

# Washington Center

## NEWS

FALL 2000

### Teaching and Learning in the Context of Cultural Differences

This issue of the Washington Center news reflects the extensive work underway in Washington state to reconceptualize diversity in ways that lead to personal, collective and institutional change. Our annual conference in February 2000 drew nearly 300 people together to talk about teaching and learning in the context of cultural differences. In her closing remarks, Beverly Daniels Tatum said that the twin tools for transformation are the capacity for critical thinking and the capacity for caring connection. We want our students to be able to think critically, to make arguments, to notice and analyze problems. We also want them to have the heart to try to solve those problems. The articles in this newsletter reflect those two values—the need to think critically and the need to care for others in addition to one’s self. As a whole, these articles enrich our thinking about the meaning of cultural differences and the potential for students when we as faculty, staff and administrators come to deeper understandings about the nature of our differences as well as our similarities. They also bear witness to our capacity for finding common ground across differences. As one person at the conference said, at this gathering, he didn’t have to pick which “identity” to share. He felt affirmed as a whole person. We hope this issue has a similar effect on you.

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**Participating Institutions:** Antioch University, Bates Technical College, Bellevue Community College, Bellingham Technical College, Big Bend Community College, Cascade Community College, Central Washington University, Centralia College, City University, Clark College, Clover Park Community College, Columbia Basin College, Eastern Washington University, Edmonds Community College, Everett Community College, Gonzaga University, Grays Harbor College, Green River Community College, Heritage College, Highline Community College, Lower Columbia College, North Seattle Community College, Northwest Indian College, Olympic College, Pacific Lutheran University, Peninsula College, Pierce College, Renton Technical College, Saint Martin’s College, Seattle Central Community College, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle University, Shoreline Community College, Skagit Valley College, South Puget Sound Community College, South Seattle Community College, Spokane Community College, Spokane Falls Community College, Tacoma Community College, The Evergreen State College, University of Puget Sound, University of Washington, Walla Walla Community College, Washington State University, Wenatchee Valley College, Western Washington University, Whatcom Community College, Whitworth College, Yakima Valley Community College.

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# Notes from the new director, Emily Decker

Dear Readers,

Welcome to this issue of the Washington Center newsletter. Thanks for your contributions to the work of the Center and for your ongoing interest and support. It is a tremendous privilege to serve as the Director of the Washington Center. We are all the beneficiaries of years of persistent and imaginative work both in the Center and across the state.

When the search committee asked me to speak about my passions in the context of higher education, I said I had two. I'm passionate about finding ways to make sure more kids, especially kids currently not well served by education, experience solid academic success. I want more kids and more adults to be successful academically. We have a growing understanding of the barriers placed before students of color and nontraditional learners. We have to persist in working to remove those barriers, including rethinking the content of our courses, the pedagogy we practice, the learning outcomes we name as important, and the demographics of who is working with these learners. The other thing I am passionate about is the reality of our human-ness. We have finite energy, finite time. We think and feel and get tired and frustrated and sometimes elated. I am for work that honors the frailty of our humanity.



Emily Decker, Director

Ultimately, the measure of our success in transforming higher education will lie in the quality of life of our babies and our old people. As students experience higher education as a place to practice responsible and compassionate citizenship, as we deepen our collective practice of education in the service of such citizenship, the lives of the people most dependent on others should be enhanced, and so should the quality of our collective lives together. We will know we have succeeded in transforming higher education when we see a difference in our communities. I don't know that we will see this in our lifetimes, but that only means that we should become quite clear about our deepest purpose.

How does this begin to translate into practice? Without losing sight of the urgent need for transformation, we need to take time to discover our common ground, our common understandings, and to develop a sense of community. Out of that sense of commitment and purpose the right work will grow. As Bernice Johnson Reagon writes in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (ed. Barbara Smith, NY: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), we need to be clear about our principles: "The thing that must survive you is not just the record of your practices but the principles that are the basis of that practice." As she points out, if someone is going to use your song, they're going to have to shift it a little bit.

I want to help organize a movement based on deep respect for the work of teachers and students, and on sharing good practices across institutions. We need to build coalitions wherever we can, connecting and supporting communities of people who share a vision of a just world and are working to make that happen. Our skills in building coalitions across boundaries in support of the learning of all may be the most critical element in transforming higher education.

Coalition work is hard. In that same article, "Coalition Politics: Turning The Century," Reagon argues that coalition work only matters if you intend to be around fifty years. I think it will take us at least that long to make the changes we need to make – to make our colleges places where everyone – students, staff, faculty, administrators, community members – greets each other with respect and compassion, and the learning that goes on leads ultimately to better lives for the youngest and oldest among us.

We have to become more discerning about where to put our individual and our collective energy. Last spring, the Washington Center's budget was cut by a third and it may be cut again. How best do we use our finite resources? How can we use technology to support collaborations across institutions and sustain our work between gatherings? How can we form coalitions that create synergy? I welcome your ideas, your advice, your offers of help.

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# Reflections on Whiteness in the Classroom

Gilda Sheppard, The Evergreen State College – Tacoma  
Carl Waluconis, Seattle Central Community College

“...if I am not what I've been told I am, then it means that you're not what you thought you were either! And that is the crisis.”

- James Baldwin, *A Talk to Teachers*

We have found that approaching the topic of whiteness often is like taking a walk through a minefield, and in this case, a very special minefield. Some of the explosives revolve around semantics; another set unearths a myriad of pre-assumptions. Whiteness and the difficulties incurred in discussing it revolve around history, around media, around class. Racism is often central to the discussion.

Therefore, let's try something different. Let's try to begin with a story: “There are two brothers – Big Whiteness and No Whiteness.” Did we say brothers? Perhaps we are genderizing this tale too early. There are a brother and sister – Whiteness & Whitenessella. Well, mixing race and gender into the same discussion heightens the discussion, and adds a new layer of complexity.

However, for the sake of the story, let's try our original tale a different way: “There are two brothers – Whiteness and Otherness.” These brothers lead to a question. Is Otherness brother to Whiteness, or did Whiteness create Otherness? This question could instead be – what parts of the identity of Whiteness does Otherness provide? Otherness furnishes and maintains some major attributes of Whiteness – those

attributes are power and privilege. They do appear in the classroom.

Power and privilege are not erasable – history supplies them even as Whiteness, without uttering a word, walks into the room. The crucial point is to use power and privilege responsibly, not as a practice of domination, which so often characterizes Whiteness. For instance, in its practice of domination Whiteness insists that Otherness not look at Whiteness. This is ironic because African-Americans (in the large population of “othered” peoples) have been “looking at” Whiteness for decades. In fact, it has often been imperative for their own health and safety that they do this. On the other hand, Whiteness doesn't want to look at Whiteness very often. Moreover if Otherness speaks in class, Otherness is not supposed to articulate or describe Whiteness during the discussion. After all, such an articulation might expose the two central attributes of whiteness we are examining: power and privilege.

Isn't such an exposure long overdue? A primary way to begin to understand whiteness is to expose its skill at erasing itself as a marker, becoming invisible even as it does its privileged work. Such an under-

standing requires an increase in consciousness. Increasing consciousness and awareness concerning whiteness and its implications in the classroom is the underlying purpose of this article.

The classroom propelled us to deal with whiteness publicly. To be specific, it seemed at first always to block our progress in a Learning Community concerning media. We thought for a long time that what blocked our progress was racism; i.e. discussions of race and racism led us to dialogic circles that explored only abstractions and inclusions. (Mention it and it's been covered; add it and it's been included.) We were dancing around the notion of whiteness and oftentimes blamed the students when they shut down. When we explicitly focused upon whiteness, it created a different discussion about race. Furthermore, we found that by interrogating whiteness, we could then successfully continue our exploration of media. The examination of whiteness deepened our students' and our own understanding of media and the ways that media effects thinking. A quotation from James Baldwin brought our study into focus for us: “The Negro performer is still in battle with the white man's image of the Negro which the white man clings to in order not to be forced

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“ . . . discussions of race and racism lead us to dialogic circles that explored only abstractions and inclusions. We were dancing around the notion of whiteness and often times blamed the students when they shut down.”

to reverse his image of himself.”

This is not to say that a discussion of whiteness is discipline bound. In fact, an interrogation of whiteness is important whether talking about diversity or bio-diversity. An interrogation of whiteness is a changing process. However, the process involves a study of history – did whiteness begin in the 17th century as Allen argues? It involves an economic analysis – see DuBois or Roedigger and others on the history of labor. It involves a study of aesthetic beauty and media – see hooks or Dyer. It involves science and math – see Ascher. These are frames of reference for an interrogation. They can provide a means for movement of minds in our classrooms.

After all, in our classrooms, instructors report that the discourse concerning race often seems to cause the white students to shut down. The faculty report frustration at not knowing how to engage the students with this topic. These are top-flight faculty who have a veritable bag-of-tricks from Perry and others on how to engage students on a variety of levels. The same methods that engage students with physics, history, sociology, chemistry, fill-in-the-blank can be used to engage students in a discussion concerning whiteness. After all, students and instructors who otherwise subscribe to more progressive discourse often spend time and energy dancing around the topic of whiteness. The irony is that by engaging with the topic, the rigor of scholarship and discourse increases in ways not previously considered or even imagined.

Certainly, one problem in our study is that whiteness is a protean, elusive target. It is changing even as we write; it is disappearing to re-appear in new ways. Finding whiteness in a topic or discipline adds a new way of seeing. For instance, in terms of the consumer culture that engulfs us, whiteness is always commodified, but is not set aside by itself on the shelf. On the other hand, otherness is commodified in trendy ways, and is always set aside for consumption.

We discussed how the topic of racism led us to these considerations of whiteness. Perhaps, a critical question arises from the comparison - *are whiteness and racism the same?* They aren't necessarily. Racism is not the sum total of whiteness; it is a practice of whiteness. Whiteness, like racism,

involves historical domination in all of its forms, such as white supremacy, the heart of whiteness. The informative question might be – *is whiteness an ism?*

We began with a tale that seemed to get lost as we progressed. Well – the story is only lost if we refuse to live it. Actually, it is not lost, but we will live it without recognizing. It is up to us to finish the story, but we do so by continuing to recognize and interrogate whiteness in its attempts to dominate. In the words of Richard Dyer, “the point of looking at whiteness is to dislodge it from its centrality and authority, not to reinstate it.”

We need to know that a study of whiteness will not eat us up; it will liberate us. It provides us with a new perspective on our disciplines and our teaching practice.



Kitty Carlson, Cesar Villasana, and Sherry Sullivan (South Puget South Community College) discuss an institutional change based on focus group discussions with students of color with workshop participants at the annual conference.

# Interrogating Whiteness

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# Creating a Socially Constructive Conflict Environment

Sue Feldman, The Evergreen State College  
Lee Lambert, Centralia College

Over the years of teaching we have heard the same complaint from students. It goes something like this, “the conversation was just getting good and the teacher stopped it.” “We were just getting into the stuff that mattered and the teacher stopped the discussion.” “The stuff that mattered” was socially charged content and almost always race related. The students were ready to talk, to listen, to learn and probably to argue it out, but the teacher was not. The following is a discussion of why we have socially charged conflict in our classrooms and how faculty can embrace conflict as a constructive, educationally sound, opportunity for learning.

Our work draws from three theories: conflict theory (Deutsch, 1973; Bush, Folger, 1994), developmental theories (Piaget, 1967; Vygotsky, 1978), and racial identity development theory (Helms, 1990; Cross 1991). We will briefly introduce these theories, describe how they work together to inform classroom practice and then outline some fundamental classroom practices that provide for the constructive engagement in conflict that emerges from socially charged content to promote educationally sound experiences.

Webster’s Dictionary (1997) defines conflict: “1. A fight, battle, war. 2. Competitive or opposing action of incompatibles; antagonistic state or action (as divergent ideas, interests or persons).” This common understanding of conflict is the result, at least in part, of conflict being viewed as a zero/sum game, and participants not having skills to engage in

conflict as a constructive process. We define conflict as “an opportunity to bring together opposing actions of incompatibles to create and promote understanding that is lasting, transformative, positive and healthy” (Lambert and Feldman, Presentation, 1999).

Conflict theory establishes the constructive and transformative potential of conflict. It identifies conflict as a neutral, not good or bad, experience. It is how people behave in conflict that determines whether the outcomes will be constructive or destructive, therefore it is essential to understand the particular behaviors that determine if a conflict will be constructive or destructive. Here, constructive means building relationships through the process of

engaging in the conflict, working to gain greater understanding through the process of the conflict and focusing on mutual gains. Constructive behaviors can be taught and learned.

Piaget and Vygotsky both identified the essential nature of conflict in learning. Developmental theory defines conflict (disequilibrium) as essential to the development of intelligence. Development occurs when cognitive dissonance (conflict) creates the need for change. Change is often maturing. The more mature one is the more able one is to self-actualize, to think and act on knowing. When we embrace conflict as essential to development then it has a place in our classrooms as long as we are prepared to engage in it

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Nancy Taylor (The Evergreen State College), Michael Meyer (Bellevue Community College), Jim Harnish (North Seattle Community College), and Bruce Kochis (University of Washington – Bothell) discuss strategies for next year’s conference at the June Planning Committee meeting at Rainbow Lodge.

constructively, meaning to maturing ends. We do not mean character strengthening or toughing it out. We mean addressing conflict to develop greater understanding, to build relationships and mutual educational gain.

