Changing Lives Through Metacognitive Relationships:
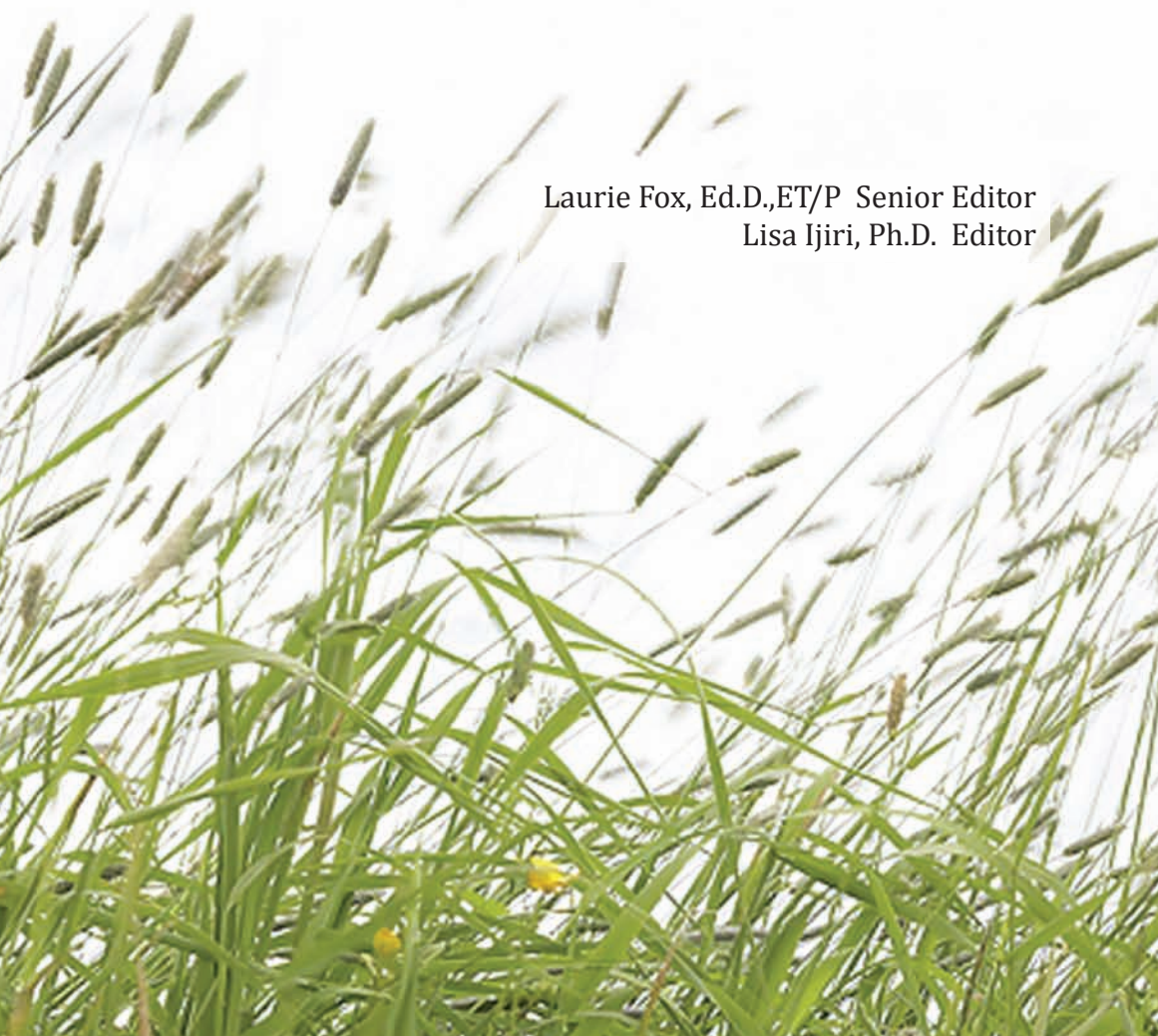## *LD/ADHD and College Success*

Laurie Fox, Ed.D.,ET/P Senior Editor
Lisa Ijiri, Ph.D. Editor

Changing Lives Through Metacognitive Relationships:

LD/ADHD and College Success

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All of the stories in this book are based upon actual situations in practice. Names have been changed in many cases in order to respect the privacy of our students.

Table of Contents

ACCOMMODATIONS & TRANSITIONS

Introduction

Supporting college students with learning disabilities can result in transformations that extend far beyond the granting of accommodations, instruction in learning styles, or implementation of study strategies. Enduring changes are related here to connection, mentoring, and the presence of reflective learning conversations as students with language-based LD, ADHD, and/or executive function weakness come to understand themselves as unique, empowered learners. *Changing Lives Through Metacognitive Relationships: LD/ADHD and College Success* celebrates 40 years of leadership provided by the first and oldest comprehensive college support program of its kind.

Given the high expense of college and the difficult, if not traumatic, prior school experiences of many with LDs and ADHD, it is important to know what can transform the hesitant, dependent learner into someone who is independent, confident, and successful in the classroom and in life. Critical insights on this change process are rarely shared with a broad audience. *Changing Lives* provides expert analysis of real life transformations.

Our book covers a wider than usual range of topics involving learning disabilities and ADHD, including, for example, substance abuse and other co-existing conditions, executive function, lifelong learning, tapping the soul, second language learning, parenting, assessment, teaching students with LD and ADHD in the classroom, assistive technology, adult learners, transitioning, and the impact of emotions – especially from early years in school - on learning.

For educators and professionals, *Changing Lives* provides leading edge, best practices for fostering adolescent and adult academic success. For parents, it serves as a complement to college search books, a support text for parenting those entering a more independent phase. For students, this can be a transition book and hope-filled guide. Student quotes
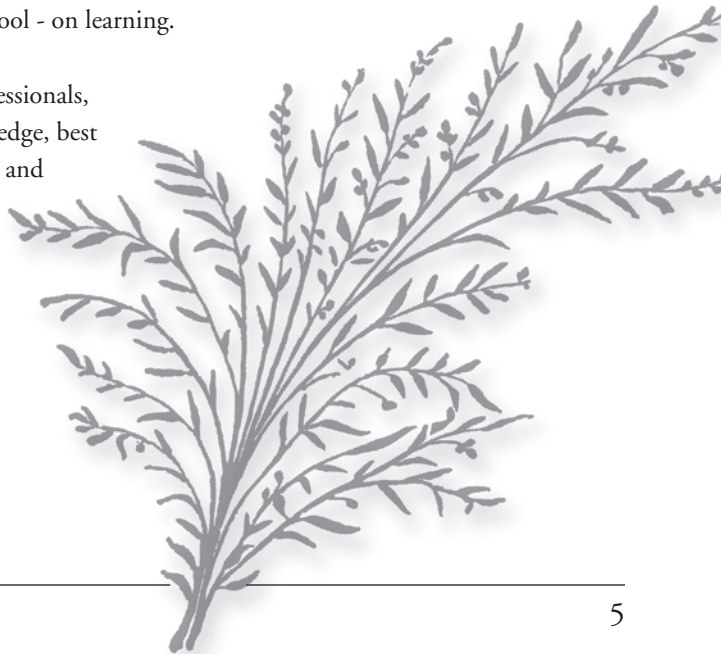
at the end of each chapter are geared toward those who prefer minimal reading and/or sampling the text in a non-linear fashion.

Reflective practice is a topic of great interest in and outside of education. *Changing Lives* applies reflective practice principles. At the end of each chapter are Reflection Questions that engage readers interactively in personal application and deeper processing. Questions are specifically geared to educators and other professionals, to parents or guardians, and to students. In this way, it builds a unique bridge between students' metacognition and others' reflective practice. We suggest that the in-depth reflective thinking that we foster and describe in this book goes far beyond skills and strategies and is a critical component of the change process.

Changing Lives explores the value of consistent metacognitive relationships that are less likely to occur in typical college support program models. It describes, from various vantage points, processes that inspire a "changed life," picking up where texts and advice guides leave off. It speaks from the hearts, expertise, and experiences of those who walk the long road to success every day. We hope you are as inspired as we by what follows on changing lives.

Laurie Fox, Ed.D., ET/P and Lisa Ijiri, Ph.D.

The Program for Advancement of Learning's 40-Year Heritage

In 1970, Dr. Gertrude Webb, a visionary educator, pioneered the first post-secondary disability support program in the country, the Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL) at Curry College in Milton, Massachusetts. In an era when learning disabilities were just becoming identified in elementary school children, Dr. Webb's model centered on metacognitive development and strength-based teaching and learning.

Upon Dr. Webb's retirement in 1993 and until 2007, co-editor, Dr. Lisa Ijiri, a Fulbright Scholar, with graduate degrees from The Johns Hopkins University and Northwestern University, was Director of PAL, leading a multitalented team of learning specialists to further develop and expand the unique offerings of the program. In the last decade, PAL has added a vibrant array of services and programs to its core offering; these have included PAL for Multilingual Students (PML), the Adult Center at PAL (ACP), the Educational Diagnostic Center (EDC), the Learning Academy (a summer program for high school students), and extensive outreach in the form of workshops for guidance counselors and faculty, a student speakers' bureau, hosting of national conferences, and an active faculty who publish and present in a wide variety of venues.

Dr. Laurie Fox brings her 20-plus years of professional experience to her senior editing leadership of *Changing Lives*. Professional roles have included Speech, Reading and Learning Specialist, Educational Therapist, Classroom Teacher, Counselor, and college faculty in Psychology, Communication, First Year Transition, and Reflective Practice. Her four and one-half year commitment to guiding this project helped to bring forward the impressive breadth and depth of passion and expertise in 20 PAL faculty contributing authors.

The authors, who commit themselves every day to high standards of excellence and dedication, include accomplished writers, artists, award-winning professors, educational therapists, musicians, program developers and leaders, parents, deans, technology experts, diagnosticians, professional authorities, and most importantly, caring practitioners. *Changing Lives* is due to the PAL faculty and staff who have been instrumental to 40 years of success and inspiration, to the pioneering work of love by Dr. Gertrude Webb, to Curry College's belief in transformation, and to the students who help us all evolve into more effective and compassionate humans.

METACOGNITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Working from the Soul

Lynn Abrahams, M.Ed.

ur work in the Program for Advancement of Learning at Curry College is exhilarating, but it's not easy. It is a bit like parenting; there really are no rules, no set programs that we can follow with each of the students who walk through our doors. There are guidelines, of course, and we certainly draw on our collective knowledge honed through years of study: knowledge about learning disabilities, about the neurological developmental stages of late adolescence and adulthood, and about the range of study strategies and techniques of learning. But, important though they are, those technical competencies are not enough to ensure success. On those occasions when we succeed, it is because we have managed to dig deep into our souls to find the courage to rely on something that is beyond our academic knowledge. We are successful when we have the strength – and take the risk – to rely on our intuition. I call this "working from the soul," and this, I believe, is the ingredient that makes the PAL program unique.

Our job with our students is not to fix or to heal. Our job is to listen, to ask questions, to honor our students' answers, to journey with them as they find their talents and strengths. As educator and philosopher Parker Palmer says: "When you speak to me about your deepest questions, you do not want to be fixed or saved: you want to be seen and heard, to have your truth acknowledged and honored" (Palmer, 2004, p. 117). Following Palmer's advice is not easy, particularly among those of us who have chosen a helping profession. By nature, we are tempted to swoop in and try to relieve our students of their discomfort – by correcting their missteps, leading them in another direction, and teaching them a *better* way. Yet to do so is a surefire way to make our students defensive, closed off, embarrassed, and shamed –- all of the emotions that distance our students from us, and that get in the way of the students' personal, emotional, and academic growth.

So, if we don't *fix* our students, what do we do? The first step is finding the strength to create a connection based on a mutual respect for what we don't know.

What is Working from the Soul?

In his book, *Invisible Lines of Connection*, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner (1996) describes, in short spiritual stories, the deep connections that unite us all. He writes:

Look, I understand about coincidence and even what Jungians call synchronicity. But suppose there is something going on in the universe which is to ordinary, everyday reality as our unconscious is to our daily lives? Softly, but unmistakably guiding it. Pushing us here, pulling us there, tripping us up, guiding our steps, feeding us our lines. Most of the time, we are unaware of it (p. 114).

It does not seem to matter to Rabbi Kushner what we call these invisible connections. Some call it soul, some God's will; some simply smile and call it "life." For me, Rabbi Kushner paints a clear picture of the glittering silver web that links all people, objects, thoughts, and feelings. Although we may not be able to name all of what we see, still we need to acknowledge that there is something there. There is simply more going on than we know.

The same theme is evoked by Carl Jung when he refers to life as "a plant that lives on its rhizome" (Jung, 1965, p. 4), the horizontal underground stem from which shoots rise to pierce the ground's surface. In his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung writes that:

True life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome. The part that appears above ground lasts only a single summer. Then it withers away – an ephemeral apparition. When we think of the unending growth and decay of life and civilizations, we cannot escape the impression of absolute nullity. Yet I have never lost a sense of something that lives and endures underneath the eternal flux. What we see is the blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains (p. 4).

For Jung, the rhizome symbolizes what Rabbi Kushner calls "the invisible lines of connection" that criss-cross our world and connect us to each other.

Our work with students in PAL requires that we cultivate a respect for what is hidden. That realization is only the beginning of the process, for it invites any number of questions. Are some people more comfortable looking for what is underneath, what is not visible, than others? Is this a learned skill? Or is it innate in all of us? And, if innate, how do we reach inside and summon up the resources within us?

Not long ago, I joined a group of 50 educators, psychologists, and doctors at a weeklong workshop on Cape Cod, a few hours' drive from Curry's campus outside of Boston. The subject of the workshop was "Spirituality and the Care of the Soul in Psychotherapy" and the leader was Thomas Moore, Ph.D., author of best-selling books *Care of the Soul, The Soul's Religion, Dark Nights of the Soul,* and many others. On the first day of the workshop, he asked all of us – earnest professionals eager to widen our horizons – to pay close

attention to any connection we felt during the week to other living creatures. I was a bit surprised by the request but went along with it. Over the next few days, we discussed psychological concepts, philosophical beliefs, and religious terminology. We talked extensively about the meaning of the spiritual aspects of healing and healing the whole person: body, soul, and spirit.
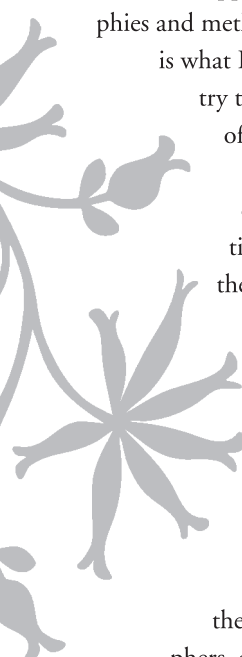
Toward the end of the conference, a number of us traveled to Provincetown, on the tip of the Cape, and joined the Center for Coastal Studies in a whale watch on a boat called "The Portuguese Princess." A typical trip would lead to sightings of five to ten whales. We were honored to witness 28 Humpback and Minke whales, both adults and calves. Our weeklong discussion about the soul became crystallized in the image, one that is forever etched in my memory, of three great Humpback whales chasing our boat, breeching in unison in response to the applause of the humans clustered together on our vessel. These huge animals came from down deep to grace us with their leap into air.

The next day, Thomas Moore talked to us about the need we seem to have to reduce our students, clients, or patients to a diagnosis. To be able to name something is to have some degree of control over it, to be able to exercise power over it. But the truth is, we cannot. Sometimes we must simply accept what we cannot fully understand. We must step back and respect what emerges from the deep. Just as we waited quietly, hopefully, for the whales, and just as we burst into celebration when they suddenly breeched beside us in a dance of their own devising, so we as teachers must work patiently with students, creating an environment of acceptance that will allow each student's innermost being – the soul, if you will – to burst forth, at its own time and in its own manner. And then we celebrate.

Again, the question arises: what makes one person more comfortable with the ambiguity, the mystery from down deep?

When students walk into my office, no matter how many words we exchange, the most potent messages we share are not verbal ones. I develop a "gut feeling" about what I think students might need. I speculate about the experiences they may have endured as a student with some degree of special needs. For their part, the students have a "feeling" about me and my reactions to them. So much of our communication occurs without words. When a student walks into my office, in order to be open to learn about that student, I need to draw on something other than what I know or understand. Every ounce of sixth-sense that I have has to become accessible as I try to get a glimpse into what is happening with the student. I need to relax into reading the invisible connections that exist.

Tapping into the deeper levels of living, deeper than words, deeper than philosophies and methods, was not what I was taught to do in graduate school, but oddly enough it is what I have learned from years of studying the piano. Here's how it works for me: I try to devote some time each day to practicing piano. I work on analyzing a piece of music for patterns, studying scales in the same key, building up flexibility and strength in my fingers. All of this is preparation for those few moments when I can sometimes lose myself so totally in the music that time slips by without notice. These are the precious moments I work so hard for: the moments when the ego is gone, when I don't think about how I sound – when I can simply lose myself in the beauty of sound. I go to my room with the piano, I sit down, and even though, somehow, I am accessing years of study, practice, and knowledge, nonetheless I am thinking about only the music. This place, so quiet without the ego's constant tug for attention, so peaceful without all the words, is the exact place where I find myself when I meet each new student and begin the process of listening to the student seated before me.

It is no coincidence that so many of PAL's faculty members are involved in the arts. We are playwrights, poets, painters, musicians, gardeners, photographers, and quilters. I believe there is a strong connection between the artist's ability to surrender to the depths and the teacher's ability to access intuition. Working from the soul is the act of tapping into the unnameable in order to connect with another. It is what we do when we make split-second decisions about when to push a student and when to stop pushing, when to work on the next cognitive level and when to ask about the memory that might have been triggered, when to work and when to talk about the work we just completed.

When we meet with students in Curry's PAL program, we must remind ourselves that we are only looking at what can be seen. If we do not have respect for what lies underneath, those invisible connections, we will never be able to help our students in a fundamental, meaningful way. We must be aware of what is in our soul, and we must respect and seek to discover what is in the soul of others.

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Working from the Soul
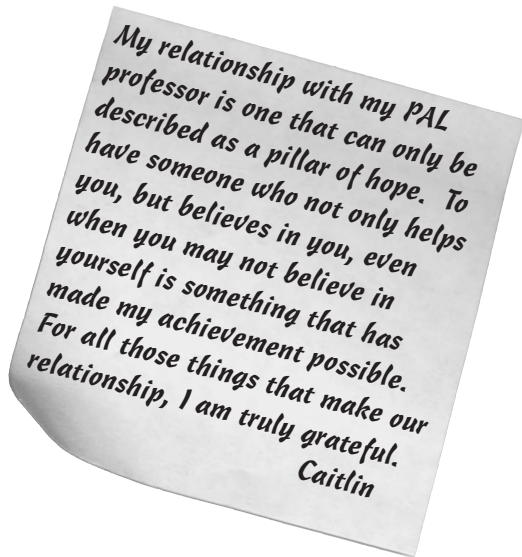
For Students
When I think of someone who has understood things about me - what is in my soul - that weren't even said, who comes to mind?

How was that helpful?

For Educators and Other Professionals
When have I perceived someone as a diagnosis?

My relationship with my PAL professor is one that can only be described as a pillar of hope. To have someone who not only helps you, but believes in you, even when you may not believe in yourself is something that has made my achievement possible. For all those things that make our relationship, I am truly grateful.
Caitlin

How might I go deeper and tap something more intuitive?

For Parents or Guardians
"When you speak to me about your deepest questions, you do not want to be fixed or saved; you want to be seen and heard, to have your truth acknowledged and honored."

Reflecting on this Parker Palmer quote, what comes to mind for me?

Reigniting the Light for Lifelong Learning

Paula Cocce, M.Ed.

I love to teach. I enjoy the students, the classroom and the academic atmosphere. The most rewarding aspect of my profession is in witnessing the spark of enlightenment, the switch of insight turned on, the students who gleam suddenly and state that they know, they will try, they can and they will continue. Over the span of my career, I have taught at all levels: elementary, middle school, high school, adult basic education and now college. This epiphany for learning potential can happen at any time during the educational experiences of the student. It is a teacher's greatest gift to behold.

