflection.
- What new knowledge and skills did you acquire through the content and activities of this course?
- Explain how the writing you chose is a good example of your skills as a writer and thinker.
- What connections have you made between this course and other courses you have take before, work and/or personal experiences? Give details.
4. Discuss briefly how you feel about reflecting on your own learning. A paragraph will suffice.

Student responses reveal an ability to transfer a paradigm from one context to another, often one that has personal relevance to the writer. Responses also reflect layered reflection about social history and power relations embedded in certain practices:

> At the beginning of this course all I knew about Plato was that he was an old, smart, dead Greek philosopher. As we discussed *The Allegory of the Cave* in more detail my ideas developed and changed. I realized that Plato's cave wasn't particularly thought provoking because of its story; it was the concept behind it that was. I was able to see examples of Plato's idea in history. The example of Plato's idea that I was best able to identify was with Malcolm X and his story. Like the men in Plato's cave, Malcolm and his friends believed in the "shadows." They were ignorant and uneducated to ways outside of the life they knew, which was a life of selling drugs

and violence. However, as Malcolm left the cave (Harlem) and went to prison, he effectively distanced himself from his peers and became educated alone. He progressed and learned while his peers didn't. And when he returned to Harlem to enlighten them to the things he had learned, they ignored him. (Craig Daley, student)

What are the lessons learned by faculty at LaGuardia as they reflect on the relationship between diversity practice and learning communities? Under the category of "challenges," our faculty dialogue reveals that we recognize that diversity work is never done, that it requires constant rethinking, adjustment, sensitivity, and openness— effectively the same qualities that are needed for learning community work and for good teaching in general. Members of our 2002–03 Teaching Portfolio Seminar said that what was most needed and most difficult to find was reflective time to share strategies and concerns. LaGuardia faculty teach on average four courses per semester and contribute substantially to departmental activities and college-wide service. Finding time to assess their individual teaching as well as their work together in learning communities is often difficult. The Division of Academic Affairs and the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning are committed to supporting professional development by offering some released time, but much of this work is grant funded and therefore difficult to guarantee as a permanent part of our culture. Currently, however, we are feeling very fortunate to be able to offer six yearlong professional development seminars in which diversity, active learning, and reflective practice are emphasized.

In the category of "best practices," learning community faculty would probably agree that building a safe space for community and time for reflection is as important for students as it is for faculty. Pedagogical materials presented here and on the Teaching Portfolio website suggest that collaborative, active learning assignments and projects specifically focused on diversity themes and issues are central to learning community curricula. Many of these activities show an intentional foregrounding of issues central to LaGuardia students such as immigration, hybridity, language difficulties, and empathy.

In a *Women and Society* cluster, Lorraine Cohen invites students to "look at gender oppression through the multiple lenses of women in this country and in other parts of the world. Important to this is an interview assignment that leads to a paper about a woman of an older generation, often the mother of the student. Since so many of the

students' parents are immigrants and many of them are from working-class backgrounds, students have an opportunity to focus on the interplay between gender, class, and culture." Gail Green-Anderson, a veteran of many learning communities, uses an assignment related to Gabriel García Márquez's novella *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* as a way of inviting students to think about their own experience of translation: "I ask students, before they read the novella, to write a short autobiographical essay based on an experience with translation. Students wrote about translating from one language to another; those who spoke only English had the opportunity to write about an expression or joke that did not 'travel' from one social context to another. As we discussed *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, we talked about issues related to translation. In this way, we recognized the power of language, not just *a* language, English. Since English is not the first language of most students in my class, this approach made students feel more confident and even proud of their expressive abilities in their first, second, or third languages."

If we look more deeply into classrooms where learning community work is taking place, the notion of holding back, of becoming the "guide on the side," emerges again and again. It becomes part of a reflective self-critique for many of us: "I was going to say something but . . . I waited"; or "I said something and wished I hadn't but the students solved the problem anyway." We can relate, in other words, to Parker Palmer's description of his struggle not to do the work for his students:

> [W]hen a student says something utterly untrue—everything in me wants to rise up and smite this falsehood with the Sword of Truth. If I want to encourage the conversation that the community of truth requires, I must learn to ask myself in that crucial instant a simple but demanding question: How quickly do I need to do the smiting? Can it wait thirty seconds? A minute? To the end of the hour? Until the next class? (1998, 134)

Here is faculty member Leonard Vogt's description of his struggle with a cluster discussion that got out of hand:

> In my liberal arts clusters, I teach around the themes of ethnicity, class, gender, and race, using Virginia Cyrus's *Experiencing Race, Class, and Gender in the U.S.* I assign around ten articles for each of the four themes and have students work in small groups to do reports on each of the articles. Recently, when reporting on the gender theme, one

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group was discussing an article called "Rape and Sexual Assault." The article's point was that rape has more to do with power than with sex but as the students made their report, the topic of women bringing on rape through what they wear or don't wear began to consume the conversation. I finally stopped the discussion, saying that the class was out of hand, that they were dealing with the topic far more from the emotions than the intellect and that this type of Jerry Springer approach to critical thinking was simply not appropriate or acceptable in a college classroom. One student asked if they could have five more minutes on the discussion since she thought what we were doing was very important. At that point a student who had not yet had a chance to report on her part of the article said: "The article ends by saying that nuns and women completely covered and even small children were sometimes raped; therefore what is worn or not worn is irrelevant to the cause of the action." That one student got the discussion back on course. The point of all this is that students often end up being the ones who really teach the class, if we trust them enough and even allow them to do what they have to do in their learning process.

While we would like to take credit for the purposeful structuring of activities and projects, as Vogt shows, the truth is that in learning communities we often observe the ways students take charge of their own knowledge. Our task, then, becomes to heighten their awareness of this process.

What is most meaningful to many faculty, despite our large classes, busy schedules, and impossible dreams, is our students' ability to apply what they are learning to new contexts, to look reflectively at ways they have changed, and their explicit valuing of insights and growth that have occurred during the cluster or seminar. It is the way students describe the transformative effects of being part of this kind of community:

I think this cluster has helped us find our true selves because I've seen people changing; I can tell the difference from the beginning of the semester up to this point. We're all growing and we're acquiring knowledge from all of our classes that are applicable to our lives. I love the fact that there is so much potential in our class, that everybody has their own artist and philosopher inside, and it is also great to see the diversity of

ethnicity in our cluster; I love my cluster, I love my classmates and I thank my professors for all the help, patience and understanding they've offered us throughout the semester. (Joanna Ramirez, student)

Endnotes

1. Source: Office of Institutional Research, Institutional Profile (http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/facts/default.aspx).
2. For more details about each of these learning community programs at LaGuardia, see our website: http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/lc.
3. The website our Teaching Portfolios is at: http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/tps.
4. Our teaching portfolio seminar were developed in dialogue with Judith Kamber, Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Northern Essex Community College, where she leads a faculty seminar called "Teaching in Community."
5. William J. Koolsbergen (theatre), Sonja Tanner (philosophy), and Phyllis van Slyck (English) taught this learning community.
6. See the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning website for a description of these seminars: http://faculty.lagcc.cuny.edu/CTL/home.htm.

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