Beverly Daniel Tatum's 1992 article in *The Harvard Education Review* captured the predictable nature of conflicts that arise in class, simply because students are in different places in their own identity development. These identity-based conflicts are inevitable because our students are naturally in different places in their identity development using a developmental framework. Cross (1991) and Helms (1990) defined racial identity as a particular aspect of development that plays a major role in who we know ourselves to be. Helms (1990) identified 5 stages of White racial identity: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independent, Immersion/Emersion, Autonomy. Cross (1991) identified 6 stages of African American Identity: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization, Internalization/Commitment. Each stage is discernable and has distinct characteristics that are determinates of worldview and behavior. These models provide us with a language structure to understand the challenges our students face when they interact with others who are different from them. When some students are at Cross's Immersion/Emersion and other students are at Helm's Disintegration, this can naturally lead to conflict in the classroom.

Constructive engagement in these socially charged conflicts is what our students want to learn how to do in an effort to promote greater understanding among their classmates. This desire on the part of our students is something we as educators should be prepared to facilitate and encourage. When educators embrace conflict as a necessary experience for significant meaning making, it becomes as important in the learning environment as a good text. The trick is, of course, to facilitate the conflict for constructive

engagement, rather than destructive chaos. When one pulls these theories together to inform teaching practices, conflict holds a welcomed place in the classroom.

The key here is for teachers to understand how to establish constructive learning environments. There are distinct conditions that create constructive learning environments: creating community, cultivating basic conflict resolution skills, and establishing a systematic structure for engaging with conflict when it arises.

Creating community can be done many ways. We have found that the collaborative development of a social contract that answers the question, "What do you need to fully participate in this class?" provides clear structure for students and instructors. Through the process of identifying ground rules and explicitly discussing their implications for the class, students begin to learn about each other's needs and points of view. This explicit attention to inclusion sends a direct message to students who are generally marginalized that they will have equal access to the learning and therefore a place in the community that recognizes their voice. The development of a social contract

establishes a learning environment in which power is shared equally, by asking each student to contribute to the definition of the social environment of the class. This process will often decenter the white, male students who are accustomed to having more power in the classroom. This alone can be a transformative learning experience. The social contract provides for safety and constructive discomfort. (Social contract lesson plan available upon request.)

One of the first things many educators are taught is to establish safe classroom environments for students to learn. If students are comfortable in class, they will learn and if they are uncomfortable, they will not. Our work redefines the role of safety and comfort in the classroom. Yes, safety plays a role in the classroom, but for meaningful learning to happen some discomfort is essential. Explicitly separating safety from comfort is an important activity in creating a learning community.

Basic conflict resolution skills contribute to the constructive engagement in conflict. The basic conflict skills of attending, restating, reframing, validating, and reflecting and encouraging are easy to learn and easy to teach. When instructors take

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Lee Lambert (Centralia College) visits with Gene Taylor (Edmonds Community College) after a session at the 2000 conference.



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“When we embrace conflict as essential to development, then it has a place in our classrooms as long as we are prepared to engage in it constructively, meaning to maturing ends.”

forty minutes to an hour on the first or second day of class to teach these skills, students and instructors can share the responsibility for constructive engagement. If an instructor teaches these skills, he or she can fairly expect students to use them and can even grade students on their demonstration of the skills. Additionally when the instructor consistently demonstrates these skills him/herself, it reinforces the value of the skills for the students.

Having a systematic structure for engaging with conflict that arises provides something for students and instructors to depend on. The constructive engagement process we propose has six steps which must be followed in order and must be facilitated by a skilled (skills listed above), quasi-neutral person. (Instructors aren't neutral but they can facilitate the process as neutral.)

1. Recognize the issue
2. Set Structure
3. Tell the stories
4. Name It
5. Negotiate Meaning
6. Take Action.

This process takes some time but allows for the constructive engagement in socially charged issues which otherwise escalate out of control and contribute to a destructive learning experience.

Recognizing the issue simply means noticing when conflict is present. Setting Structure means identifying what will happen next. Establish how much time you are willing to give to the engagement, and how the process will work and what the rules

are. Common rules are no cross talk until negotiations, deep listening, no interrupting, confront ideas not people, and focus on greater understanding. Sometimes instructors will have students move their desks into a circle formation so that each student can see every other student. This makes it easier to speak to the group instead of to the teacher. Once the structure is established each student shares information about the issue from their point of view. This can be done systematically by going around the circle to the left. When the first person finishes, the person to his or her left can speak or pass until everyone has had a chance to offer some information. This systematic approach de-escalates emotions, slows down the interactions, and gives each student voice so no one has to grab the floor.

Naming It is generally the instructors' time to pull together the themes and connections from the students' stories and to clarify the issue(s). This reframes the issue for engagement rather than argument. It is helpful to connect the students' stories to the class content and particularly the themes in the class's texts. It is important at this point to clarify misunderstandings and misinformation. It can be helpful to offer additional information to enhance the discussion that will follow. If, for instance, the issue is racism and in the students' stories they used the terms prejudice and discrimination interchangeably, it would be important to clarify the meaning of those terms before the discussion began. Naming It transitions into Negotiating Meaning when the instructor

poses a compelling question that is open ended and insists on critical thinking.

Negotiating Meaning is an open discussion that provides the opportunity for students to think together about the issue with a focus on greater understanding. The purpose of the discussion is to collaboratively explore the complexity of the issue. (Watch out for simplification and problem solving.)

The final stage is Action. Action means to do something with what you have learned. It could be a written assignment; it could be a public presentation; it could be a political action. Action is the step that moves the learning forward from talk to walk. These engagement sessions are emotionally taxing and action is empowering. It is important to close the process on an action because action is the antidote to despair. (A detailed explanation of the process is available upon request.) When instructors possess the basic skills to constructively intervene in socially charged conflict, students develop relationships across significant differences, gain greater understanding from diverse viewpoints and work together for mutually beneficial educational sound ends.

When we recognize learning as a process of becoming ourselves and understand that the process of learning is inspired by conflict, then conflict deserves an honored place in our classrooms. Just as we would not come to class unprepared to discuss a text, we ought not to show up unprepared to facilitate students' learning in controversial times.

# Making Multiculturalism Come Alive at Pierce College: A Learning Institute

Christine Martin, Agnes Steward  
Pierce College

Emily Decker asked, “What led Pierce College to support a team of 22 at the Washington Center Conference on Teaching and Learning in the Context of Cultural Differences?”

To quote Judy Kvinsland, our Associate Dean for Planning and Assessment, “What we really do well at Pierce is team around goals. Professional development is often a solitary activity, and has little real systemic impact. But as a team, and in community, we can extend our learning multifold.” And that is exactly why we sent a team – to build on our strengths and to deepen our learning. As a part of the Multicultural Learning Institute, this conference developed participants’ learning in the context of two different communities, giving them more perspectives, more support and more tools to extend their learning into their classrooms and workshops.

“Teaching and Learning in the Context of Cultural Difference” not only applies to our students, but also includes tapping into and developing the differences our employees bring to the work of the College in a systemic and intentional way. By supporting teams that are in line with our mission, we become an example of Stephen Covey’s “Learning Organization” – and everyone benefits:

“Once you get information, you tend to use it. When you get enough people with information, you raise the consciousness and unleash energies. The higher the consciousness, the more the social, national, and political will develops. For the principle-centered leader, information then becomes power, the power of a collective will to accomplish the mission of the organization.” – Stephen R. Covey, *Principle Centered Leadership* (235)

**The Multicultural Learning Institute** was a pilot project, using an employee learning community as the vehicle to provide a rich, collegial professional development opportunity for the members of the Pierce College District, including our Puyallup and Fort Steilacoom campuses as well as our 13 sites. The Institute was one of numerous efforts to systemically incorporate our core five abilities throughout the institution: in the classroom, in the delivery of student services and in our staff development efforts.

## Why a Multicultural Learning Institute?

*“We are a community of learners open to all.”*

That’s the first thing you read in our Pierce College Mission Statement. The statement also espouses four core values:

- ◆ Access
- ◆ Multiculturalism
- ◆ Educational Excellence
- ◆ College Environment

As a key part of Educational Excellence,

*(We) prepare our students to live and work in a dynamically changing world by emphasizing whole-student development and the five abilities:*

- ◆ *Effective Communication*
- ◆ *Critical Thinking/Problem Solving*
- ◆ *Multiculturalism*
- ◆ *Information Competency*
- ◆ *Responsibility*

Yet, despite our repeated efforts to underscore our stated value of – and

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commitment to – multiculturalism, our spring 1999 Student Survey revealed we still weren't doing enough: "Although Pierce College students make progress in adopting a multicultural perspective over time, they do not significantly increase the frequency of their serious discussions with students whose ethnic or cultural background is different from their own or who are from a different country."

It was clear. We needed to get students talking to each other face to face, not just appreciating each other's perspectives from a distance.

## What was the Multicultural Learning Institute?

Chris drafted a proposal suggesting that she and Agnes offer staff, faculty and administrators the chance to participate in a two-quarter-long learning community, "Making Multiculturalism Come Alive at Pierce College." The Multicultural Learning Institute was based on five principles:

- ◆ The Institute would be a functional learning community.
- ◆ Pierce College defines multiculturalism as "multiple ways of knowing, being, and thinking", an inclusive definition focusing on ability, age, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social economic status, among others.
- ◆ The "Internationalizing Learning Through Linked Assignments" instructional design by Tom Whalley, a community college instructor at Douglas College in New Westminster, British Columbia, would be used as our foundation. Instructors would "link" a multicultural activity to an existing classroom or workshop activity, using the richness students and employees bring to our classrooms and workshops and

integrating those experiences into the context of an existing assignment or task.

- ◆ Since many of us had participated in intensive diversity training over the years, we assumed there was a relatively high level of multicultural awareness and sensitivity at Pierce College. The Institute would build on the foundation of this awareness, commitment and skill.

- ◆ We were determined to make our newly reorganized "Student Learning and Success" model come alive by recognizing the systemic nature of our college's mission, specifically the inseparable bond between instruction and student services and the impact of that bond on student learning and success.

Grounded in the above five principles, we used Ruth Stiehl's outcomes assessment model, first defining the learning outcomes for Institute participants – then working backward to set parameters for our assessment tasks, process skills and the Institute's themes, concepts and issues. The outcomes guide was used to design the Institute, direct our instruction and assess the learning that occurred.

In addition to Stiehl's model, we wove faculty development and learning community principles into the design. As a result, the following features marked the Institute's final form:

- ◆ Manageability – 6 two-hour workshops held over winter and spring quarters.
- ◆ Independent, self-directed study.
- ◆ Attendance at the 13th Annual Washington Center conference "Improving Undergraduate Education: Teaching & Learning in the Context of Cultural Differences".
- ◆ Curriculum development – created a linked activity winter quarter and implemented it spring quarter.

- ◆ Resource identification and development assistance (Web, library, personal resources, people).
- ◆ On-going support – peer group, consultations, blackboard virtual online classroom, drop-in times, classroom visitations.
- ◆ Stipends – salary credits for faculty or \$200 for implementation of the linked activity by June 23.
- ◆ Joint facilitation – Chris Martin, Curriculum Development Specialist and Agnes Steward, Director of Multicultural Services.

## Who participated in the Institute?

The participants in the institute included faculty, administrators, and student services employees of the Pierce College, all from the Fort Steilacoom campus. We selected participants using these criteria:

- ◆ Commitment to the full Institute;
- ◆ Registration by deadline;
- ◆ Representation from instruction and student services;
- ◆ Representation from diverse fields of study and content.

We targeted our original call for participants to ten; however, due to the overwhelming response, we developed two separate groups of ten, making each group as diverse as possible using the diversity that already existed. At the onset, we identified age, employment classification, and gender as the diversity we, as Institute designers, could link to Institute activities. As the Institute developed, religion, ethnicity and race also contributed to the richness of our learning community.

To exist at all, the Institute needed funding and district-wide support. We obtained both without reservation from our Associate Dean for Planning and Assessment, our two District Vice Presidents for Student Learning and Success, the Director of

(Continued on page 12)

Student Success, and our seven division chairs. We were fortunate that International Education, the Outcomes Team and Multicultural Services wholeheartedly came forth with financial and moral support for the effort, even after our numbers doubled! The Institute tallied total expenditures of roughly \$5000, which included sending a team of 22 to the Washington Center conference. In addition, \$2000 in curriculum development stipend money was made available but was largely untapped as most participants chose not to use it.

### What were some of the multicultural outcomes and linked activities that were developed?

◆ Ted Wood, Chemistry Faculty – Students will work in diverse work groups to analyze various chemical aspects of Lake Waughop bordering the Pierce College campus. “Prior to beginning work, each student completed a values inventory designed to encourage them to think about what they bring, and don’t bring, to the group experience.”

◆ Deb Devolio, Displaced Homemakers Coordinator – Students will be able to describe a workplace situation from two different cultural frames of reference. “The activity consisted of identifying the stereotypes associated with age that exist in our country,

especially as they relate to entering the workforce and to one’s own self-presentation.”