Humans are born with an enormous capacity for learning. Too often, the learning disabled child has experienced trauma in the classroom, extinguishing enthusiasm for learning. These students must be provided with special, individual-specific ingredients for fuel to reignite their interest in learning. Just as a kerosene lamp needs fuel to burn and a helping hand to turn the handle to allow the flame to burn bright, so does the student with learning differences. We must offer a helping hand to kindle the flame for growth. College is a time of transition and great potential for growth.

Young children are sponges for knowledge. In the first years of life, they learn language, social skills, and develop motor skills. They are born with great enthusiasm for exploration and learning, utilizing all of their senses in this exploration. They require guidance and encouragement to continue to grow and develop. Parents and caregivers provide fuel for this growth. The flame for learning is ignited.

Then the School Years
Learning disabilities are often not apparent until a child enters school. The bright, enthusiastic, happy, active preschooler now faces frustration. The signs of learning disabilities may be subtle at first. The child may not be able to write his or her name when the other students are able. He or she may seem to be one step behind the rest of the class in transitioning activities. This seemingly intelligent, well spoken youngster may have difficulty in letter and num-

ber recognition. Rhymes and phonemes just don't connect. Parents and teachers begin to wonder if there is an underlying problem.

As the child enters elementary school and the demands of academics become more pronounced, the LD becomes more apparent. Now, the student has to perform for teachers and faces formal evaluation. Assignments are expected to be completed in a certain time frame. The student is often asked to read aloud and writing samples are displayed. This is when enthusiasm begins to wane and that flame begins to soften.

These children often feel humiliated in the classroom. They know how labored their oral reading skills sound. They can see that their peers' writing samples are sometimes superior. They are well aware that they are, more often than not, the last one ready to move on to recess or to the next activity. Their peers notice also.

This frustration is then carried over to family life. The LD student is often asked to complete unfinished class work at home. An assignment given in the classroom can take two to three times longer to complete at home than in school. The child is tired at the end of the day and there are more distractions in the home environment. Assigned homework then needs to be tackled after the classroom work is complete. Parents become just as frustrated and discouraged as the child.
Exhausting…… Extinguishing…..

Nurturing Strengths

Students with learning disabilities are sometimes labeled as lazy, unmotivated, slow. They begin to feel the failure, live the failure. They may see themselves as stupid, incapable. Testing is administered to determine the causes of the failure to thrive in school.   This battery often results in validation of the problem, a diagnosis, a label.

Squelch…..

Now, let me get back to why I love to teach. I have had the privilege of working in an environment that searches for and embraces strengths. Everyone has strengths. Resilient students use their individual strengths to overcome weaknesses. Sometimes this resilience comes from within and sometimes it needs to be taught.

One of the first tasks asked of students in the Program for the Advancement of Learning (PAL) at Curry College is to catalog their strengths. This is often a very difficult assignment for these young adults. They have spent a lifetime discussing

and worrying about their weaknesses. Some say that
they have never had to talk about themselves in
such a positive light and they are not com-
fortable listing things that they feel are
personal strengths. However, when asked
to record areas of weakness or areas that they
would like to work on to develop, they are much
more comfortable, perhaps because this is so familiar.
They are able to begin this task with very little hesitation.
This list is much longer than the inventory of strengths. So begins the
discussion, the journey, the exploration to rediscover a passion for learning.
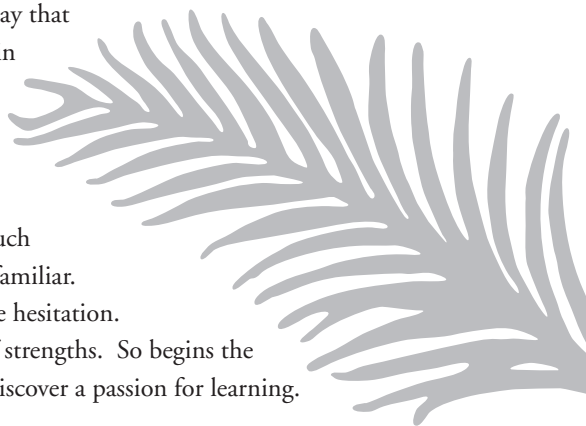
Lucky students discover the spark for learning early in their educational experiences.
They are fortunate to have teachers who understand the nature of the way they need to learn
and are able to nurture their preferences. They often have parents who are supportive. In
PAL, this exploration is through conversation and connection.   One major component of
the PAL professor's job is to develop a relationship with the student that leads to inroads of
self discovery, rekindling the flame for lifelong learning. This rediscovery of potential for
learning can happen at any time. It might come through experience and reinvention.
Perhaps this epiphany happens due to failure or disaster. Often times it comes in developing
a sense of security and comfort in self and surroundings. Maturity may be the ignition.
Sometimes it is the unexpected that sparks the flame.

Reignition through Experience

Robert was a tall, lanky junior in a high school located in a suburb of Boston. He
was placed in my Chapter One Reading class because he was not performing well on stan-
dardized tests. He was also not doing well in academics. He was diagnosed with dyslexia
and stated that he "hated to read." Words on a page made his "eyes go crazy."

It is a natural human instinct to do things that we do well and avoid things that we
do not do well. So, Robert concentrated on basketball. He practiced everyday and was quite
an accomplished player. I pointed out the fact that he was a good basketball player partly
because he has a natural ability to play and partly because he practiced to improve. He was
motivated.   I told him that his reading and academics would also improve with practice and
perseverance. He didn't believe me.

I asked my Chapter One students to carry a book of their choice to class everyday.
I also provided high interest, low level readers (not too low) for those who wanted to peruse
them. The students were asked to read silently for the first ten minutes of each class. This

gave them fifty minutes of reading for "pleasure" every week that they did not normally do on their own. Yes, they complained for the first week, but they eventually settled into the routine. I read silently with them, enjoying my own book. I wanted them to see that reading has many purposes; it is not just for academics.

A few months later, I asked the students to put their books down to move on to another activity as I did every day after the allotted 10 minutes. Robert asked for a few more minutes as he was "… at a good part in the book." Music to a reading teacher's ears! Imagine, a teenage boy who hated to read immersed in a book! I knew then that a spark had ignited Robert's zest for reading. I was confident that he would continue to read for enjoyment. I am not sure he was aware of his metamorphosis, but it was a day that I will never forget.

Some students arrive at college with a new outlook, both on themselves and on life. They hope to find the spark for learning at the college level. They do not want to continue to be the same student they were in high school and elementary school. This is the time in life when that transition can most easily take place. At college, you can reinvent.

Reignition through Reinvention

Chad grew up in a middle class family in Connecticut. He struggled in elementary school with reading and maintaining attention. To cover up his difficulties he became the class clown. His strength was in his outgoing personality. He knew how to use it, but never realized it was a strength; he only concentrated on hiding his weaknesses.

As Chad grew older and continued on to high school his frustration with academics intensified. He was fortunate, however; he was athletic and this helped raise his self esteem. He did not do homework and he never studied. Why do things you are not good at when you can get accolades in other areas? Chad's grades were always below average. He did what he had to do just to stay on the team. He was a good football player, yet a terrible student.

Chad wanted to change that image as he matured. He was accepted to Curry and made the college football team, but he wanted more. He wanted to be a good student and he knew that this was his chance to excel. He came to Curry with the mindset of doing well and he began to study to see just what he could do.

Chad walked into my office with a big smile and a friendly demeanor. He was very honest about his academic history; he said he found school difficult from the start and stopped trying. He knew that he was fortunate to get into Curry and the PAL program. He wanted to do well to please not only his parents, but he wanted to do this for himself.

I asked Chad to make a list of areas of personal strengths that would help him to achieve his goals. He could not come up with one. He could easily write a long list of all the weaknesses he felt he personally possessed. I mentioned football, but he said that he was not that good; he didn't dress for the games. I asked if he showed up for all of the practices and games. He did; he's a team player. I asked if he saw himself as socially successful, if he had good friends. He said he had a few close friends. Interpersonal strength, you need to be a good friend to have good friends. I asked why he did not become discouraged in the college application process after receiving denials. He said that he really wanted to go to college to make something of himself in life: perseverance, motivation. These strengths are the makings of a successful human being.

Chad signed up for Business Management courses. He did his homework, studied for tests and showed interest in class. He attended PAL consistently and was honest about his academics. His mother called me one day to check on his progress. She was worried as he had always struggled in school. As I had obtained Chad's written permission to speak with his parents, I told her that I thought that he was very motivated to do well and that he was receiving high grades on papers and quizzes. She cried; no one had ever said those words about Chad before. Chad lit his own flame for learning. Students like Chad make my job seem effortless. However, not all students are that easy.

Reignition through Failure

Sharon entered her first year of Curry with little idea of what she wanted to do after college. She was not sure of a major. Many first year students do not know what they want to do, so they concentrate on the liberal arts courses. Sometimes, one of these courses will spark an interest.

Sharon began her first semester with apprehension and anxiety. She had been diagnosed at an early age with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Inattentive and Impulsive Types. Students diagnosed with ADHD can have

trouble attending to detail. They might have difficulty with organization of both time and materials. Sharon had traumatic elementary school and high school experiences. She was not sure that she wanted to be in college, but did not know what else to do.

By midterm, Sharon was overwhelmed and stopped doing assigned readings. This snowballed into frequently missing classes. She missed projects and tests. Sharon was not honest about her progress with me, her parents, nor with herself. Sometimes, students are in denial about their academics. They assume that they will pass courses without doing the required work. Sharon ended the semester on academic probation.

After lengthy discussions with her parents, Sharon decided to return to Curry for a second semester. She signed up to retake a class that she had failed and added other liberal arts courses. She came to me determined to do better. Unfortunately, by midsemester she had fallen into the same trap. She stopped doing assignments. She did not attend classes consistently and continued in her pattern of dishonest behavior.

Students who have trouble admitting their weaknesses have some difficulty finding strengths to help them overcome these areas. Honest conversation is the foundation of the PAL relationship. Students have every opportunity to succeed utilizing PAL resources, but they must be honest about shortcomings and mistakes in order to turn them around.

Sharon left Curry to pursue employment. She felt that she needed to work to find what she wanted to do with her life. She desired a journey that would help her to honestly learn about herself. She needed to develop both long and short term goals. Sharon chose to find her strengths in the world of work rather than in academics. This epiphany, hopefully, was Sharon's spark for reigniting that light for learning. As painful as the school experience had been for Sharon and her parents, it put her on the road to self-discovery. She needed to discover her strengths and her passions and utilize them to be successful. Returning to school someday is always an option. She may find that she will succeed in the business world without a college education. And that is okay!

While some students find their way after significant failure, many students find the spark for lifelong learning while attending college. This is the stage in life where, hopefully, they learn mature independence and grow to adulthood. This enlightenment can happen at any time during those years and for a variety of reasons.
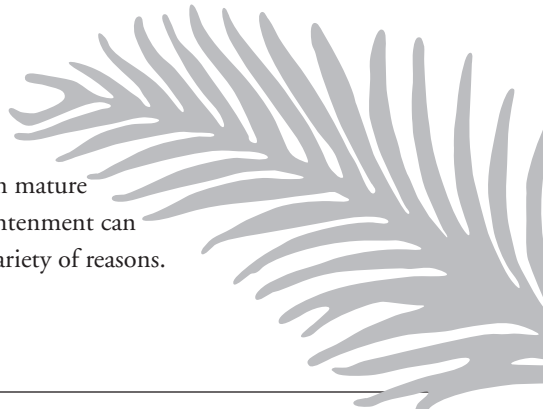
Reignition through Disaster

I knew Jay was on the road to lifelong learning while helping him to type and edit a group project during his junior year. Jay came from a small school system located close to Boston. His struggles with school began in the first grade. He had trouble learning to read and write. The school tested him and he was placed on an educational plan. Jay spent a lot of the school day in the resource room. By the time he arrived at high school, he was tracked in a technical program. Therefore, he didn't take the required classes for college admissions; he was excluded from college prep math courses and the high school foreign language requirement was waived. He was told that admission to a four year college was not an option.

At 17 years old, Jay decided that he did want to go to a four year liberal arts college. He wanted to become a police officer and decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. The guidance counselor recommended that Jay begin by taking classes at a local community college. He could advance to a four year college if he could achieve good grades. Jay had other ideas. He applied and was accepted to Curry and the PAL program.

During his first meeting with me, Jay told the story of his journey to Curry. He had little academic self-confidence. However, he showed leadership in that he was captain of a high school athletic team during his senior year. He was very anxious about participating in college courses. During our conversation, I pointed out that he was already successful. He persevered and was admitted to a four year college even after he was told that it was not an option. He had taken initiative. We started with that success and continued down that road.

Jay's academic progress during the first two years of Curry was inconsistent. He did well in most classes, but continued to struggle with writing, reading and test taking. We worked on study skills and organization of materials and time. Jay was curious and receptive to suggestion. Grades improved as his confidence grew.

A group research project was assigned in psychology. Each student in the group was to choose a role. Three students were to research and write different sections of the paper. Another student was to read and edit the research. The fifth student, Jay, was responsible for typing, organizing the information and citing it correctly. He was also group leader. In this role, Jay was responsible for keeping students on a timely track and facilitating group meetings.

Group dynamics can be very complicated. Some of the students followed through with their assignments, while others did not. Not everyone attended meetings. Some of the research was submitted to Jay at the last minute, leaving the group leader with many loose ends.

Jay walked into my office with three sections of the research. Some of it was typed and cited. Some of it was handwritten and not cited at all. We discussed the frustration of leading a group. We also talked about the dynamics of group activity and how it can be positive and productive. The finished product was due in the morning.

The typing and organizing began. As Jay typed, he became more and more frustrated about the quality of the project. There was much to improve. He lacked correct citation information. Jay's first inclination was to "wing it." He could just type and organize the information he was given, risking a low grade, not to mention plagiarism. We discussed the ramifications of this decision. Then, I waited…… Jay continued to type.

Suddenly Jay stopped and took a deep breath. He could not pass this project in as it was written. This paper needed a lot of work. Although it was due in the morning, Jay decided that he would ask his professor for an extension. He would explain that he needed to meet with his group and discuss the consequences of plagiarism and substandard work. I could see that this moment in time was a turning point. He not only cared about the project but in the process involved as well. A light was ignited.

Reignition through Security

Karen came from a troubled family and moved numerous times during elementary and high school. She was the oldest of four children. As her parents had divorced more than once, she was unfamiliar with stability. Karen was diagnosed with auditory processing disorder. She often confused information presented orally and missed assignments. Her experiences affected her social skills; she felt that she didn't fit in with the students at her various high schools.

In October of her high school senior year, Karen attended the open house activities at Curry. She knew in her heart that Curry was the school she wanted to attend. Its wooded campus with close proximity to Boston was the perfect environment. She liked the individual attention she would receive in the small classes. The programs of study were varied, and
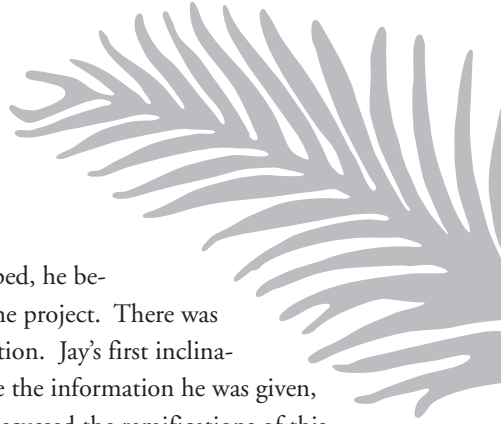
she was confident that she would find an area of interest to pursue. PAL was structured yet personal. Curry was a perfect fit. It felt safe, both physically and emotionally.

Confident in her decision to attend, Karen thrived. She learned that she could write well and that she enjoyed research. This instilled a new sense of academic security. Karen found an interest in Community Health and decided to pursue this avenue. As her confidence grew in academics so did her confidence in social settings. She made good friends and developed solid relationships with professors and other personnel on campus. Karen had found a new home, a sense of belonging. Security released her talents and sent her down the path to success.

Reignition through Comfort

Steve entered Curry after attending boarding schools for students with learning disabilities. He seemed a little older than his biological age as he had lived away from home for a number of years. He wore army fatigues, black t-shirts and dog chains for jewelry. His pierced eyebrow held a gold hoop ring and his spiked hair was dyed florescent green. Throughout our first introduction and conversation he appeared to be resistant, emanating a strong sense of bravado.

Although Steve appeared to be resistant to attending yet another program for students with learning disabilities, he attended his PAL sessions regularly. Initially, our meetings were not comfortable for him. He did not want to disclose his areas of weaknesses and had a difficult time discussing his strengths. He was not interested in lengthy conversation.

Students often conceal information for self-preservation. They prefer to be known for extreme behavior or appearance. They find that they can be successful in the extreme. They have felt their differences since early childhood. If you sense you are different then sometimes you feel you need to appear different to fit in. They find other students with the same image. This is their way of connecting with others.

Our relationship gradually became more comfortable over the first semester. Since I was meeting with him one on one, our conversations became more revealing and honest. Once he realized that I was devoted to helping him and that he was emotionally safe, he was able to discuss his academic difficulties. He needed assistance with writing. Math was terrifying. He had failed numerous math classes. Calculators serve no purpose when you do not understand the concepts. He hated numbers.

Math, however, is a requirement. We discussed facing this fear head on so that he could concentrate on his academics without the worry of a math class hanging over his head. He felt more confident registering for one after I explained that our math professors understand math phobia and work well with students who have math deficiencies.

Steve continued to see me throughout his second semester, often bringing in his math assignments. This time he understood the concepts taught; they were applied to his everyday life. Concepts came first. That made all the difference. Steve found success with numbers; he was no longer apprehensive. He had tamed his mathematical demons.

By May of that same academic year, Steve's appearance had changed dramatically. His hair was back to its natural color. The radical jewelry was gone. He had become comfortable in his own skin. Steve had grown and matured. He no longer needed to hide behind a costume. Steve's transformation was dramatic in that the change was physically observable. As his light was ignited, he could be himself.

Reignition through Maturity

It is never too late in life to light the flame for learning. I learned this lesson while teaching adult basic education and GED preparation at a local college. One student explained that she would be 34 years old by the time she finished classes and obtained her high school equivalency. Through conversation, she realized that she was going to be 34 years old even if she did not achieve her diploma. She could be 34 with or without this education. She decided that this was the time to reach for her goal. In fact, anytime is the right time to strive for lifelong goals. I will always remember the kind face of the 84 year old man who, when leaving the GED class for the last time, turned at the door and silently mouthed "Thank you." He had just passed the GED exam. His lifelong dream was fulfilled.

Success begets success. Teachers have the ability to spark the flame through conversation, connection, and personal mentoring. The PAL program at Curry College emphasizes the importance of the professor-student relationship in helping students to develop and utilize individual strengths. The hope is to keep the fire for lifelong learning burning bright and eternal. This is why I love to teach.

Reigniting the Light for Lifelong Learning
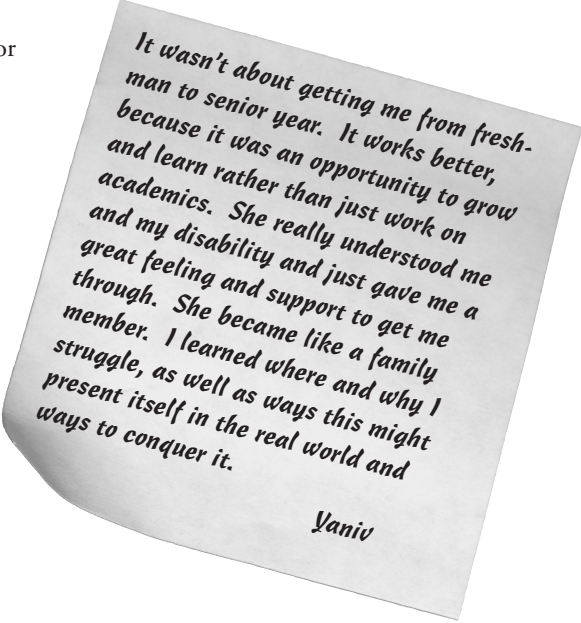
For Parents or Guardians
Here is an example of reigniting the light for lifelong learning in my own life:

For Students
"Some students …hope to find the spark for learning at the college level. They do not want to continue to be the same student they were…"

How this might apply to me:

It wasn't about getting me from fresh-man to senior year. It works better, because it was an opportunity to grow and learn rather than just work on academics. She really understood me and my disability and just gave me a great feeling and support to get me through. She became like a family member. I learned where and why I struggle, as well as ways this might present itself in the real world and ways to conquer it.