◆ Jan Bucholz, Human Resources Director – Supervisors will identify contrasting cultural values and examine how one’s own cultural values may impact perception of job elements. “The activity will occur within the training of supervisors and other employees about using a new performance evaluation form.”

◆ Arron Grow, International Education Coordinator – Students will produce a culturally sensitive business report. “International students will incorporate what they have learned about cultural sensitivity into their analysis of opening a new factory in a given city.”

◆ DeAnne Berryhill, Tutoring Center Coordinator – Tutors will resolve a student/staff issue using three different approaches in order to serve a diverse population.

All in all, we were very pleased with the variety and creativity that resulted from the Institute.

### What was Learned?

#### Participants – Some Lessons Learned

In general, the mid-session and final evaluations showed that the Institute had an above-average impact on people’s learning. In

regards to new skills gained, staff members found themselves more confident in their new skills to link a multicultural activity than did faculty and administrators. Following are some comments from the final evaluations about what folks learned:

“Those of us raised in white cultures don’t necessarily identify with our own race. I have become more aware of this for myself and others.”

“[From the Institute] I learned how to analyze each component of the student learning process. From the [Washington Center] conference, I learned to approach a student at their level, not mine, and to pick appropriate outcomes.”

“I am satisfied with what I wrote, but I still feel like writing a good, specific, measurable outcome for multicultural skills is, at best, difficult, and at worst, not really possible.”

“I feel confident that, given what I teach, I have the ability to offer assignments that will maximize the multicultural potential of my courses.”

#### Facilitators – Some Other Lessons Learned

Of the many things we learned, we’d like to highlight just a few, along with a few ideas of how we might expand what we’ve learned in the future:

◆ In general, the more an individual was engaged with the design of the Institute and used the resources offered, the more she or he was likely to implement the plan and accomplish the outcomes successfully. Next time, we want to have one, ten-member group with two facilitators to increase support. We will also tighten up selection criteria.

◆ Differentiating instructional content from the ability to use that content continues to be a huge challenge. We want to have more one-on-one consultations to help guide this process.

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Student Brenda McKinney’s poster was chosen to represent one of the college’s five core abilities, Multiculturalism. Posters were designed as part of a student project for Pierce College’s Digital Design program. Brenda also designed posters for each of the other core abilities.



◆ At this year's Washington Center Annual Conference, Drs. Janet and Milton Bennett discussed the importance of identifying where on their "Continuum of Development of Intercultural Sensitivity" an individual lies. The learning outcomes for the institute posed a relatively high level of challenge, and it was important to work with each individual where they are on this continuum. We will include the Washington Center conferences in future Institutes.

◆ The ability to fully participate in and take advantage of all the Institute had to offer was limited by the demands of working in a student-centered institution and by one's own intrinsic motivation and ability to be self-directed. We will look for grants to pay for reallocated time and seek more supervisory support.

◆ Members of the Institute developed a relatively strong Institute identity. We want to deepen this commitment and support by incorporating more group accountability within the Institute and to the District as well.

◆ Moving beyond the understanding of diversity as "race" to the more global understanding of Pierce's multiculturalism was difficult. We need to model this more intentionally throughout the Institute's design and implementation.

◆ To assure more use of the on-line classroom, we need to develop a strong, non-optional reason for people to go there. We could use the classroom to facilitate the development of a group project.

### Now what?

The Multicultural Institute was a quite successful pilot project – and it has a future. We've had requests from across the district to offer the Multicultural Institute on a yearly basis. Preliminary backing has already been garnered, supporting the idea of reprising the Institute at Pierce College, Puyallup during winter and spring quarters of 2000-2001. (An Effective Communication Learning Institute will also be offered next year.)

An advisory committee of Institute participants and Student Learning and Success administrators will meet once or twice this summer to give us both some input on how to strengthen and develop the Institute.

Over the years, the people of Pierce College have striven to fulfill our mission: "We are a community of learners open to all." This continual effort and commitment is best expressed by a faculty member's words:

*"The focus to link a multicultural skill to an existing course activity works well – it emphasizes that multiculturalism is a 'part of' the learning process as a whole and not something that you focus on for a couple of days and then move on" – Institute participant*

The authors wish to thank Judy Kvinsland and Carol Saynisch for their editing contributions. For further information on how the Institute was designed or facilitated, the reader can contact Chris Martin at [cmartin@pierce.ctc.edu](mailto:cmartin@pierce.ctc.edu) or Agnes Steward at [asteward@pierce.ctc.edu](mailto:asteward@pierce.ctc.edu).

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# A Question of Culture

Sandy Campbell Cheek  
Big Bend Community College

The experience of being “a stranger in a strange land” is a universal one, to a greater or lesser degree. At times, each of us has felt uncertain of what was expected or normal in a certain situation; each of us has struggled to define for ourselves how we “belong” in a certain place. Moving to a new community, taking a new job, or living in a different country—all these situations require adjustments that allow us to begin our process of adaptation. We engage in an ongoing process of re-defining ourselves, taking into account the new context in which we find ourselves. This process is dynamic and on-going, and is impacted by historical, social, personal, and cultural factors. To say it is complex and challenging is an understatement.

For immigrants, refugees and international students, this re-defining process is an important one. Cultural adaptation and understanding the process of developing a cultural identity are at the root of the immigrant experience. To what degree is it possible to “belong” in this new country? How is that sense of belonging achieved? What of a person’s self is given up and what is retained? At what cost? What are the factors that make the process of adaptation easy or difficult, joyous or painful? And finally, what degree of choice does an individual have in terms of how he or she defines himself, culturally speaking?

These questions, all centered around the topic of cultural identity, are the focus of a curriculum I developed for my ESL students. This is a story of why I engaged in this topic,

how my class worked through these difficult and challenging questions, and finally, what kinds of answers they came up with.

## Rationale

I have been teaching in adult education and development education for almost twenty years. As an instructor of ESL students at a technical college, I knew that I was responsible for helping my students develop their reading and writing and thinking skills so they’d be successful at work or in their subsequent courses, and I’d been doing a pretty good job of helping with that. But I felt that something was missing...

I watched and listened to my students. Time and again, as we engaged in classroom conversation, the subject turned to their struggles with the tremendous sea change they were experiencing (or had experienced) as immigrants. They *needed* to talk about it.

I also observed that when left to their own devices, students tended to gravitate towards others of the same culture and language. It was understandable (I’d done the same thing as a student in France years ago); nevertheless, I felt we were sidestepping a great opportunity for cross-cultural learning. In talking with employers and other teachers, I realized that cultural diversity was becoming the norm; classrooms and workplaces were fast becoming global communities. I decided that in order to be successful, learning to deal with cultural differences was an important skill.

In fact, like Ford Motor Company, I had decided that functioning successfully in a multicultural environment was “Job 1” for my students.

## Objectives

I had some pretty lofty goals: One, I wanted my students to develop their “voice” and learn to tell their own story as it related to their immigration experience. I felt intuitively that exploring this topic would enhance their reading and writing abilities. (It did, by the way, beyond my wildest imaginings!) Two, I wanted them to understand some of the social, economic and historical factors that affected the development of their own cultural identity. I believed that, as is the case with most things, the more we know about a process, the better control we have over its direction and influence on our behavior. And three, I wanted them to develop an appreciation for cultural difference in others, and begin to understand what it takes to function effectively in a multicultural setting. My dream was that somehow, in my classroom, cultural barriers would become bridges, and a learning community that embraced differences would somehow evolve. (I am, after all, a cockeyed optimist!)

Well, how was all this supposed to happen?

## Implementation

*“The real job is not to understand foreign cultures but to understand our own.”*

- Edward Hall

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“My dream was that somehow, in my classroom, cultural barriers would become bridges, and a learning community that embraced differences would somehow evolve.”

Any ESL teacher worth her salt has conducted some exercise to enhance cultural understanding in her students. Potlucks, celebrations of various holidays, and the study of different cultural practices are all part of the ESL classroom experience. However, I wanted students to engage in activities that would not only showcase students' various cultures, but would make students think deeply about significant aspects of their culture, how they learned them, and how (or if!) they wanted to preserve those traditions in their own families. I wanted students to understand the multiple dimensions (both overt and covert) of culture, how culture is transmitted, and the nature of cultural adaptation.

We had “country talks.” Students from the same culture prepared presentations on some significant aspect of their culture. Students then asked questions about the meanings and significance of the cultural practice, and we attempted to discern what core values were implied in the practice.

Students were also required to teach us a particular cultural practice — a song, a dance, a particular dish.... This was a wonderful experience. Students who had not really thought much about their culture (who in fact spent much of their time trying to diminish differences in their effort to adapt!) had a chance to become “experts.” A Japanese tea master took us through a formal tea ceremony, explaining each exquisite step. A Thai woman taught us classical Thai dancing, showing how her dance master bent her tiny wrists back at

impossible angles to form a graceful arc which none of us could duplicate; a Chinese woman made moon cakes and told us the fable of how the moon was made; and on and on. Each time we participated in these activities, students discussed what was “behind” the practice—in other words, what values were implicit in not just the cultural practice but how it was executed.

The beginnings of cultural awareness, and with that, a deep sense of pride in their culture: this is what I saw happening. A young woman from Mexico told me, “Before, I was ashamed to be Mexicana. I wanted my son to be only American. Now, I am proud of my heritage. I want to tell people more about my country, and I want my son to know where he is from.” She transferred him to a bilingual kindergarten as a result.

The next portion of the curriculum was designed to help students examine the process of cultural transmission. I focused on the key elements of gender roles and education. I asked students to think about *what* they were taught in their native culture regarding gender roles and education, about *who* taught them, and finally, about *how* those values were transmitted. It was an interesting and difficult exercise. Try it yourself. Do you remember someone sitting you down and telling you that, for example, girls were supposed to be “nice” and boys were supposed to be “rowdy” in a classroom? Or that because everyone in your family went to a particular college you were supposed to go

there as well? I suspect not...and that's what's tricky about cultural values. Most of what we learn about our culture is absorbed almost by osmosis; we don't even know it's happening. But it's the very unconsciousness with which we operate that can cause problems. By uncovering some of these cultural messages, we can then make conscious choices about which ones we listen to and pass on, and which we choose to ignore. That's a powerful thing.

Students began to discover cultural messages everywhere. A Mexican woman realized that in her house only her brothers were expected to go to school; her job was to stay and take care of the younger children. A Cambodian woman realized that the clothing she was expected to wear as a young girl made her “ladylike”, but was incredibly restrictive. It was tremendously exciting to hear and read the thoughts my students had on these issues; it was evident that even though these were tough and complex concepts, my students rose to the challenge of thinking and writing about them because they *mattered*.

Exciting changes began to occur. Students who had been shy, reserved and unwilling to cross cultural lines began to work and talk with others from different cultures. Women who had never contemplated working found jobs. Students who had been working only where their native language was spoken were taking on new jobs that required English, and they were participating more actively in the workplace. It was working!

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“Students mapped out their personal journeys to America, and then looked at the records of other immigrants throughout history.”

Thus far, students had gained cultural awareness of both their own and others' cultures. They had examined the social nature of cultural transmission and were beginning to understand the process by which cultural norms are passed on. They had begun to develop the skill of seeing the significance of cultural practices and their relationship to cultural values.

Finally, I wanted students to understand the historical dimension of their immigration experience. We've said it a million times—that America is a nation of immigrants—but I wanted my students to understand that from the inside. To do so, we first mapped out their personal journeys to America, and then looked at the records of other immigrants throughout history.

This was perhaps the most moving part of the curriculum experience. Students created collages from old magazines that helped them describe their experience of coming to America. They wrote about what they had created, and shared it with other students. What images did they choose to symbolize their experiences?

A flock of ducks crossing a highway in front of a truck: *“This is me. I can drive. I can walk to anywhere. I can go anywhere, but I feel it is not safe. Ducks can cross the road, but it is very, very dangerous.”*

A songbird caught and struggling in a net: *“I have been caught by everything in this new culture...like this bird, I am angry and desperate.”*

Two Vietnamese farmers silhouetted by a sunset: *“I missed my life...I miss everything. Do you like music? Do you know about the music in my country? It is wonderful*

*sleeping while the sound of the one-string instrument run (sic) through your head...”*

An angel: *“When I came to this country, every part of my body wanted to sing a song...”*

As they shared their experiences, they began to see common threads that tied them together across all cultural lines. It didn't seem to matter where they were from, what language they spoke, or what circumstances had precipitated their move to America—all had struggled and then found ways to adapt. Those who were still struggling learned ways of coping and adjusting, and perhaps most important, discovered that they were not alone.

My students now felt connected to one another through common immigration experience; reading about Ellis Island and Angel Island connected them to America and the American immigrant experience. Voices from one hundred years ago echoed the same feelings my students had just voiced: pain, joy, loneliness, fear, and anticipation. And above all, a fervent desire to belong, whatever that means.

#### **And in the End...**

To assess what was learned, I used a variety of techniques and tools. I used standardized reading tests; their gains were unprecedented. Most students made gains of two grade levels, if the standardized tests were to be believed. I used writing rubrics; I noticed sentence length and structure gained in complexity; vocabulary improved; and the use of literary devices such

as metaphor and simile were remarkable. I used focus groups and very specific questions to determine, from the students' perspectives, what they had learned. I taped and transcribed the results of these focus groups. These provided documentation of job changes, job promotions, increased community involvement, increased intercultural interactions, and an increased awareness and appreciation of their own and others' cultures.

*“Your class changed my life.”*

*“Before, I was afraid of black people. Now, I met many black people in class, and they are very nice and friendly.”*

*“My heart was touched by the class. We are friends from all cultures because of this class.”*

*“I cut the chains of my life with the help of my teacher, Sandy Campbell.”*

It's been four years since this first class, and still, students have come back to me with comments like these. They're not quantifiable, or easily reduced to statistical data. But I've become a great believer in the power of telling one's story, and my students learned to tell theirs. I like Eudora Welty's argument for the significance of stories, so I think I'll end with a quote from *One Writer's Beginnings*:

*Each of us is moving, changing, with respect to others. As we discover, we remember; remembering, we discover; and most intensely do we experience this when our separate journeys converge.*



# Untold Success Stories of Students of Color Project at Seattle Central Community College: A Project in Process

Alejandro Tomas, Rebecca Boon, Terri Johnson, Tracy Lai, Karen Strickland, Yilin Sun, Tina Young, Seattle Central Community College,  
Diane Gillespie, University of Washington – Bothell

As part of the efforts to promote teaching and learning excellence and increase retention and success for students of color at Seattle Central Community College (SCCC), a research team of eight faculty and staff members from Seattle Central Community College and the University of Washington (Bothell Campus) has been working on a collaborative project which focuses on the untold successful experiences of students of color. The team members are: Alejandro Tomas, Commercial Photography; Rebecca Boon, Basic Studies; Dr. Diane Gillespie, UW–Bothell; Terri Johnson, former SCCC intern; Tracy Lai, Humanities and Social Sciences; Karen Strickland, Health and Human Services; Yilin Sun, Basic Studies and SCCD District Faculty Development Office; and Tina Young, Multicultural Initiatives Office.

This project is investigating successful experiences of students of color with the following qualifications: (a) students who are currently in their second year of a college program at Seattle Central Community College, or (b) students who have successfully completed their program of study and are currently enrolled in a 4-year institution, or (c) students who transferred from SCCC and have completed a baccalaureate degree at a 4-year institution, or (d) students who have successfully completed a two-year certification program and obtained employment

as a result of college education.

Through the collection of the case stories documenting the successful experiences of these students, and the development of a photo-documentary exhibit, the project aims to illuminate: (1) how students of color have met the challenges of making a difference in their academic and career lives; (2) in what ways the community college system has helped them to achieve success; and (3) how institutions can transform themselves to further improve and facilitate students' success.

Both two-year and four-year institutions can use the results, both the stories and the exhibition, as powerful ways to increase the retention and success of students of color

in different programs of study and to deepen our understanding of multiculturalism and diversity. This project is a complex, multi-dimensional approach to program evaluation and curriculum enrichment; thus it provides a distinctive and important opportunity for faculty and staff development, especially in the areas of advancing cultural diversity.

## **Intended Outcomes:**

- College faculty and staff will have a valuable opportunity to appreciate and experience diversity from students of color and to learn from their inspiring stories through case studies, workshops and the exhibition.

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Hong Wang, with her daughter

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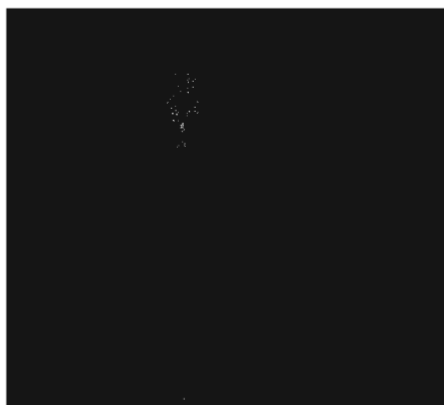
“The photo-documentary exhibition will have a long lasting effect on promoting the successful experiences of students of color and create a positive image for the general public about students of color.”

- Faculty and staff will be made aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the college’s programs, services, and facilities so that they can in turn inform and reform the institution.
- Through participation as researchers, faculty and staff members will have a valuable opportunity to be engaged in professional development, and to gain insights and skills for classroom oriented research which will enhance the effectiveness of their teaching and the delivery of student services.
- The case stories developed by the team will be available to all faculty on campus for curriculum integration.
- The photo-documentary exhibition will have a long lasting effect on promoting the successful experiences of students of color and create a positive image for the general public about students of color.
- Students who are interviewed will have the opportunity to reflect upon their achievements, develop confidence, and a stronger sense of themselves as role models.
- Students who are still within the community college system will be able to learn from the stories and exhibition. For many students of color, their experiences and perspectives will be validated through these presentations.

Currently, the team members are writing summary stories from the interviews which will accompany the photographs in the exhibit.

Workshops and presentations will be organized on campus and faculty and staff will be encouraged to use these powerful case stories in their classrooms and in the delivery of student services. By making these stories available to the larger campus community, students of color will be able to learn and apply the effective strategies shared by these role models and to reflect on their own critical moments. The results of the project will also serve as a means to advocate for the recognition of underrepresented student populations and help institutions, funding agencies and the state legislatures set up more realistic approaches to achieve desired outcomes.

This project has been sponsored in part by Seattle Community College District Chancellor Dr. Peter Ku; SCCC President Dr. Charles H. Mitchell; Dr. Myrtle Mitchell, Dean of Professional/ Technical Education; Bea Kiyohara, Dean of Student Development Services; Rhonda Quash Coats, Director of Student Services, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; The Washington Center for the Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education; The Lockwood Foundation, and Washington Association for Education of Speakers of Other Languages (WAESOL).



Seattle Central Community College student  
Fred Mata

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# Supporting and Celebrating Our LGBT Students and Colleagues

W. Houston Dougharty, University of Puget Sound  
Travis Greene, Iowa State University & University of Puget Sound

For years our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) college students have struggled to be included in campus diversity efforts. But during the past several decades a growing number of college and university campuses have begun to acknowledge, support and even celebrate their LGBT student, staff, faculty, and alumni. These efforts have met with varying degrees of support and success - and naturally those that have been the most successful are those that have received the greatest levels of administrative and faculty support. Issues of sexual orientation and gender identity have for too long been ignored and avoided on our campuses.

What is one of the most pressing LGBT issues on our campuses? Visibility is what we hear our students and colleagues say. LGBT folk on campus wonder why they are so often not visible in the curriculum, in student affairs, in human resources policies, in celebrations, and in diversity initiatives. Certainly homophobia and heterosexism are to blame here, but we who are the most ardent promoters of pluralism and multiculturalism are also often guilty of excluding our LGBT students and colleagues, too.

In an effort to respond to the needs of LGBT students, some larger institutions (e.g., UCLA, Penn, Illinois-Chicago, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities) have created actual centers for LGBT issues that are staffed by full-time professionals who are responsible for programming of all types. Directors of LGBT resource centers are responsible for anything from short-term crisis counseling and educational programming to institutional policy development. Other campuses (e.g., Iowa State, Eastern Michigan, Texas A&M) have part-time professionals or graduate students who serve LGBT students. More often than not, the duties performed by part-time professionals do not vary greatly from full-time directors – they just have fewer resources (staffing, time-commitment, and financial) to assist in their job. On most campuses, however, the work is left to concerned student affairs professionals who produce LGBT supportive programming and to faculty who attempt to infuse the curriculum with LGBT topics, authors and Queer Theory.

New initiatives and resources are available to anyone interested in creating a more inclusive environment on campus by affirming LGBT students and colleagues. Two ideas that are highlighted in this publication – The Safe Zone Project (see workshop description) and Lavender Graduation (see faculty keynote remarks) at the University of Puget Sound and Iowa State University - are initiatives that have found great success on these two (and many other) campuses. Both directly address the visibility issue by making a bold and positive statement about the value of LGBT folk on campus. The Safe Zone project provides visibility by introducing an LGBT symbol of pride onto the physical campus landscape. LavGrad accomplishes it by celebrating the success of students who have overcome prejudice and other obstacles while earning their degrees. Visible support and recognition are important for all communities – and the LGBT community is no different in this regard.

How might your campus be more inclusive and affirming for LGBT students and colleagues? The possibilities are many and might include some of the following ideas that have found success on other campuses:

- Support Groups (Coming Out, Women's/Lesbian and Bisexual, Men's/ Gay and Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, LGBT International Students, LGBT People of Color, etc.)
- LGBT/Queer Literature & Film Series & Discussion Group
- Speakers Bureau (residence hall and classroom presentations, speakers/leadership training, homophobia/heterosexism workshops)

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- Library resources (LGBT books, magazines, videos, music)
- Web-based resources (discussion groups, list-servs, campus resources, links to other LGBT web resources)
- Student groups (support, social, political, activist, graduate students)
- Faculty and Staff groups (support, social, political, activist)
- Recognition ceremonies (Lavender Graduation, LGBT scholarships, ally recognition, etc.)
- Safe Zone Sticker Project
- Policies (domestic partnership benefits, housing, non-discrimination)
- Greek organizations (Delta Lamda Phi fraternity, Lamda Delta Lamda sorority)
- National Coming Out Day observances (October 11)
- Blue Jeans Day
- PRIDE events (June)
- AIDS awareness/prevention
- LBGT/Queer curriculum (Queer theory, LGBT studies, interdisciplinary, infusion into mainstream curriculum climate surveys)
- LGBT student services office or center

There are websites and books that offer resources and ideas, as well, such as:

National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education:

<http://www.uic.edu/orgs/lgbt/index.html>

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators GLBT Issues Network:

<http://personal.ecu.edu/luciera/naspaglbt.html>

ACPA Standing Committee for LGBT Awareness:

<http://www.cas.ucsf.edu/sc/lgbta/default.html>

Lambda 10 Project (National Clearinghouse for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Greek Issues):

<http://www.lambda10.org/>

Iowa State University Safe Zone Project & Evaluation:

<http://www.iastate.edu/~lgbtss/safezone.html>

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~clund/safezones/>

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You can also contact W. Houston Dougharty, Associate Dean for Student Services, at University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, WA 98416 (253) 879-3360, [http://www.ups.edu/student\\_life/dos/](http://www.ups.edu/student_life/dos/)

An improved campus climate for LGBT people will not happen by itself. Positive change requires initiative, effort and long-term commitment. If we are to create campuses that truly support and affirm learning for all students, then each campus must begin to include LGBT issues in curriculum and programming. All campuses that now have successful LGBT initiatives began the effort with one program, one idea.

What will you do this year to include LGBT students and colleagues in your program on your campus?

# Campus Climate for LGBT Folk: Can Safe Zones Warm the Chill?

Excerpts from a presentation by W. Houston Dougharty

Andrea Meld, Green River Community College

In this lively and thought-provoking workshop, W. Houston Dougharty, currently at the University of Puget Sound, described the Safe Zone project he co-founded at Iowa State University as associate dean of students. The Safe Zone project, initiated in the Fall of 1997, helped to increase awareness, visibility, and support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) students and other members of the Iowa State University community.

Basically, the intervention involved making Safe Zone stickers, a symbolic statement of willingness and commitment to provide an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance for LGBT students, available to all members of the campus community who requested them. To assess the effects of the Safe Zone project, Nancy Evans, associate professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University, conducted a year-long ethnographic study. Results of the Safe Zone project showed that it had a very positive effect on the campus climate for LGBT students, staff, and faculty and for all members of the campus community. While the project did not produce revolutionary results, it did crank up the “thermostat” by measurable degrees.

We started our workshop by considering these questions: What are the issues? Who are the students we are talking about? What was the Safe Zone project and why was it needed?

When we started to define the problem, the name “Matthew Shepard” came up right away. Violence has

occurred against students because of their sexual orientation on many campuses across the country. LGBT students may feel harassed, silenced, unsafe, invisible. They rarely see themselves reflected in the curriculum or in the campus culture. They may feel pressure about “who knows” their orientation, especially if they are away from home for the first time. It may even feel stressful to answer simple questions from other students such as “What did you do this weekend?” The “system,” as well as traditions and laws may feel or actually be hostile and authoritarian to LGBT students. A climate of homophobia that makes it more difficult for students to learn and effects student retention.

## What is the Safe Zone project?

Safe Zone was developed to address concerns about the campus climate for LGBT students. There have been Safe Zone projects at different colleges and universities across the country. Close to home, for example, there have been Safe Zone projects at Western Washington University and University of Puget Sound. At Iowa State University, it was funded as a research project by a grant for the recruitment and retention of special populations. A Safe Zone committee/task force was established. The task force, with the endorsement of the Dean of Students, sent out invitations by

e-mail to all faculty, staff, students encouraging them to request a Safe Zone sticker. Community organizations also found out about the project and requested stickers. Because the responses were sent via e-mail, a mailing list was generated that could be used for future mailings and requests. Of those who requested stickers, 40% were faculty, 24% staff, 29% students, and 4% community organizations.

## The goals for the Safe Zone project included:

1. increasing visibility for LGBT people and concerns on campus;
2. increasing support for LGBT people; and
3. increasing awareness of the issues facing LGBT people.