Yaniv

For Educators and Other Professionals
Who comes to mind as I think about students whose love for lifelong learning was reignitied by these:

Experience

Reinvention

Failure

Disaster

Security

Comfort

Maturity

We Make the Road by Walking:
Transformative Learning in the Adult Center at PAL

Diane Goss, Ed.D.

The Brazilian proverb, "We make the road by walking," is the title of a book on emancipatory learning by Paulo Freire, a proponent of liberatory adult education whose work has greatly influenced my teaching in the Adult Center of the Program for the Advancement of Learning (Horton & Freire, 1990). It is also a maxim I use often with my adult college students when they express their fears of tackling an academic task with which they are unfamiliar or when they reveal deeper concerns about where their life paths are leading.

When adults enter college after being away from the academic environment, they embark on a new journey. It is a journey that will challenge, excite, frighten, inspire, frustrate, stimulate, and ultimately change them. Going back to school as an adult is a triggering event, an event that presents disorienting dilemmas and upsets one's equilibrium (Mezirow, 1975). To resolve these dilemmas, adult college students make changes in the ways in which they see themselves and their situations. If they fully engage in the process, they undergo a powerful perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1994). They become freed from irrational beliefs that have held them back and freed from the low expectations of a society that may not value their unique gifts. They discover that they are creators of knowledge, not just passive receivers of it (Freire, 1970). They achieve one of the most important goals of transformative education, what Jack Mezirow (1991) calls "a crucial sense of agency over ourselves and our lives" (p.20).

The Challenge of Transformative Learning for Adults with Learning Differences

I have witnessed this transformative process in the intrepid and committed group of learners who participate in our Adult Center at PAL. Coping with the dilemmas and demands facing them is a challenge for any adult college student, but for those who have struggled with learning

differences, the challenge is even greater. Being back in the academic setting causes many adult students to revisit past frustrations and stirs up painful emotions associated with earlier humiliations and failures (Goss, 2004). Adults with learning disabilities often have strong emotional reactions to academic tasks and situations that evoke only a mild response from students who are not challenged in this way.

Adults with learning disabilities and attention deficits have had difficult, even traumatic educational experiences in the past (Adelizzi, 1997). They have tried, as human beings do, to make meaning of these experiences. Too often they have been branded with negative labels like stupid, lazy, stubborn, slow, unmotivated, crazy, undisciplined, or unruly because they did not learn in the usual ways and did not fit well into conventional educational settings. Painfully aware of their failures, many students have accepted these labels as true and used them to assign meaning to their experiences. The labels provide a convenient explanation, not just for educators, but for learners themselves, for experiences they do not understand. *"I failed my math test because I'm stupid." " I didn't get my report done because I'm lazy."* They use the negative attributes that have been ascribed to them to make sense of their life story.

Adults with learning differences often come to us carrying the heavy burden of a history of school failure.   The path they have walked is littered with crumpled papers covered in red ink, with report cards hidden from parents and peers, with ugly memories of red-faced humiliations in the classroom. Shame rather than pride colors their reminiscences of school days. Their history leaves these students insecure about their abilities and unaware of their talents. The mantra of learned helplessness, "I can't," becomes part of their habitual way of thinking.

Resiliently, in spite of the labels and school failures, the adults who participate in the Adult Center at PAL have kept alive a spark of hope that change can occur, that their lives can be better. Coming back to school can truly be an authentic transformative experience for them. It is a catalyst that spurs them to reflect on their thoughts, feelings, perspectives, behaviors, and relationships. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma or being exposed to new situations and changes in one's life does not, of course, always result in personal growth and transformation of one's perspectives. It is not what happens to us, but what we do with it that allows us to change and grow. The Adult Center at PAL was created to provide a milieu that supports participants as they engage in the challenging and compelling process of transformation.

The way we do this is simultaneously very simple and very complex. People often ask us to tell them the specific strategies, processes, and techniques that lead to success. They hope to get a collection of recipes that they can replicate to produce the same result. While each of our PAL faculty members does have a wide selection of learning strategies to share with our students, it is not the visual memory techniques, the organizational systems, the assistive technology, the reading tactics, or any other specific procedure that make the greatest difference. No, the truly transformative strategy that we employ in the Adult Center is simply to walk beside our participants, mentoring them and encouraging them to understand themselves and their experiences. As we walk beside them, we listen to their stories, and by doing that, help them find their own voices. We provide a mirror in which they can see the beautiful, talented, intelligent, capable parts of themselves that have often been overlooked by themselves as well as by others. We give them the great gift of respect, acceptance, and empathy thus creating a safe place in which they can explore their feelings. We gather together a group of peers that finally allows them to discover that they are not alone on the path they have to walk. We guide them through questioning, both gentle and challenging, to understand what is happening when they meet obstacles and roadblocks and to help them discover the paths to success.

Starting with the Learner

Everything we hope to accomplish in the Adult Center at PAL has its origin in the learner, so that is where we must begin. We have the results of comprehensive psychoeducational evaluations that give us a detailed look at the students' cognitive abilities and current academic achievement levels. This is helpful in identifying intellectual strengths and needs, but it is not nearly enough. We need to understand not just the cognitive profiles of the learners, but also their emotional contours. We have to get to know them in a broader and deeper way to truly be able to walk with them on their transformative journey.

When my students come into my office for their one-to-one sessions, they have a choice of sitting at the table where they can spread out their textbooks and get organized for their assignments or at the computer where they can work on getting their thoughts into written language. They can also choose to sit in a comfortable overstuffed chair tucked into the corner. When they settle into this spot, I pull up an old rocker and patiently wait for them to unburden themselves. This is where the most important work we do occurs.

One of the most valuable gifts we give our students is the time to explore and reveal themselves at a deep level. I admit that sometimes I struggle with this because I am

worried about the term paper they have to write or the sociology test that is coming up. But I have learned to restrain myself and let the students make the decisions about our agenda in any given session. They have taught me that they are truly the experts in knowing what they need. A man in his forties, who had been terrified of returning to school, stated, *"The kind of support you gave me was helpful, not only academically, but emotionally. The cause [of my learning problems] was more emotional and you seemed to understand that. To a certain extent, I would come here once a week and bitch. I needed to get it out, and really do nothing academically. I maybe would have you read a paper and that was it. I would just whine and moan and vent, and that was very helpful."*

When our students choose to engage in the difficult work of exploring and disclosing their inner selves, we need to listen. Many of our students have become skillful at hiding the pain they have felt. Others have invested herculean effort into concealing their weaknesses and insecurities from teachers, employers, and even friends and family. They have survived in a world that is not very accepting of differences by mastering the art of covering up, by faking it, by avoiding situations in which their weaknesses might be revealed. When they are finally ready to share past or present concerns, we do them wrong if we deny them that moment.

Where Have They Been?

When our students enter our program, they have already walked a long and difficult path. If we hope to understand them in the present, we have to acknowledge their past. An African proverb reminds us of an important truth. "Do not ask me where I am going, but where I have come from." By taking the time to listen respectfully, both in informal conversation and in formal interviews with our adult students, we gain important insights into where they have come from and what they bring with them to the present situation. We are allowed to see the present through their lens.

Through careful and respectful listening, we have discovered that, while there is certainly great individuality and uniqueness among our students, there are also some prior experiences and characteristics that many of them share in common. While we don't want to dwell on the negative, we must acknowledge it. We must let the students share their pain so they can understand it and go past it.

Damage to Self-Esteem

A common characteristic among our students, and one that must be addressed, is damage to self-esteem. Wounds to self-esteem have been suffered even by those most gifted intellectually and socially. A beautiful and talented young woman described the way she felt before her participation in the Adult Center at PAL. *"I felt worthless. I felt like I couldn't do anything, felt stupid…I was afraid of what people would think, afraid that I would always be viewed as stupid and that something was wrong with me. I think I feared that I would always view myself like that too."* A young man with an exceptionally high IQ explained how his dyslexia has influenced his sense of self: *"You think you're stupid when you can't write. The fact is, I can't do what other people can. And if you know that, you think less of yourself."* A man in his thirties who has since earned his college degree stated, *"I didn't go to school because I felt I wasn't smart enough, and I didn't think I could do the work. I held myself back because I didn't have enough self-confidence that I could actually get in there and do this stuff."* A woman who has also now graduated from college talked about the delays she experienced in reaching her dreams. *"It took me so long to get there. I always felt I couldn't do it and I stopped. It stopped me."*

While many of our adult students have excellent social skills, learning differences and lack of self- esteem have negatively affected the social interactions of others. A highly intelligent woman who projected an air of self-assured detachment described the way she was held back by her insecurities: *"I tended to be shy and reserved. I didn't like to do anything that would call attention to me. I was second-guessing what I said constantly. Even what I looked like, what I wore, was always a huge issue with me because I was so lacking inside as far as confidence."* One man stated, *"I used to be very shy…A lot of times, I didn't know what my friends meant. I didn't get it, but I was afraid to ask questions. I didn't want to feel stupid, so I kind of stood back…you feel you're looked down upon. And I don't want to feel that way. It's not a good feeling."*

Exclusionary practices common in schools when many of our adult students were growing up also contributed to social difficulties. In discussing his problems dealing with people, one man who had been educated outside the mainstream stated, *"I should have learned social skills younger, but I didn't learn them. I was excluded from that. I wasn't around people a lot when I was younger. Exclusion hurt… I felt so ostracized just not being part of the inner circle."* A middle-aged man described the isolation that had begun in school and carried over into his adult life. Prior to coming to the ACP, he had endured a decade of anxiety and lack of self-confidence that had kept him out of the workplace as well as from interactions with others. *"I was living in my own apartment by myself. I didn't feel comfortable around people. [I was] afraid of being judged, of having nothing good to report [about my life]. I always*

felt I had to prove something, say something was better today than yesterday, and it wasn't. I became basically a hermit… I was very isolated. I was very uncomfortable."

Co-existing Disorders

Many adults with learning disabilities have also been diagnosed with coexisting psychiatric conditions. In particular, a very high percentage of our students have suffered from anxiety and depression. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to separate the impact of the learning disabilities and attention deficits from the effects of these psychiatric disorders. Most of our students see their learning disabilities and these conditions as inextricably entwined.