Through the relatively simple intervention of displaying a Safe Zone sticker on their door or in their office, faculty, staff, and students were able to show support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students on campus. The research team led by Nancy Evans used ethnographic methods to investigate the impact of the Safe Zone program on the overall climate at ISU. They examined archival news reports and email communications; interviewed 42 students, staff, and faculty who have chosen to display stickers; observed Safe Zone project meetings and discussions; and talked with LGBT students and non-LGBT students about their awareness of the

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project and its effect on them.

Another ethnographic method used in the study was mapping the buildings on campus with the greatest and least numbers of stickers posted. This was another way to measure the campus climate by creating a visual survey of support for the Safe Zone project. Student researchers counted the number of Safe Zone stickers visible in campus buildings and creating a color-coded map that displayed where stickers were located and to what extent they were posted.

### Motivation for Posting Stickers

Individuals had to request a sticker. The impact would probably have been different if the stickers had just been mailed out to everyone. The reasons that people gave for posting a sticker included the following:

- To show support for LGBT students, the project, and for all students on campus;
- For LGBT students, faculty and staff: to affirm their identity and support a project which directly affected them and to show they could be counted on to support other LGBT members of the community;
- To encourage allies to post stickers; and
- Because it was the “right thing to do.”

### Effects of the Project on Campus -- Positive

In general, LGBT members of the community expressed greater awareness of changes in campus climate due to the Safe Zone project than their heterosexual allies; those who had been on campus the longest were more aware of changes than more recent arrivals. The main positive effects included:

- Increased the visibility and awareness of LGBT people, issues, and concerns;
- Increased support for LGBT people;
- Increased discussion and communication about LGBT concerns;
- Helped LGBT students to identify safe people and places and feel greater safety in general;
- Increased networking for LGBT faculty and staff; increased their security and sense of affirmation;
- Perceived change in university's conservative image from faculty and staff point of view;
- Provided impetus for other needed changes on campus;
- Increased educational opportunities on campus, as reported by LGBT staff, as well as gay male students;
- Perceived changes from viewpoint of heterosexual students less definite, for example, some heterosexual male students felt that the project did change campus attitudes.

### Effects of the Project on Campus -- Negative

Very few individuals reported any specific negative effects. In general, it was more difficult for those interviewed to identify drawbacks of the project than benefits. The negative outcomes included the following:

- Some incidents of stickers being defaced or ripped off were reported;
- Some students reported harassment, particularly in certain residence halls;
- Some degree of conflict about posting stickers in space that

was shared (e.g., one person in an office or area wants to post a sticker but the other person does not);

- Concern that a false sense of security might develop because so many stickers were visible;
- A few people worried that the high visibility of the project would threaten individuals who were closeted and did not want attention called to their identities;
- A number of interviewees felt that the biggest negative effect was that the project had not had enough of a major impact on campus.

For me, the beauty of this project was that a relatively simple intervention could have such profound results. A symbolic gesture can give support and strength to others. I liked the fact that the assessment component was built right into the design of the project and also that this research can be replicated. Finally, this project suggests that similar methods can be used in a variety of ways to further social justice on college campuses and other community settings.

### For more information

*Toward acceptance: Sexual orientation issues on campus*, edited by Vernon A. Wall and Nancy J. Evans (2000), University Press of America.

*Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*, edited by Warren J. Blumenfeld (1992), Beacon Press.

ISU website for Safezone Research  
<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~clund/safezones/main.html>

# What Courage Entails: A Keynote Address to Lavender Graduates

Commencement Address by Dr. Suzanne Holland at The University of Puget Sound Lavender Graduation, May 12, 2000, to an audience of 150, including 8 Lavender grads (out of a graduating class of 700)

Commencement speakers always begin by saying that it's an honor to be here and I've always thought that a rather trite way to begin an address, so I sat at my computer trying to think of another way to begin. I found that I couldn't because I genuinely do feel honored—perhaps more to the point I feel humbled by your invitation to speak to you, the first Lavender Graduates of the University of Puget Sound. Sandi told me that I only have 10 minutes and as anyone who's ever had me in class knows, I can hardly say hello in 10 minutes, so I'd better get right to the point of my remarks.

There is one thought I want to leave you with today. It has to do with the word "courage."

Twenty years ago, when you were very little, and long before I had dealt with the reality of being Gay, I heard a feminist religious thinker by the name of Theresa Kane give a talk on the importance of courage in social activism. What she said impressed me so much that it has stayed with me across the years and I want to share it with you today because it seems relevant in several ways. Theresa Kane claimed that the heart of courage is a "just rage." Think about it for a minute. This is a play on the root of the word, from the French, *couer*, meaning of course, heart. Contained within the word, *courage*, whose root is heart, is also the word, *rage*: the heart of

courage is a just rage. The insight for us, it seems to me, is that it takes a huge amount of courage to be a gay or lesbian or trans-gendered or bi-sexual person in the world. That it should take such courage is enraging, and it eats at the heart.

It takes courage right now, for each of you to be here, in this room. I don't really need to tell the Gay and lesbian persons here, but perhaps on their behalf, and mine, I need to tell the rest of you gathered in support of them that these are no ordinary individuals. Those of you who know them are aware of that, but perhaps what you don't know first-hand is what it cost each of them to be here, to stand up as a homosexual or bi-sexual person in a world that largely despises and at best, tolerates, your existence.

Perhaps it is not accident that I am both a professor of Christian ethics and a lesbian, for it allows me to offer a critique of my tradition. The Christian churches have a shameful history of discrimination against homosexuals, and it is a scandal that is eroding the heart of the church. If the heart of courage is a just rage, I am enraged that nearly every one of us who is Gay has been told at some point in our lives by the church or its representatives that we are "sinful" because we are homosexuals; that we are "unnatural." I carry a "just rage" at the Christian

churches for refusing to ordain Gay and lesbian persons as ministers. And this was so in my own case, when in my 30's, I decided to be ordained an Episcopal priest and realized that I would be asked if I were a homosexual. In a sort of "Sophie's Choice" moment, I knew that I would either have to lie and keep on lying the rest of my life, or tell the truth and not be ordained. I am not ordained. That was one of the key experiences in my life of discrimination simply on the basis of my sexual orientation—it wasn't other people; it was me.

My conviction that a "just rage," a "righteous anger" is at the very heart of courage is probably why I chose to teach ethics: it gives me a natural platform for railing against injustice. Many of us, particularly the women among us, have been taught to believe that anger is not an appropriate response. On the contrary, I believe that a "just rage" is crucial to getting on with the work of love. Where injustice exists, it should enflame our passions; it should enrage our hearts. When we meet injustice, courage is required—the kind of courage of which I am speaking; the kind of courage it takes to stand up and be counted as a human being who also happens to love persons of the same gender.

Alice Walker, attempting to describe what it is to be an African-American woman and a feminist—she  
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“Contained within the word, courage, whose root is heart, is also the word, rage: the heart of courage is a just rage.”

famously coined the term “womanist” for this—has written that a “womanist” is one who “. . . loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless.” Though Walker was speaking of African-American women when she wrote this, I imagine that each of you graduates knows exactly what it means to love yourself, regardless. To be Gay and to stand up and to say so requires that you learn to love yourself in the face of every aspect of dominant culture telling you that you are not worthy of such love. It’s the “regardless” that takes courage.

In my own life I have come to believe that being Gay is a two-step process that requires both self-acknowledgment, and self-acceptance. These two steps do not always arrive at the same time; perhaps they rarely coincide. Acknowledgment and acceptance. Each step in the process requires an act of courage, and perhaps that is why I have always thought that a healthy Gay/lesbian person is like the finest Olympic athlete. It requires such strength of character, such love of self, such a vast capacity for endurance to stand up and to be counted as “different,” not once, but each day of your life; to refuse to stay put in the closet where most people would like us to remain because it’s more comfortable for them, despite the fact that the lack of air and light will kill us sooner or later.

I look upon each of you graduates as a champion, as a hero. You are heroes of mine because you have decided to be here, knowing the discomfort, knowing the costs. I hope you will go forth into your lives throwing those closet-doors

wide-open; I hope you will bask in the sunlight of that kind of freedom, and that you will remember to rage against injustice, not just injustice to homosexual persons, but injustice against every form of oppression.

I hope that you will carry a flame in your hearts that burns with a “just rage” for all those who are made to live in fear of their difference. And remember that the gift, the privilege of having been marked as “different” is that it gives you an important vantage point on justice because you have suffered from injustice.

There’s a book in the Bible, the Hebrew Scriptures, actually, called the Book of Exodus. In this text of liberation, the writer tells the ancient Israelites, “You shall not oppress the stranger; you know the

heart of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23: 9). In the Bible, Egypt is symbolic of the land of slavery and the writer is telling the Israelites, who once were slaves in the land of Egypt, and who were marked as “different”: don’t forget that you understand what it is to know the heart of a stranger—the outcast, the one whom society despises—for you also were such a person before you were freed. So don’t forget, as you go forth from this place as the first Lavender Graduates in the history of the University of Puget Sound—don’t forget to carry “a just rage” in your hearts, and to work for justice for all those on whose behalf courage—your courage—is required.

Thank you for including me in this celebration, and congratulations!

### **Not Just An Issue for Students: An Update on Domestic Partner Benefits**

On May 23, 2000, the Public Employees Benefit Board voted to extend health benefits to same-sex domestic partners of state and higher education employees and retirees, and the employees and retirees of K-12 school districts and local governments that purchase PEBB coverage. The new PEBB rule expands the category of eligible dependents from “lawful spouse” to include “any qualified domestic partner” (same sex domestic partner qualified through the declaration certificate issued by the health care authority) and children of the subscriber’s domestic partner. At least 85 state and local governments across the US, 104 colleges and universities, and over 600 companies, nonprofits, unions and other employers provide these benefits, based on the goal of ending workplace discrimination. Initiative 250, filed October 2, 2000, would nullify the PEBB board ruling by specifically stating that “lawful spouse” means “a husband or wife in a marriage” as defined in Washington’s “Defense of Marriage Act.” I-250 is an initiative to the Legislature, and if enough signatures are gathered, will be considered in the January 2001 Legislative session.

The ferocity of the emerging debate about whether the same-sex partners of state workers are entitled to the same health benefits as opposite-sex marriage partners of state workers testifies to the need for courage of which Suzanne Hollander spoke in her address.



# “Encountering Religious Commitments in the Classroom”

Lance Laird  
The Evergreen State College

In most discussions of diversity in higher education, the conversations, presentations, and resources generally focus on issues of race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. I would like to add religious “identity” or “orientation” to the list. I say this not because I believe in a vast army of persecutors arrayed against people of faith in the academy, but because I see religious identity as a fundamental element in constituting human individuals, societies, and cultures. And it is largely ignored or compartmentalized in the American academy.

Whether or not faculty, staff or students identify as “religious”, the fact remains that we live in a world where the majority of people continue to accord religious stories, sites, practices, institutions, doctrine, and communities a prominent place in public as well as private life. Religious traditions shape and are shaped by the historical and cultural contexts, technologies and intellectual streams all of us study. Political leaders employ religious discourse regularly in this and “other” societies, and communities of faith provide foundations for decisions about personal ethics, careers, and civic affiliations. Social movements use the metaphors of exodus, exile, jihad, crusade, martyrdom, and destiny in the media. So-called “secular spirituality” is

increasingly popular in corporations (vision quests, meditation retreats), and the rise of spiritual individualism and experiential religion is changing the face of post-denominational American society. Since 1965, immigrants have stimulated the growth of a wide variety of religious communities that have an increasingly significant presence in the neighborhoods and classrooms in which we live and teach.

I teach comparative religion at The Evergreen State College, a small, alternative, public liberal arts college. A Christian of the Baptist variety who got hooked on Islamic studies by a Shiite Sufi professor in college, I now teach biblical criticism to evangelical Protestants, Wiccans, and atheists alike. I teach about Qur’an and hadith to Muslims, Jews and Buddhists. I read spiritual masterpieces of Sufi and Zen teachers with earnest New Agers and rebellious Catholics. The assignments I make and the perspectives I take in the classroom have a direct impact on the religious identities (or lack thereof) of my students.

When I asked my students about how religious commitments raise issues in the classroom, they made comments like these:

*“Several people asked me how it felt to be the “token Muslim”. . . . I was*

*looked at as the sole source of knowledge (and I stated many times that what I said in class was my own understanding, not that of the ummah). I can begin to have a sense of how some African-Americans feel at times. Generally though, there were situations like the following which remained unchecked by faculty during class: A female student pressured a discussion to focus on the marriage of Muhammad to Aisha when she was so young. Her comments were centered on my personal belief and faith in someone who married a child knowing that “marriage = sex” (and this is an accusation of child molestation). I tried to explain that marriage means other things to other people sometimes, but I received no assistance. This is an atypical view held by many people in the West. Regardless of my assurances that Muhammad’s characteristics did not match those of a child molester and my statement that I didn’t appreciate the accusation, this did not deter certain parties.”*

*“I myself am still exploring my religious identity, and I sort of alternate between Dianic Wiccan and Christian beliefs. So when somebody asks, ‘What’s your religion?’ I feel like I’m gonna get stuck into a category. If I say I’m Dianic Wiccan, then they start asking me all these questions,*

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“All of these concerns have parallels in the experience of students of color, women and sexual minorities, and they deserve the same sort of attention.”