A man with a diagnosed anxiety disorder eloquently noted the interacting nature of his learning disability with this disorder. *"It was a vicious circle. The anxiety made the LD issues worse. Anxiety creates a mental state of dysfunction where you almost can't think straight. It affects your thinking. When you're in such a state, it naturally is going to affect your learning. And, from a non-clinical or non-scientific point of view, I think it is logical that the scars that [people with LD] get when they are little would lead to the anxiety. I think the LD causes anxiety issues over a long period of time. I don't think the LD spawns from anxiety."*

One woman says, *"[I suffered from] depression- without a doubt. I also had anxiety attacks for a while before I was diagnosed with LD. I can remember physically being unable to go to class because I couldn't breathe. I felt like I couldn't stand. I mean, I just felt I was going to explode."* A man in his forties stated, *"I've been depressed. I didn't' know I had it (dyslexia) at the time, but I was depressed that I couldn't write. I also had fear that I might be discovered- fear that when I wrote a note or an email someone would find out."*

In talking about the depression for which she was currently taking medication, one woman noted the link she believes exists between it and her LD/ADHD. *"I think I'm just a little bit weaker because of the ADHD stuff. It's just a weak spot for me."* She also noted that she had suffered from anxiety. *"It was severe to the point that I didn't get in the car or leave the house."*

Another very insightful woman suggested that her learning disability may have intensified her anxiety. *"I think anxiety runs in the family so I inherited some of that…I think it was exacerbated by the LD, but there were emotional issues also that had no relation to the LD.*

So I may have had [the anxiety] anyway, but the LD made it that much more intense."

Another woman who had suffered from both anxiety and depression attributed the depression to realizing in seventh grade that she was different, questioning her intelligence, and not understanding what was wrong with her. She also stated, *"I didn't like school, so it made me anxious to be there. And when I was considering coming back to school, that was the worst anxiety…I would cry, shake, and have a hard time breathing at times. I had panic attacks. It was so painful to think about going back to school, but I wanted it so badly. It was a very diffi-cult conflict."* For this group of adults with co-existing disorders, the challenge of going back to school is especially difficult.

Sadness and Loss

Some adult students express a sadness that has roots in losses they have experienced as a result of their learning disability. One man speaking of his learning disability said simply, *"I feel sad about it all the time."* A woman said, *"If there's any emotion that I've felt the most in my life, it's probably sadness and frustration. Those are the two."* A woman in her fifties sobbed as she talked about the ways in which her life might have been different if she hadn't had a learning disability.

"I'd say that my learning disability has hindered my life greatly, tremendously. I stayed in a bad marriage because I didn't have the education to get out and support my kids. I would have been an engineer, been a designer of some sort. Instead, I'm less of a person than what I wanted to be. You have to understand there's a big void in my life. It's not the money. It's the status of the being a professional."

Frustration and Anger

While our students are a varied group, one experi-ence that I can safely say has been shared by all of them is the experience of frustration. A man with superior intelligence stated, *"I have a good brain, but I just can't read and write…All the way through school - frustration! That's all it's been. If I have a high IQ, that's fine, but I would give away 10 points to be able to write- to write a little, average or better….A lot of problems would be gone. I might not have that high [intellectual] ceiling, but I might be happier. At work I can see that people don't understand and I'm unhappy…."* A woman expressed her frustration saying, *"Definitely I felt frustration in school before coming here, knowing I was smart and I was capable, but I just couldn't do it. I just couldn't figure out how to do it and no-body was helping me."*

For many adult students, frustration and loss related to their learning challenges has evoked anger. Although today she realizes that her teachers and parents were unaware and didn't understand her learning disability, a woman in her forties still finds it hard to let go of the pain of her past. *"I'm frustrated and angry. Oh yes, I'm very frustrated. I'm angry. I can't forgive them for what they took from me. I just can't. I just can't. There's nothing worse than being a child and having your dreams stolen from you."* Another woman of the same generation said, *"I'm angry. Why me? I think I would have moved faster and accomplished more through life if I didn't have this. I wouldn't have been forty before I'm getting myself together. Why, Jesus why, why can't I just have this thing go away? It's such a struggle. It's very frustrating, truly frustrating."* A younger woman said, *"I had to struggle incredibly, incredibly. It's taken me twenty-four years to get here, and half of those years I was just sitting in my own bitterness and anger. I used to be very angry and blame people, and it showed."*

The frustration doesn't end when people leave school, and many of our students share their workplace frustrations. A woman in her forties with a professional position stated, *"They [people at work] don't get it. Like the CPR training. I got so flustered and so upset. They kept changing the format when they tested us. I just felt so humiliated. The kids that were teaching us were only like in their twenties. And people were finishing and doing the test, and they're leaving and I'm sitting there, and finally I walked out in tears. I haven't felt so humiliated in I don't know how long. And I couldn't look them [co-workers] in the face when I saw them at work. I thought they must think I'm horrible and stupid. Are they looking at me? I feel like I'm out there. You grow up feeling that everyone is looking and thinking you're stupid. It's in us. It's just there. It's part of the ADHD; it's part of the LD. It's part of all of it."*

Mixed Emotions

The majority of our adult students come to the Adult Center at PAL with a complex combination of mixed emotions. One man described this complicated tangle of feelings. *"Not being taken seriously, not knowing what to do, needing to do things and not being able to do what other people were able to do, things like that made me feel angry. Definitely angry. Anger yet depression, because when I was alone I'd feel like my life was going by, and I wasn't accomplishing everything that I wanted to do in my life because of the LD. Also anxiety - when I'd be facing problems, there would be severe anxiety."*

Given the complexities and interactions of their conditions, it is not surprising that some of our students are confused about what they are feeling. *"I have emotional problems that people with LD have. I don't know how to put it into words…not being able to process the emotion. How does this feel? How are you not supposed to feel? Is this all right? I'm constantly thinking I shouldn't feel this way, I*

should feel that way. And I don't know if that part is worse than the LD. Maybe the LD is OK, but it's the emotional stuff that went with it. I feel like I'm late, like I'm twenty years late in doing things. And maybe it's the emotional thing that's what's lagging 20 years."

Where Are They Going?

Fortunately, the journey doesn't end here. When adults who have experienced the struggles described above return to school, they have already accomplished an amazing feat. They have faced their fear, learned helplessness, sadness and anger enough to take the first step in a new leg of their journey. At this point, we join them in the journey they have already begun, and though many obstacles still lie in their paths, we help them as they "make the road by walking."

Metacognitive Conversations: The Power of Understanding and Acceptance

To help our students make their roads, we engage them in metacognitive conversations. Through these conversations, we help them to bring to light realizations that lie hidden within them. We provide a mirror, a sounding board, a probe, a light- whatever is needed for them to gain a better understanding of themselves, their learning, and their lives. These learning conversations, non-judgmental, accepting, honest, and respectful are the core of what we do at the Adult Center.

Learning conversations may center around many topics. One day, the conversation may be about diagnostic test results and what they reveal about the student's learning profile. Another day, it may center on finding a strategy that will be effective in completing a specific assignment. On yet another occasion, the conversation may focus on a difficult personal relationship.

In response to a question about what type of support has been most helpful to him as he works toward his degree, a middle aged man responded, *"Working one-on-one with people who understand what's going on- someone who really gets it. The key is the understanding."* A woman answered, *"You've given me a lot of motivation through understanding me and my learning disability."* Another woman said, *"You have been most helpful to me. You're a very understanding person and I can tell you probably anything. And you don't interject your opinion like everyone else does. Sometimes you just listen."*

The understanding provided by the caring professionals at PAL is important, but even more critical is the understanding that comes from deep within the learner. One student who had been particularly frustrated in the past and who felt helpless when he began our

program, described his current status: *"I'm at a crossroad between what I am and what I want to become - understanding what my limitations are and understanding what I'm capable of."* A woman diagnosed as an adult with LD and ADHD stated that finding out about her learning differences had had a positive outcome. *"I think it's made me a better person. At first, when I found out, there was a huge sense of relief. Then it was embarrassment. But then, I learned about certain positive traits that I had, things that I had 'cornered the market on' so to speak, to compensate for the LD. [I discovered] that I'm smart enough to have latched on to those other things. Once I found out, it taught me a lot about myself. It's been good. [The way I learn] is a huge part of who I am and not in a negative way at all. It really is an essential part of who I am…Without it, I wouldn't have failed in some things, but I wouldn't have accomplished the majority of things that I have."*

Gaining metacognitive insight into their learning needs as well as their strengths is a key factor in our students' success. After being diagnosed with learning disabilities as an adult, one student noted, *"Once I found out, it gave me… a better understanding of myself. I think, oddly enough, embarrassed as I was, it gave me a greater sense of confidence in my ability to be a better student."* A woman who had lived with undiagnosed LD until her late twenties slated, *"I think I'm more social now that I understand my LD than I was before because I'm more confident now."* Another noted, *"I know now there were reasons [for my difficulties in learning]. I was trying hard, but I just couldn't do it. I'm coming to terms with the idea that it's not my fault."* One woman said having a learning disability was hard, *"especially when I didn't know what was wrong with me. I don't feel this now. I feel more normal than I ever felt because I have so much more understanding…I was depressed because I didn't know [that I had an LD]. All the failures and the grief! But I'm feeling much better now. Knowing has made it better. It has. And working through the issues."* Another student experienced a similar benefit: *"It is easier if you understand that you have problems in certain areas. Some people have no idea why in their lives nothing works out for them. I know myself pretty well."*

Self-understanding leads to self-acceptance. One man talked about a turning point when, *"I started to accept the learning disability, started to be open about it, and realized I wasn't dumb like I thought I was."* Another man said, *"Today, I still to a certain degree feel a level of discomfort, but it's far more manageable. It's not paralyzing. It doesn't cause me to avoid people like I used to. I'm more than willing to accept the improvements I've made and the progress I've made. I'm happy with that."* A third says, *"I'm still investi-*

gating who I am, and most of it, I like." One woman explained, *"I've learned to deal with certain things. I'm kind of comfortable with myself. I've come to grips with that. I know I've got some problems. I've got some issues. There's some issues I have to deal with. I've just kind of accepted that learning is going to be hard. You know, you can't dwell on it too much or it will get in the way."* Another woman not only accepts, but embraces her challenges: *"I'm more confident now - millions of us have it. It's frustrating for the moment, I try to fix it, and it passes. I call up somebody and say, how do you spell this. My friends already know and are giving me something- they spell it out for me. I have good friends, family. I think I'm blessed, I know I'm blessed."* In a simple, but eloquent statement, another woman assessed herself after years of struggling for understanding and self-acceptance: *"I do believe that I am intelligent and that I am beautiful, and that I have a lot of great gifts."*