*like I'm some expert on how to do all these rituals; and if I say I'm a Christian, they act like I'm an expert on the New Testament. There are just all these assumptions people make. I don't really fit into a category.”*

*“There's this traveling preacher who comes and sets up in the square and starts yelling at students. There is this group of students who yell back. They just spew this anti-Christian sentiment. And the school paper always writes these articles that talk about all the negative things about Bible Jim, and they portray these rabid students as some kind of heroes. I think this really makes it hard for religious students on this campus. I know when I was working with a student activist group, and we were talking about possible community groups we could work with, somebody brought up working with a church organization, and the group just dismissed the idea automatically. 'A church? No way!'"*

*“I am a Christian, and the person sitting across from me in seminar calls himself a Christian, but we have completely different interpretations of what that means. I mean, I was raised with some pretty New Age ideas and also with some charismatic ideas about being a Christian, and I don't always agree with these. But this other person, who also calls himself a Christian, has a totally different understanding. So if you asked us, we'd both say we're Christians, but you wouldn't necessarily know anything about us.”*

These comments present several issues relevant to the discussion of diversity in higher education. One primary concern of students is that faculty (and other students) recognize that their religious identity is in process; they are changing, exploring, questioning, trying to make sense of the tradition in which they have grown up or which they have recently claimed. Another is the fear of being categorized or stereotyped: “If I say I'm a Christian, people will equate me with Bible Jim” and “If I say I'm a witch, people will think I can turn them into a mouse” (from an actual conversation). A third concern is that they are expected to be a spokesperson for their particular tradition or group, whether or not they have any significant religious educational background or leadership experience. A fourth concern is that faculty (and peers) will not support them when they feel an important element of their tradition is maligned or misrepresented. All of these concerns have parallels in the experience of students of color, women and sexual minorities, and they deserve the same sort of attention.

Several factors make the issue of religious diversity and commitment in the classroom particularly difficult for professors and for students. Faculty and students fear talking about religion, because these discussions bring with them an emotional charge that threatens to break down the civility of the classroom. The same could be said of

race, gender, and sexual orientation, however; and many of us have experimented with ways to use the passion of these issues to have civil, reasoned discussions and constructive confrontations about these issues in the classroom.

Many faculty may feel they do not have the information and resources to challenge (or even to recognize) when students are stereotyping another person's religious tradition. Such discussions can be a learning opportunity for all of us. When we ask students to identify and analyze the sources of information for their views, or when we ask them to do some research with us to examine the questions they have, we can model civil conversation and a respectful learning environment.

Another reason that religious identity presents a problem in higher education, however, is that most of us have been taught to keep our religious identities private, especially in an academic setting. Appeals to revelation, experience, and traditional authority are perceived as antithetical to scientific, naturalistic, rational, academic discourse—even in the humanities. Those of us who have succeeded in the academic enterprise and become faculty members have often inherited the bias of our nineteenth century (liberal Protestant and otherwise) forebearers, whose confident faith in enlightened scientific reason portrayed religious belief as anti-intellectual. With plenty of anecdotal evidence from popular

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“One of our greatest challenges as educators is to invite students into a critical dialogue with unfamiliar ideas and into relationships with unfamiliar people.”

media as well as the historical record, we can accept stereotypes of religious people as fanatical, divisive, superstitious, irrational beings who do not yet have a college education!

And, even if you see this as an overstatement of the case, many faculty convey this message to students through the books we choose, the examples in our lectures, the perspectives allowed in writing assignments, the statements and silences we choose in directing discussions that involve religious authors, ethical issues, or questions of ultimate value. Despite the critique of science and reason in postmodern discourse that has led to a search for multiple perspectives in our work, few are willing to allow that traditional religious perspectives may have something to offer the larger discussion, at least as credible and critical voices among others.

One of our greatest challenges as educators is to invite students into a critical dialogue with unfamiliar ideas and into relationships with unfamiliar people. In Thomas Groome’s “shared praxis” approach to education, he describes the transformation that occurs when the co-learner honors where the learner is in the meaning-making journey by listening to how he or she articulates a perspective or an experience. The educator is a guide who shares a Story and a Vision derived from the field of inquiry. The goal is to promote a “conscious conflict” as the learner’s actions, stories, and vision interact and conflict with other learners, and with the story and

vision of the community and the culture (Parks 1986).

When I read and discuss religious texts with students, I usually have a twofold “learning outcome” in mind: I want the students who do participate in a particular religious tradition to become more critical, questioning participants capable of leadership, clear communication, and reform; and I want the students with no religious background or commitment to gain an appreciation for what the world looks like through the eyes of particular people of faith. Faculty from any discipline need to engage students where they are, so that we can be aware of where those actual (not presumed) points of conscious conflict are, where learning occurs. Students bring their religious identities with them into the classroom, whether we want them to or not.

But then, so do we. An important part of dealing with the religious commitments of students in the classroom is coming to grips with our own “baggage” about religion. I mentioned before that many of us have succeeded academically by checking this baggage at the door of the classroom. In my teaching so far, though, I have found students quite astute at seeing the baggage claim tickets I carry in my pocket.

Diana Eck reminds us that we as scholars and teachers have a tendency to privilege or to universalize our own particular modes of analysis and discourse. This is exactly what we fear those religious

students might do if we let them.

Eck writes eloquently about the multiple voices with which she speaks: “It is my contention here that becoming more self-conscious of the multiple voices we inevitably have as scholars, as people of faith, as citizens, or as activists is essential to the truthfulness of our writing and teaching, and that encouraging students to recognize and become critically aware of their own multiple voices is part of the task of education. It is the submerged voices—unidentified, unacknowledged, unspoken—not the vocalized ones, that distort and impoverish the integrity of the academic enterprise” (Eck 146).

Do I mean to suggest that students should feel free to preach and proselytize in the classroom? No more than I want them to grandstand on their favorite political issue when it is only tangentially related to the subject at hand. As a Baptist, believe it or not, I stand firm on the separation of church and state, but this does not mean that religious perspectives have no place in public institutions. As a faculty member, it is my responsibility to challenge students to deepen their understanding of their own beliefs, to consider those beliefs through multiple lenses, so that they might act on them after considered reflection. I will hold them to standards of rational argument, and I will insist that they make serious connections to the perspectives of other students, faculty, and authors, but can I insist that they begin with the same presuppositions that I do, or that

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they arrive at the same conclusions?

Interestingly, this secular, public college at which I teach displays prominently on its homepage a *credo* which claims that the main purpose of the college is to: “promote student learning through ... learning across significant differences and through personal engagement, that is, students develop their capacities to judge, speak and act on the basis of

their own reasoned beliefs.” (The Evergreen State College, [www.evergreen.edu](http://www.evergreen.edu)).

I wonder if the framers of this statement had religious commitments in mind when they spoke of “reasoned beliefs”, or whether they intended to include *religious* differences. Many institutions have similar creeds that have led them to implement curricular and

co-curricular programs as well as faculty hiring and development initiatives that focus on creating a healthy and stimulating environment where students, faculty, administration and staff may celebrate, examine, develop and critique the gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity that make them who they are. What would it mean if we as educators considered religious identity a difference to celebrate as well?

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Sharon Daloz Parks, *The Critical Years: Young Adults & the Search for Meaning, Faith and Commitment* (SF: Harper & Row, 1986).

## Other Useful Sources

Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (SF: Harper & Row, 1983)

*Education as Transformation Project: Religious Pluralism, Spirituality and Higher Education.* Dr. Peter Laurence, Director; Diane Dana, Coordinator, Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02481; Phone: (781) 283-2659; Fax: (781) 283-3676; E-mail: [transformation@bulletin.wellesley.edu](mailto:transformation@bulletin.wellesley.edu); [www.wellesley.edu/RelLife/transformation](http://www.wellesley.edu/RelLife/transformation).

The Project has a contact list for those interested in models from various kinds of institutions who have initiated programs in religious diversity on campus.

## Campus Conversations

A group of TESC faculty, staff and administrators gathered one evening for a wide-ranging and stimulating discussion out of which grew the following set of questions:

- How does one's personal commitment to the issue of spiritual development of students relate to the functions and policies of his/her institution?
- If TESC is committed to holistic education, we do a poor job attending to, resourcing, encouraging both physical and spiritual dimensions of student engagement/development. What is needed is an institutional commitment and intentionality, which would lead to a discussion of these issues during “regular hours”. Such institutional commitment would have implications for faculty development; intentional student groups; co-curricular offerings (in addition to curricular possibilities in program dealing with religion and the natural environment, where often students are encouraged to explore “spiritual” perspectives); and perhaps most importantly, connection with local community resources.
- Along these same lines, if TESC is really committed to fostering responsible citizenship and abilities to negotiate life in a diverse world, we need to integrate knowledge of/encounter with religion into our curriculum/co-curriculum more intentionally.
- We need a discussion about how an institutional commitment to spiritual development raises issues of church-state separation; could we have some kind of seminar/colloquium/workshop/lectures with faculty and student religious group involvement that would address the legal issues of what we should not be doing in the classroom or as part of official school activities? Could there be some sort of shared interfaith worship/meditation space on campus?

# The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Alternative Visions of Mathematics Education

Swapna Mukhopadhyay  
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## Scene 1

“Math is boring, it makes no sense” . . . “Math is hard, you have to memorize all sorts of rules” . . . “I don’t know the answer to your problem, I was never taught this sort of stuff before” . . . “I cannot do math, I am not the math type” . . . These are typical comments I invariably encounter in the classes that I teach for practicing and future teachers. Colleagues who teach similar courses report similar observations. Outside our classrooms we hear much the same statements; unfortunately, most people in our society do not view themselves as mathematically literate. They have no trouble admitting their distaste, often accompanied by fear, for mathematics learning. Mathematics classes evoke memories of shame and humiliation for not being able to perform the expected mathematical activities, be it multiplication tables, word problems, or algebra. And yet these people are intelligent and responsible individuals, competent and literate in their own language, and functioning effectively in today’s society. They have no inhibition against acknowledging their own lack of confidence in mathematics, yet, in contrast, the same individuals would be ashamed to admit that they could not read or write English. Why this apparent contradiction?

This picture of being mathematically dysfunctional obviously has a lot to do with people’s personal

learning histories. Learning mathematics is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that depends not only on how mathematics is taught in schools but also, critically, on other elements, such as personal beliefs and attitudes towards mathematics, which in turn are influenced by society’s conception of, and attitude towards, mathematics. Traditionally, mathematics instruction in school consists of mechanical delivery of information, with reliance on commercially produced textbooks and pre-designed practice sheets.

When textbooks make an attempt to show the applicability of mathematical concepts to the real world their exercises are almost invariably artificial, creating only a forced match between mathematics and reality. In general, practice sheets (intended to impart computational fluency) are usually sets of repetitive exercises that consume a significant part of instruction time but fail to challenge students’ thinking. Thus, learning mathematics at school is an enculturation process whereby the students eventually learn to play the “school math game” by becoming dutiful scribes who mechanically fill up their daily worksheets; those who cannot conform are likely to be reprimanded and to become alienated towards mathematics.

In this traditional model, learning is defined as mastery of a set of rules and is measured by tests that typically reinforce the paramount importance of procedural

competence. Most often a student can pass the hurdle of a test by memorizing rules and forgetting these immediately when the test is over so that new rules can be “learned” (stored temporarily) for the next test. As a result, traditionally learning mathematics in school frequently degenerates into an efficient model of remembering “stuff” for testing only, followed by archiving/forgetting to make room for newer topics. Conceptual understanding and problem solving receive little or no attention.

Part of mathematical dysfunctionality is a result of systematic desensitization to context. Since, in classrooms, topics are presented, practiced, and assessed in a procedural fashion, mathematics becomes perceived as asocial, totally contained within the walls of the classroom, unconnected from the rest of the functioning world. For example, Verschaffel, Greer, and De Corte (2000) have documented examples of the degree of separation and detachment caused by traditional school mathematics. They used a number of word problems that students tend to answer unreflectingly, by applying an inappropriate mathematical operation, of which the following is an example:

An athlete’s best time to run a mile is 4 minutes and 7 seconds. About how long would it take him to run 3 miles?

In a series of replications in  
(Continued on page 30)

“ . . . if the claim is made that mathematics is a pan-cultural mental activity, why do people experience such a strong aversion and resistance to learning mathematics at school?”

Ireland, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, and Venezuela, it was found that well over 90% of students in every country answered this question by multiplying by 3 – an appropriate answer according to the rules of the “word problem game” – apparently taking no account of their knowledge that a runner cannot maintain speed over a longer distance. When replicated with adult students in the US enrolled in a developmental mathematics class, the results were similar (Mukhopadhyay & Greer, in preparation). Only one student gave a realistic response, referring to his personal experience as a runner.

## Scene 2

For a sharp contrast, let us focus on some products of human creativity. A Navajo wool blanket, in earth tones of red, yellow, sage and black, is in my mind. Like many

Navajo blankets, this blanket is an embodiment of a pattern that is both intriguing and aesthetically pleasing (Fig. 1 is a simplified version). The pattern is a geometric fantasy with symmetry and harmony of shape and form. The arrangement of shapes and colors follows specific rules generated and followed by a designer – here, the weaver. Any deviation from the rules would disturb the visual regularity of the pattern.

An observer, like you or me, can analyze what makes the pattern. As we visually trace the progression of the nested diamonds, we can see how the pattern is transformed by altering the steepness of the diamonds. This pattern is an example of a common Navajo motif, called “Eyedazzlers”, formed with concentric diamonds in different colors with sharply serrated sides. Patterns that use nested shapes are prevalent in many different cultures

at different times. For example, Maori patterns heavily use concentric circles and curves; zig-zag and up-down pathways are common in Chinese and Northwest American Indian patterns. Although similar patterns are observed at different parts of the world, their apparently universal nature is modified by local rendering.

An artisan works within a set of cultural constraints determined by the traditions, available materials and tools, and the purpose of the production. Most techniques of designing and executing a patterned artifact are cultural knowledge and are taught to an apprentice learner within a community. Guided by oral tradition, in many instances, the artisan works without written direction or drawing. His/her activity demands improvisation and the ability to figure out when a mistake has been made and adjust accordingly. Thus, producing patterned artifacts is a complex cognitive

(Continued on page 31)

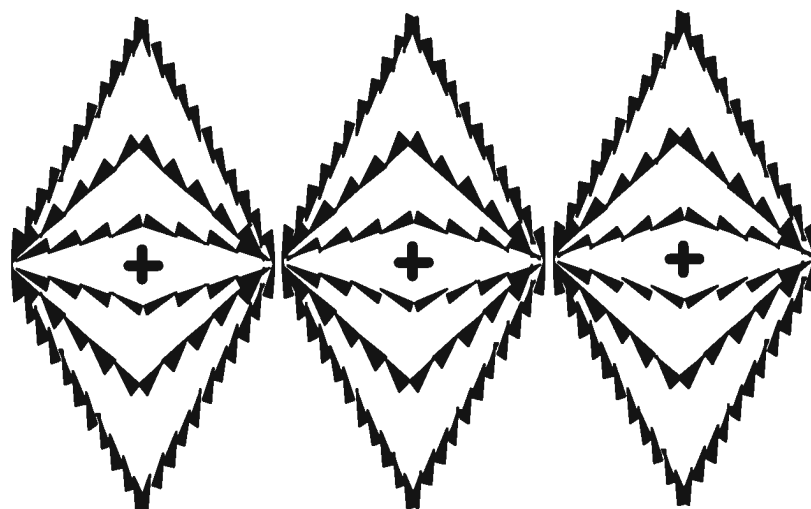


Figure 1.

“How can we explain the apparent contradiction that mathematics, on the one hand, is a natural part of life and, on the other, gives rise to non-engagement, resistance, and failure?”

process involving an internalized representational system. Many of the products of such activity that we find visually stimulating and aesthetically pleasing are produced by individuals with no or very little formal schooling, yet we are amazed by their creativity and cognitive sophistication. We also realize that the production of any patterned artifact is accomplished by a set of logically complex rules.

### A paradox

In “Mathematical Enculturation,” Alan Bishop describes six fundamental activities – counting, explaining, measuring, playing, locating, and designing – as cultural universals engaged in developing mathematical thinking (Bishop, 1988). The specific example I started with was the description of the design of a Navajo blanket, but activities in all cultures implicitly or explicitly require mathematical engagement, whether navigating a fishing boat in the Micronesian islands, weaving a straw and grass basket in Mozambique, or selling candies on the streets of Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, the same comment applies to our own culture – a travel agent working out the best itinerary for a client, a carpenter constructing a deck, a seamstress altering a dress are all engaged in activities with a mathematical aspect although they are not applying school mathematics. Indeed, if asked, they would probably not acknowledge the mathematics in what they are doing, nor would they see any connection to the mathematics they learnt at school.

Hence the paradox – if the claim is made that mathematics is a pan-cultural mental activity, why do people experience such a strong aversion and resistance to learning mathematics at school? How can we explain the apparent contradiction that mathematics, on the one hand, is a natural part of life and, on the other, gives rise to non-engagement, resistance, and failure?

### Change of scene

One obvious response is to transform school mathematics teaching. By revising both the content and, more importantly, the method of teaching we might be able to motivate students to be aware of their thinking about mathematics and to become proactive learners.

How do we redesign curriculum and reconceptualize teaching practice so that mathematics connects to every individual's thinking and does not push them away from learning? One line of argument is that the study of how people use mathematics in their lives should provide one strand in teaching mathematics. A growing body of research evidence has documented how people learn out of, as well as in, school (e.g., Resnick, 1987), and employ mathematical thinking in their everyday lives and workplaces (e.g. Lave, 1988; Rogoff & Lave, 1984). From this research has emerged a view of learning as being situated in activities rather than abstract and decontextualized (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Studies of situated cognition capture through “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) the cultural nuances of contexts that manifest/embed cognitive functioning. People's articulation of their activities reveals how mathematics serves as a necessary cognitive tool in accomplishing their tasks. Their verbal descriptions of these activities, however, do not match the language of formal mathematics, nor do they exhibit the symbolic representations taught in schools. An alternative framework for informal people's mathematics has been termed “Ethnomathematics” by a Brazilian scholar, Ubiratan D'Ambrosio. In his words, ethnomathematics constitutes “the mathematics which is practiced among identifiable cultural groups, such as national-tribal societies, labor groups, children of a certain age bracket, professional classes, and so on” (D'Ambrosio, 1985, p. 45).

Analogous to the relationship between the oral tradition of storytelling and written literature, ethnomathematics provides a cognitive platform that arises out of socially manifested multi-sensory experiences. Like orality, it displays intellectual richness which is often localized and does not translate easily into formal, abstract representations. Connecting mathematics, as it does, to its social and cultural roots, ethnomathematics offers an alternative approach to introducing mathematics in schools (which is not to deny the development of formal mathematics as one essential purpose of mathematics education).

(Continued on page 32)



“Connecting mathematics, as it does, to its social and cultural roots, ethnomathematics offers an alternative approach to introducing mathematics in schools.”

## Teaching through Ethnomathematics

To provide an example of teaching through ethnomathematics, I will share an approach to teaching the geometry of pattern analysis using artifacts from different cultures to inservice and preservice teachers. This is an effective way to undermine the perception that mathematics exists only in textbooks. A hands-on approach of creating and analyzing patterns is followed by looking at actual patterned objects from our day-to-day lives and at a local museum. Since physically manipulating objects that are aesthetically rich (and created by people) is not the same as looking at mere illustrations in a textbook, this approach uncovers a deeper interest in the creator and his/her culture. The students take an active role as investigators in explaining the patterns, listening to each others' commentaries, and ultimately producing group projects describing their chosen artifacts from cultural and mathematical perspectives. Besides learning the geometry of pattern analysis (the overtly mathematical goal), this approach affirms more than a casual connection to people's cultural, social, and political lives. First and foremost, it acknowledges mathematical thinking as a part of human cognition that exists in creative self-expression. Unlike the rules and formulas in school mathematics that have no relevance to many, these mathematical products transcend the static limitations of textbook learning. Tolerance of, and respect for, others results from legitimizing and dignifying their work. Ethnomathematics is thus paramount in

strengthening mutual respect in multicultural societies.

As a teacher, I have used this approach several times to introduce mathematics to students who typically are afraid of mathematics. While they come with a lot of trepidation, they often show a qualitative change of attitude towards their own learning. Looking at mathematics through cultural lenses provides them with a sense of comfort otherwise absent in their experience. There is also a covert coalition with the pattern-makers – men and women from different parts of the world – who are “just common folks” like themselves, yet capable of producing mathematically sophisticated products. Still, this is not a process of instant conversion; any transformation of attitude towards learning mathematics is slow to come, because of the way mathematics is culturally perceived.

There are other long-lasting benefits of studying patterns on artifacts. Besides learning about the intrinsic mathematical quality (the process) and extrinsic manifestation of mathematical ideas (the product), it is an aesthetic connection to the hand-made world where objects are created from scratch. In our modern industrially sophisticated mechanical world, we have lost touch with the process of creating, recreating, repairing, and reusing. Eternally busy, when we need something, we dash to a store (or a computer) and pick up either manually (or digitally) what we need. Finding a hand-made object and taking time to study it provides us with moments for contemplation, a rare commodity for

life in the fast lane. It is also a precious opportunity to glimpse mathematics as an intrinsic part of a meaningful personal activity.

However, the fundamental reason I want to argue for this approach is that it democratizes mathematics and changes the perception of mathematics. Mathematics becomes a tangible cultural product and as a result is no longer seen as belonging only to an intellectual elite. By experiencing the cognitive power of clearly ordinary people without academic qualifications, students appreciate that they themselves can access their own cognitive power. With their newly found confidence they start relearning mathematics with a new mind.

I want to be clear that I am not arguing for adopting the ethnomathematical approach as the only viable way of teaching mathematics. The ethnomathematics perspective – since it locates mathematics as an inherent part of people engaged in everyday activity – may be seen as the most direct expression of the more general philosophy that mathematics should be considered as a human activity. Ethnomathematics constitutes, therefore, one important strand in an approach to teaching mathematics based on that principle.

## Barbie goes to mathematics class, and GI Joe follows her

Through learning about ethnomathematics, then, students are led to perceive mathematics as a tool for the critical analysis of their own

(Continued on page 33)



“By experiencing the cognitive power of clearly ordinary people without academic qualifications, students appreciate that they themselves can access their own cognitive power.”

society. Several times with groups of pre- and in-service teachers and in conference workshops on demystifying the cultural myth of the “pretty girl”, I have used the Barbie doll. Barbie doll, a product of Mattel, Inc., is 11.5 inches tall, a chest at 5.5 inches; a waist, 2.75 inches; and weight, 5 ounces, first marketed in 1959. According to Mattel, typically a girl gets her first Barbie at about age 3, and is given six more Barbies by the time she is 12 years old. The statistics on sales of Barbie are staggering (Mukhopadhyay, 1998, p. 154) – on average two Barbies are sold every second. Barbie is manufactured in factories in China, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and Mattel has a world-wide market in more than 150 nations throughout the world with sales reaching \$1.9 billion in 1997. Since most people in the USA are intimately familiar with Barbie, a mathematical investigation that begins with the question “What would Barbie look like if she was as big as us?” is intellectually and socially challenging for various reasons.

The task as stated is to imagine a “real-life” Barbie based on the dimensions of an average or typical member of the group. The act of sketching out a “full size” Barbie contributes to an overwhelming “aha” experience for the students. Playful and yet engaged, the students, with a real Barbie doll and tape measures in hand, set forth to construct a “real-life Barbie” for themselves. Apart from the mathematical skills of proportional reasoning, the starting point of this exercise has other aspects of decision-making, such as finding the representative, or the “average person” for the group. Even though the students are

competent with the computation of averages, the concept of an average person for a group is much more complex, particularly because of the racial and gender variability within the groups.

The resulting discourse connects to Mattel’s Barbie and the messages she has been sending to the world for the last four decades. Shrewdly organized, she has held more than seventy five modern careers, and has been transformed to different ethnic analogs. In the course of constructing a life-size Barbie, the students recognize how strikingly different, indeed unnatural, Barbie’s shape is. Similarly, working with various ethnic Barbies, one is stunned to find that irrespective of the pigment of their plastic skin, all Barbies, whether Native American, German, or Polynesian, are identically proportioned – in fact, they share the same mold in the factories in Asia where they are made. The subsequent discussions, passionate

and involved, lead to debunking the myth of Barbie as a model for “every girl” when issues about body image and body type in relation to self-worth and cultural identity are examined. A similar exercise conducted with GI Joe and other male action figures reveals the same disproportionality.

Once the impact of mathematical tools in constructing the full-size Barbie (and GI Joe) is realized, discussions touch upon even deeper social issues such as consumerism and link naturally to fundamental questions such as commodification of men and women’s bodies, and the degree of control over everyone as consumers. These activities of creating real-life Barbie and GI Joe contribute to social consciousness, “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 17). Starting with ethnomathematics, an approach that helps us to access mathematics as a

(Continued on page 34)



Workshop participants put the Barbie challenge to the test.

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“Empowerment, an act of finding one's own voice, is the  
fundamental goal of democratic education.”

tool for understanding geometry of patterns, we then move onto critical mathematics education, where one is intellectually awakened to mathematics as a tool for everyday social sense making. Empowerment, an act of finding one's own voice, is the fundamental goal of democratic education. In my view, ethnomathematics has a vital contribution to make in nurturing mathematically empowered citizens.

### Alternative visions of mathematics education

In this article, I have depicted two visions. One sees mathematics education as a process of making

people competent at doing calculations, manipulating formulae and so on. When reference is made to the real world, it is a cleaned up version of the world that serves for the uncritical application of standard mathematical procedures. In this vision, children are seen almost like computers to be programmed, in the service of what are seen as the central purposes of mathematics education, namely the reproduction of mathematicians and the training of users of formal mathematics, such as scientists and engineers.

Aligned with this view of mathematics education is a view of mathematics that cuts it off from its human roots and distances it from

human concerns of today. The myth of mathematics as culture-free and apolitical, with a narrowly Eurocentric history, is maintained.

In stark contrast, I argue for a mathematics that acknowledges its roots in human activity, both the practical problems of living and aspects of human culture that transcend these – trying to explain the world, enjoying abstract and intellectual games, the aesthetic delight in patterns. Such a view of mathematics offers a resolution of the paradox discussed above. From this perspective, the central purpose of mathematics education is the empowerment of individuals to be responsible yet critical contributors to society.