Focus on Strengths

Self-understanding involves recognizing one's strengths as well as one's weaknesses. Many of our students become aware of the direct relationship between some of their strengths and the learning challenges they have faced. One man who described himself as artistic, compassionate, and hardworking noted that some of these traits are related to his learning differences. *"I've had to work doubly hard, sometimes triply harder than everybody else has."* A young woman said her strengths of *"being caring, warm, a good listener, not judging, accepting people"* are related to the struggles she has faced in learning. Assessing her social skills, another woman says, *"I'm not conceited by any means, but I feel that I'm a good person to others and I'm there in the tens. I'm a good listener. I got this gift because I lacked so much in all those other areas. I had to make up for not having that kind of smartness in writing or reading."* One successful adult student stated, *"I always had to find different ways to compensate for whatever I was lacking. It actually provided me with an opportunity to enhance other things- like my oddly incredible memory."*

Another student noted that because of his learning disability, he hadn't gone to college like many of his friends had after high school, but he recognized that this had resulted in other achievements. *"The flip side of it is I went to work. I learned how to save money and I set goals. I figured, well, if this is my life, and I have four weeks vacation a year, I'm going to use it. So every year I'd go on a vacation somewhere - backpacked through Europe five times."*

After experiencing difficulty with social interaction through most of his life, a man who had finally established some good friendships noted that he values these relationships more than most people do. *"I'm not going to do anything to screw [my relationships] up. You know, trust is important to me."* He also described how he has learned to avoid people who would be negatives in his life. *"For the most part, I can read people. I need to know who those people- the ones who are going to cause me a problem - are. So I'm very selective when it comes to that. [In a social situation] the first thing I'm going to do is scan the room and find the loud ones, find the ones who are kind of pushy or obnoxious and try to stay away from them. I want to be sure before I put my neck out or hold your hand. That goes back to being a kid that wasn't sure of myself in school."* Then he paused to reflect and added, *"I wouldn't really change anything. I'm comfortable now. I've learned to cope with things now. It took me my whole time growing up to learn how to read people and understand what I was going through with my disability. But now, I can pick and choose the people I want around me, you know, who won't make fun of me and will be my friend. I have more control."*

One woman explained how her own struggles led her to becoming more authentic and more accepting of others. *"I love all people. I just love everybody. Nothing matters - like race, money. Nothing, nothing. Just be you. I always felt like I could never make it. But I don't feel that way now. If other people seem perfect, I know that's all a big façade. You get to know them and you know that's not what's really there. And that's what I have the gift to do - to let people know that I know. I don't tell them this, but eventually when they're around me they realize that I'm real and I'm not going to beat around the bush about anything."*

Some adults have used their own pain to prevent others from experiencing it. One man who works with children stated, *"When I coach, one thing I do not tolerate at all is kids hazing each other. I do not. I just get on top of that right away cause growing up, I used to get in fights every day. Kids would say something to me, this and that. It wasn't in my control that I walked funny or I coped in different ways."* He also stated, *"I try not to have first impressions. Sometimes you have a bad impression [of a person] and then you talk to him and find, like, wow, this guy's really interesting. After you hear someone's story, you're like, wow, I'd be in jail right now [if I'd experienced that]. This guy's holding it together. That's pretty good."*

Many of our adult students talked about wanting to help others as a result of their own experiences. One man stated, *"I like to help, probably because I always needed help from somebody else. Feel like paying back."* Another noted his ability to understand and help others face challenges: *"I'm able to realize another person's learning disabilities from*

my perspective… I'm able to bring another person's problems down and to help solve that issue."

Most of our students recognize the strength and resiliency they have developed as a result of the challenges they have faced. *"I'm pretty confident in myself. I think I've overcome a lot of things where most people would kind of fold up…it kind of toughens you up a little and it makes you feel you can accomplish anything you set your mind to."*

The Power of Positive Relationships

Studies of transformative learning have found relationships to be critical to the process (Taylor, 2000). We need other people, people we trust, people with whom we can identify, people who can help us as we engage in the difficult journey of transforming ourselves. Daloz (1986) says that the effective mentor in transformative learning establishes a unique, caring relationship with the learners, offering both support and challenge while accompanying them in their developmental journeys. One woman describing how the Adult Center at PAL helped her said, *"The most helpful part has been my PAL professor. I'm serious. It was a friendship, professional friendship at the time. And the issues I was dealing with were all mixed up in the philosophy of PAL where it's all a part of your life…Maybe it's the healing process. Who knows? It is what it is."*

Another adult student emphasized his relationships with other participants in the ACP: *"I remember being at group meetings where there's a real bond between people that know what it's like."* A relatively new student wrote me a note after her first semester that also pinpointed the importance of peer support: *"I have to admit I had very low expectation for this PAL program because of my past experience in school. I didn't think anyone could help me. I am so happy that I got up the courage to go back to college. My confidence is gradually coming back. When I went to the first group session, I couldn't believe all those students had the exact same experiences I had and were having the same emotions I was having. It is amazing how much I needed to hear that. Thank you for all your support, encouragement, and help."*

The Importance of Critical Reflection and Problem Solving

Critical reflection is at the core of much of the work our students do in PAL. As they make their way through the challenges facing them when they return to school, they are presented with multiple opportunities for problem-solving, and as Jack Mezirow (1994) notes, "most reflection takes place within the context of problem solving" (p. 224). Students bring their problems, large and small, to their PAL sessions and together we try to understand them. As PAL professors, we try (and sometimes fail) to resist the urge to supply the easy answer or pre-packaged solution. Instead, we encourage them to come to their own understanding and to

generate their own solutions.   Often we need to guide them in figuring out what the problem really is and help them to engage in critical reflection so they can examine the previously unquestioned assumptions that have influenced their views of themselves as learners and even of the learning process itself.   We help them to explore the emotions they experience, begin to understand where these feelings originated, and determine whether or not the feelings and views are valid and appropriate. The student who has frequently failed to complete assignments on time does need to learn how to break down long-term assignments into short term goals, to estimate time required for these goals, and to set aside specific times and places for completing his work. However, none of that will really work until he starts to understand the reasons for his chronic procrastination.   Through critical reflection he can discover that his avoidance of assignments may be rooted in his fear of failure, his lack of confidence, the anxiety evoked by the task, the frustration he feels when struggling with such work, or many other factors of which he may be unaware. By guiding him to reflect on his experience, we help him to understand it.

The process often results in a perspective transformation, a change in the way the students interpret or make meaning of their experience (Mezirow, 1994).   "We can learn critically about the emotional dimension to our lives when we investigate the extent to which our instinctual feelings and automatic emotional responses to certain situations are socially learned" (Brookfield, 2000, p.127). In individual learning conversations between the students and their PAL mentors, as well as in group sessions with other adult students, learners can share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences; listen to those of others; question and reframe the ideas that no longer seem valid; and gradually come to a new consciousness.

The Transformation
Clark (1993) provides a simple, but powerful definition of transformative learning: "learning that produces change" (p.47). She further specifies that the change that occurs as a result of a transformative learning experience has a significant impact on the learners and on their lives thereafter. She also notes that the change is recognized by both the learner and others.

My greatest joy in teaching in the Adult Center at PAL is to witness the small and great transformations that occur in our students. One of my students who had had a particularly difficult time in her life before coming to PAL compared herself to a butterfly in a cocoon. *"You have to make sure the butterfly gets itself out of the cocoon because if you open the cocoon for it, the butterfly will die. I think that was part of my problem. My whole life, no one ever tried to help me. The help that was offered me was doing it for me. My mother did everything for me. She would do my homework for me and the only thing I would do was copy down*

what she had already written." This student recognized one of the most basic truths of transformation. It is not someone else who transforms us - that is something each of us must do for ourselves.

The path to transformation is difficult, challenging, sometimes painful, often confusing. All of us need fellow walkers and guides as we walk this path. Our work in the Adult Center at PAL is to walk this path with our students. Our reward is to see the wonderful, capable, beautiful people who emerge as they make their way.

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We Make the Road by Walking:
Transformative Learning in the Adult Center at PAL

For Educator and Other Professionals
How do I provide students a mirror that "shows their intelligent, capable parts?"

What more could I do to reflect their strengths?

For Parents or Guardians
How have I walked with my child in the school journey?

Here are 3 memories we share from that journey that are filled with joy for me:

For Students
"It is not what happens to us, but what we do with it that allows us to change and grow."

How can I apply this to myself?

PAL is able to see the untapped potential in its students.   Scott
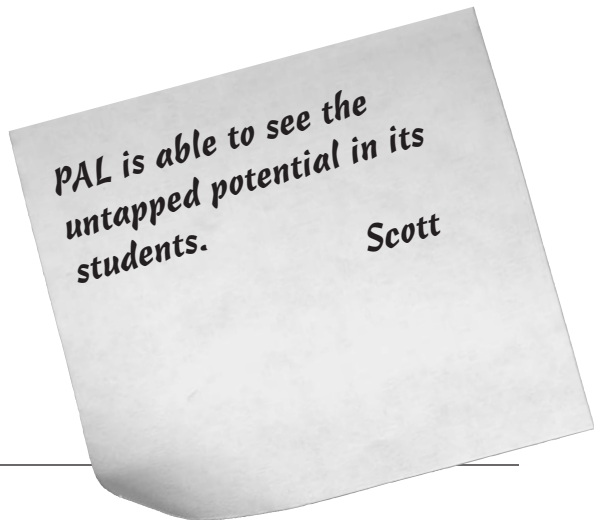
Safe Passage

Jeanne M. Vandenberg, M.Ed.