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# Looking at Learning Communities from Within: Community and Diversity in the Classroom

## Call for Proposals

Due January 26, 2001

Co-editors: Emily Decker, William Koolsbergen,  
Gilda Sheppard, Phyllis van Slyck

“We need to rethink the notion of American culture, not as a single, unified, and already constituted culture that ‘expands’ to include and incorporate sexual and racial others but as a site of cultural conflict, struggle, and exchange across borders that are themselves historically constituted, permeable, contested, and in flux.” Betsy Erkkila, “Ethnicity, Literary Theory and the Grounds of Resistance,” in *American Quarterly* 47.4 (Dec 1995), 588.

Learning communities offer faculty and students opportunities for profound experiences of learning, particularly when connections between learning, community and diversity are thoroughly explored. This is a call for proposals for a published anthology of essays about making those connections. We are particularly interested in writing that recreates actual experiences and reflects the voices of students and faculty working in learning communities. A learning community may be defined as any purposeful attempt to create community among faculty and students. It may be a formal learning community, that is, a cohort of thematically linked courses, a collaborative unit within a stand-alone course, or a structure external to the classroom in which community has been created. We believe that learning communities potentially create a space where students can explore the multiple perspectives that derive from diverse historical experiences and examine the social construction of identity, power and privilege in the world today. As a result, learning communities can engender significant learning for students and faculty. Furthermore, when students confront critical issues, learning communities can create environments in which education becomes an instance of democratic practice.

Suggested topics include but are not limited to the following areas:

- Cultural intersections in learning communities; debate and dialogue
- Pedagogy that honors difference and diversity; strategies, ground rules and evidence of learning
- Moments of crisis, insight, transformation for faculty/students
- Engaging students in political or social issues across disciplines; the learning that such engagement makes possible
- Creating community in an urban academic environment
- Cross-cultural/intercultural perspectives: reflections on identity, hybridity, othering
- Exploring diversity inside and outside the classroom

We are interested in descriptions of powerful moments and longer reflections that describe the richness and complexity of connecting learning, diversity, and community. We are particularly interested in essays that link efforts to make these connections with evidence of the learning which results from such processes. **We invite you to submit proposals (2 pages) by January 26, 2001. Completed essays will be due July 1, 2001.** Submissions should be sent to **both** Emily Decker, The Washington Center for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education, The Evergreen State College, L-2211, Olympia, Washington 98505, and Phyllis van Slyck, 205 Third Avenue, 9K, New York, NY 10003.

*About the editors: Emily Decker is the director of the Washington Center, a public service center of The Evergreen State College, and a former faculty member with the English Composition Board at the University of Michigan. William Koolsbergen is a professor in the Humanities Department and Director of Special Instructional Programs at LaGuardia Community College in New York City. Gilda Sheppard is currently on the faculty of The Evergreen State College-Tacoma campus, and was formerly a professor of sociology at Seattle Central Community College. Phyllis van Slyck is a professor in the English Department and Coordinator of Learning Communities at LaGuardia Community College.*

# Meet the Washington Center staff



Barbara Determan,  
Conference Coordinator



Sue Hirst, Budget and  
Database Manager



Sharilyn Howell, Secretary  
and Web Manager



## The Washington Center Welcomes Gillies Malnarich

Gillies Malnarich is joining the Washington Center staff on December 1, 2000, for one year on an interim basis. During that time, she and Emily Decker will serve as acting co-directors. Since September 1997, Gillies has been working with the Centre for Curriculum Transfer and Technology in British Columbia, to support faculty efforts to provide quality, relevant learning to diverse learners. Her approach, which is collaborative and faculty-directed, builds on existing good practices and assesses effectiveness in relation to student learning. During her appointment at the Centre, Gillies worked with faculty, institutional teams, administrators and policy makers to 1) implement an abilities-based approach to teaching, assessment and institutional effectiveness; 2) make innovative good work public as means for promoting collaborative endeavors (see the Good Practice Registry at <http://www.ctt.bc.ca/GoodPractice/>); 3) pilot a team-based inter-institutional professional development effort to become more learner and learning-centered (<http://www.ctt.bc.ca/colloquium>); and 4) include students' works and their accounts of learning in designing professional development programs. Gillies has been "on loan" to the Centre from Douglas College in Vancouver, BC.

## The Washington Center Receives The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Grant for Critical Moments Project

The Washington Center has received a three year grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to fund our Critical Moments project. The project is funded through the foundation's Program on Pluralism and Unity. The grant will allow us to assist four colleges in the development of the Critical Moments project on each of their campuses. Critical Moments is a retention, awareness and change project for students of color, other underrepresented students, and the institutions they attend. The project prepares students, faculty, and administrators to respond proactively to campus and classroom events that involve issues of race, gender, class and other differences through detailed discussion of in-depth case studies based on extensive interviews of individual students. Seattle Central Community College, South Puget Sound Community College, Tacoma Community College and The Evergreen State College are participating in the initial stage of this project.

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# Announcements

## Head, Heart, and Hands: Educators Holding a Space

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**A Conference on February 2-4, 2001, at  
Pierce College, Tacoma, WA**

An experiential gathering for faculty, staff, and administrators interested in exploring the concept of wholeness and its role in a healthy learning community. Marie Eaton, from Fairhaven College, whose song "Head, Heart and Hands" inspired the theme for this gathering will give a keynote presentation on Saturday morning.

A Call for Proposals will be available this fall. If you would like more information regarding this conference, please email: Jane Lister Reis (North Seattle Community College) at [jlister@sccd.ctc.edu](mailto:jlister@sccd.ctc.edu), Bobi Foster (Pierce College) at [pfoster@pierce.ctc.edu](mailto:pfoster@pierce.ctc.edu), or Carol Hamilton (North Seattle Community College) at [chamilton@sccd.ctc.edu](mailto:chamilton@sccd.ctc.edu).

## Teaming Up for Student Success: WADE/CRLA Annual Conference

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**May 10-11, 2001, at the Westcoast Silverdale  
Hotel, Silverdale, WA**

Keynote Speaker: Barbara Bonham, senior researcher at the National Center for Developmental Education

Featured Workshop: Integrating Curriculum and Designing Learning Communities in Developmental Programs: A Workshop for Educators, with Phyllis vanSlyck and Will Koolsbergen, Laguardia Community College

This is a collaboration of the Washington Association of Developmental Educators (WADE), the Northwest College Reading and Learning Assistance (NW CRLA) and the Washington Center

For links to more information, see the Washington Center web site, [www.evergreen.edu/washcenter](http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter)

## Washington Center Continues National Learning Community Work

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The Washington Center invites campuses involved in starting or strengthening curricular learning communities to apply for participation in its National Learning Communities Project. As many in the Washington Center network know, curricular learning communities link or cluster courses to deepen both community and intellectual connections among students, teachers and disciplines. While curricular designs vary, evaluations of these approaches indicate they live up to their intentions for student engagement and learning, and for faculty engagement as well.

With a recent \$1.1 million grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts ([www.pewtrusts.com](http://www.pewtrusts.com)), the Washington Center will be holding summer institutes on learning communities in 2001, '02 and '03; the dates for the 2001 institute are **June 26-July 1**. At each institute, campus teams will explore learning community curricular designs and teaching strategies, as well as issues in implementation and assessment; they also will have the opportunity for follow-up consultation. The institutes will be designed to serve campus teams either planning a learning community programs or moving to strengthen an existing one.

In addition to the summer institutes, the project will develop a national learning communities Web site with a searchable directory of learning community programs (on-line in 2001) and a monograph series on learning community approaches and issues. The project will also support emerging learning community leadership and conferences in different regions of the country in the coming years. A national learning communities conference will culminate the project in Spring, 2004. Project leaders are Barbara Leigh Smith, Evergreen's academic vice-president, and Jean MacGregor, and Emily Decker of the Washington Center. For additional information and application materials, call (360) 867-6910 or visit the Washington Center's web site, [www.evergreen.edu/washcenter](http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter) and click on National Learning Communities Project.

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The Washington Center's 14th annual conference:

# Enriched Learning for All:

## Teaching and Organizing for Access and Excellence

February 22 – 24, 2001

SeaTac Marriott Hotel

SeaTac, Washington

Our conference focus this year assumes that we hold two values in equal regard: access to higher education and significant student learning. By holding these values simultaneously, we join generations of effective educators and today's faculty, staff and administrators who actively work towards the promise of post-secondary education in a democratic society and a just, humane world—enriched learning for all.

We will offer sessions on understanding religious diversity, on confronting issues of homophobia in and outside the classroom, and on supporting the learning of non-native English speakers. Several workshops will offer perspectives on supporting the learning of Native American students. Several more will focus on institutional change strategies. All workshops are intended to create powerful experiences of learning for you, the participants. Whether you currently hold a staff, faculty or administrative position, do join us for these days of rich conversation.

New this year is an additional focus on the what and how of learning. What does it mean to teach and organize for access and excellence in the context of student writing and quantitative reasoning across the curriculum? No matter what your background (science, art, student affairs), this conference will let you experience learning outside your areas of expertise, and in that process, we can model the well-rounded learners we want our students to become.

Marilyn Frankenstein and Arthur Powell are long-time activists and educators, internationally recognized as leaders in the field of ethnomathematics. Their keynote addresses three crucial questions: who is learning and who is even present in the learning situation? What counts as knowledge? How can a critical mathematics education contribute to struggles for a more just society? Frankenstein and Powell co-edited *Ethnomathematics: Challenging Eurocentrism in Mathematics Education* (SUNY Press, 1997) and are members of the *Radical Teacher* Editorial Collective.

On Thursday, February 22, Tom Fox, English, California State University—Chico, Director, Northern California Writing Project; and author, *Defending Access: A Critique of Standards in Higher Education*, will conduct a half-day workshop on Access, Diverse Writers and Classroom Practices. In the afternoon, Tom will work with conference goers in a workshop on organizing for institutional change using three cases focusing on administrators working to support the learning of all students.

Gilda Sheppard, The Evergreen State College-Tacoma Campus, and Lori Blewett, Washington Center Fellow, will be conducting a workshop on white privilege and its implications for educators on Thursday morning as well. The purpose of the workshop is to deepen our personal and collective understanding of the role that 'whiteness' plays in our own and in our students' lives. In the afternoon, they will lead a workshop on developing a community of antiracist educators. This workshop assumes a familiarity with issues of white privilege and power, and is intended as a forum for deepening our collective work around the pursuit of a socially just society within the context of education.

More information on this year's conference and registration forms may be obtained at <http://www.evergreen.edu/user/washcntr/events/index.asp> or by calling the Washington Center at 360-867-6611. Please join us for what promises to be an exciting conference!

# Calendar of Upcoming Events

## **February 22, 2001**

*Planning Committee Meeting*  
Marriott Hotel, SeaTac, WA

## **February 22-24, 2001**

*Washington Center's 14th Annual Conference: Enriched Learning for All: Teaching and Organizing for Access and Excellence*  
Marriott Hotel, SeaTac, WA

## **March/April 2001**

*Learning Community Coordinators' Gathering*

## **April 26-27, 2001**

*Curriculum Planning Retreat West*  
Rainbow Lodge, North Bend, WA

## **May 2001**

*Critical Moments – Progress Reports*

## **May/June, 2001**

*Native American Cultures and the Process of Learning (State Board)*  
Everett Community College

## **June 21-22, 2001**

*Planning Committee Meeting*  
Rainbow Lodge, North Bend, WA

## **June 26-July 1, 2001**

*National Learning Communities Project Summer Institute*  
The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA

**Current event information is available on the website: [www.evergreen.edu/washcenter](http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter).**

## **Other Events**

### **February 2-4, 2001**

*Head, Heart, Hands: Educators Holding a Space*  
Pierce College, Tacoma, WA

### **May 2-4, 2001**

*Northwest Higher Education Assessment Conference*  
<http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/ewag/ewag.0010>

### **April 2001**

*Students of Color Conference*

### **May 10-11, 2001**

*Teaming Up for Student Success*  
WADE/CRLA Annual Conference  
Silverdale, WA

### **October 2001**

*Faculty and Staff of Color Conference*  
TBA



Jacqueline Whitmore and Mary Newell (Santa Fe Community College) discuss learning community plans with Linda Warwick (Portland Community College) at the April Curriculum Planning Retreat West at Rainbow Lodge.

# Mailing List

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
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 **Washington Center**  
for Improving the Quality of  
Undergraduate Education

The Evergreen State College  
Olympia, WA 98505

## The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education

■ Established in 1985 at Evergreen as an inter-institutional consortium, the Center focuses on low-cost, high-yield approaches to educational reform, emphasizing better utilization and sharing of existing resources through collaboration among member institutions. Established with funding from the Exxon and Ford Foundations, the Center is now supported by the Washington State Legislature.

■ Includes 50 participating institutions: all of the state's public four-year institutions, community colleges, technical colleges, one tribal college and ten independent colleges.

■ Supports and coordinates the development of interdisciplinary "learning community" programs, inter-institutional faculty exchanges, curriculum reform initiatives in science, mathematics and cultural pluralism, and offers conferences, seminars and technical assistance on effective approaches to teaching and learning.

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