Before me sat one of my brightest students, all six foot four of him, curled into his own lap. Greg had been in rehab treatment over the summer and it was now the beginning of October, the start of another semester. He was falling apart in front of me. Failure was what Greg knew best. He had learning disabilities, which had kept him from reaching his potential since grade school. His brilliance had gotten him this far, a sophomore in college, but he was barely hanging on. Greg was an alcoholic and a drug addict and he was only 19.

Greg is only one of an increasing number of students who begin their college careers with not only a history of learning disabilities, but problems with substance abuse. Fortunately for Greg, he had a family who strongly supported treatment. They were aware of the necessary care and assistance Greg would need to survive on a college campus. The faculty at PAL would be instrumental in helping Greg maintain academic and emotional balance as he developed as a college student. In order for Greg to be successful he needed a plan.

What Greg did not know is that as his PAL professor I already had a plan. It was simple. He just needed to change everything. This was not going to go over well. I wanted him to change the people he associated with, the places he hung out, and the behaviors that had gotten him in trouble. Greg understood that I, too, had been involved in a recovery program for more than twelve years. I wanted to give him the safe haven he would need for his own recovery and help him to find success academically. But the motivation and changes had to come from him; I could only hope to be the instrument of change, not the person doing the changing.

I put Greg in the driver's seat right away. It was his recovery, his life. I could only ride shotgun. However, as teacher and student, we had much to learn together. The greatest difficulty was my wanting to take control and drive for Greg, but I knew that if he was to recover, I must stay at his side, not take the lead. It was as if we were in a
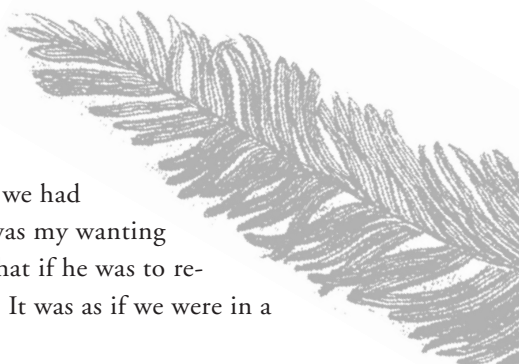
driver's education class together, with me being the instructor and he the new driver. I wanted to take the wheel because I was afraid he did not have the ability to drive us safely. I knew I had the capacity to stop the vehicle with my own brakes, but I had to trust the driving direction to Greg. It would become a learning experience for both of us.

The fact that Greg had been in a rehab program over the summer, gave us some common ground to start on. He was familiar with the requirements of a twelve-step program, and he had begun to attend meetings of Narcotics Anonymous while at home. He had even found a sponsor, someone in the program who would be his mentor and advisor. Now it was important to continue this connection with NA while at Curry. As his teacher, I showed him how to find local meetings and strongly suggested he attend one. With some hesitation and anxiety, Greg was able to find a local meeting and begin attending. Whether he realized it or not Greg had taken another step in his learning about himself. He was willing to listen, to learn about recovery, and to associate with others who were not using. It was a beginning.

Greg had come to my office feeling hopeless. He did not know what to do with the cravings he was having for alcohol and drugs, was unable to concentrate long enough to study, and was ready to give up. Although he had been attending NA meetings, he needed more support. I walked with Greg to health services and quietly waited while he made an appointment with the campus psychologist. If he was going to be able to handle all of what he was feeling, and be able to stay on campus as a full time student, he needed to get as much support as possible, not only the support of those in recovery, but professional help as well. Greg and the psychologist agreed to meet on a regular basis. This was another huge step in his recovery, but I felt that there was something more that was needed in our relationship to help him not only with his recovery with alcohol and drugs, but to be that brilliant student I knew he was inside.

Having worked with students with learning disabilities and substance abuse issues for many years, I knew the power of a metacognitive relationship with a student. I was still amazed when I witnessed a student who felt hopeless and had experienced failure after failure, rise to a new level of success when this relation-

ship became the center of his learning. Like others before him, Greg needed to understand how his knowledge of his own thinking, of how he learned and interacted with the world could change his academic career.

As a strong supporter of cognitive-behavioral therapy, there were three specific things I thought Greg needed to do. He needed to change his thinking, change his behavior and acknowledge his feelings. He also needed to see the relationship among his thinking, behaving and feeling. I knew that if Greg could alter his thinking, his behavior would change and if his behavior changed, he could see things from a new perspective. However, this would take time and more importantly, Greg would need to feel safe enough with me to be willing to change.

One of the most critical aspects of my relationship with Greg would be trust. He needed to trust that I was listening to him, that I could accept what he had to say, and that he felt safe in talking about a broad range of issues that impacted his learning. Too often, students with learning disabilities and substance abuse issues have kept their feelings and thoughts to themselves, afraid to let anyone know what is really going on inside. Greg needed to know he was not alone in how he felt. To help my students feel connected with me I often tell them some of my own personal experiences. This is not a method that many teachers feel comfortable with, but in PAL, I have discovered that most professors are willing to share a part of their lives in order to connect with their students. I have found self-revelation to be a powerful tool in helping reluctant students to open up, especially shared pain.

I told Greg of an experience in my own childhood that might resonate with him. I described how as a child and young adult, I had lived with a parent who struggled with mental illness. As an elementary school student, I often dreaded going home, unsure of what type of mood my mother would be in, and how her own demons would affect our relationship each day. Since the elementary school I attended was literally in my backyard (my home was on the corner of the street and abutted school property), I often hung around the playground after most of the other students had left. One teacher in particular, the only fifth grade teacher employed at the school, would often stay late preparing his classroom for the following day. He was friendly and observant. I was actually a bit afraid of him because he was very tall, or at least he seemed so from my third grade point of view. Anyway, he would talk to me through the windows of his classroom, which was next to the playground. Often, one or both of my younger brothers were with me as we chatted away with this

wise man. He was genuinely interested in what we had to say, which I don't recall as being very important. Most days, he let us climb back into the school, through the windows and help him with his tasks. We would feed the classroom fish, clean the cages of the pet mice, or even help with putting up new bulletin board materials. All along I just knew I felt safe there. This wonderful fifth grade teacher did no more than allow me and my siblings to have a safe place to go and feel comfortable for a few hours after school, but it made a world of difference to me. He would share some of his own thoughts with us, but mostly he just let us talk. This experience never left me, and I knew it was because of the feelings of trust and safety I had with this teacher. I wanted the same experience for my own students, and for Greg most of all.

Greg and I continued to meet each week and just talk. We did very little academic work, at first, as he needed me there to hear his own stories. He questioned his behaviors and feelings, and began to look at himself in a different way. He no longer felt so separate from others, but as someone who looked at the world in his own way. But mostly he talked and talked and talked. Greg was able to speak to me about some of the events in his life which had made him feel worthless or stupid or less than, about what it was like to have a learning disability and not understand how it affected his thinking. I knew that the deepest of these issues were ones he would need to share with his therapist, but my office became a safe place to come and talk. I also knew that this connection between us was based on trust and safety. I encouraged him to take these experiences and rather than keeping them in his head, to write them out in a journal. In this way, his experiences could be put aside for a while, and new learning experiences could take their place. He tried this and revealed to me that he often sat at night and wrote out his thoughts on the computer and was genuinely surprised at the relief this brought. In this way, he was also getting into the writing mode, which carried over to schoolwork.

Greg and I once had a discussion about coincidence. I told him I did not believe in coincidence but thought that people and events happened for a purpose. I stated that each person we meet during the day was a part of our lives for a reason, and that the events of even an ordinary day could have an effect on someone else that changed their lives. We may never know how we have affected others, but if we believed that all our behavior has a purpose, then each day was a new beginning. For example, I did
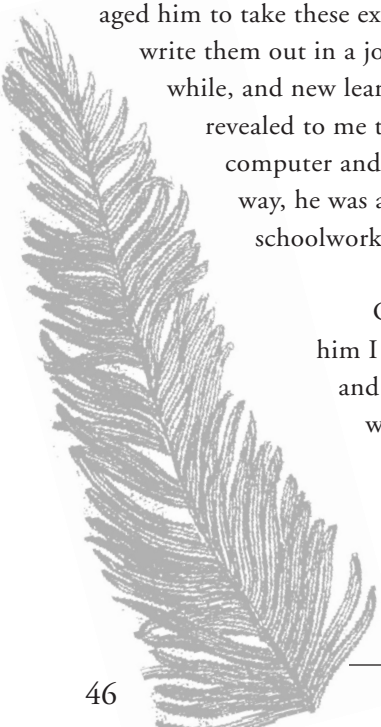
not think it was a coincidence that Greg would end up finding a job on campus driving the shuttle. His job consisted of picking up students from designated stops off campus and bringing them back to Curry. Often Greg worked on Friday and Saturday nights, bringing home students who had spent the night partying. He saw firsthand what alcohol was doing to some of his peers and he sometimes talked with these students about his own sobriety. I clearly believed that he had been put in this situation because he had become sober, and was needed by his classmates to serve as a role model.

Time passed and Greg continued to stay clean and sober. Along with his steady sobriety, his academic work improved. He was able to manage the challenges of his classwork and feel less stressed. His participation in class brought him new confidence and improved self-esteem. His professors described Greg as a creative, passionate young man who was able to provide high quality contributions to their classroom. He was truly a different person than the one who slumped into my office many months before. I believe that it was the safety in our learning relationship that gave Greg the strength and insight to make the necessary changes in his life.

In the past, I would see Greg moving slowly across campus, head down, and eyes looking only at the ground in front of his feet. He often sat in my office, unable to make eye contact; his body slumped in the chair, looking completely overwhelmed by feelings of anger, sadness and confusion. Today, I see him on campus, walking with a sense of purpose and direction. He no longer looks down as he travels but keeps his head up, eyes wide open. His story does not have an end because Greg will need to take with him all he has learned. He understands that his struggle with learning disabilities and addiction is not over as his college career comes to an end. He has simply made a safe passage. Greg is scheduled to graduate in May with a degree in Communication and a concentration in Radio Broadcasting. He has already been offered an interview with a radio station in the Worcester area. He continues to remain clean and sober, and has promised to keep in contact with me. My only hope for Greg is that he can take what he has learned from our relationship and begin again with others.

Safe Passage

For Students

Someone who helped me with a safe passage was:

What made it safe?

For Parents or Guardians

Who in my child's life has provided the kind of support that Greg received?

What are similarities?
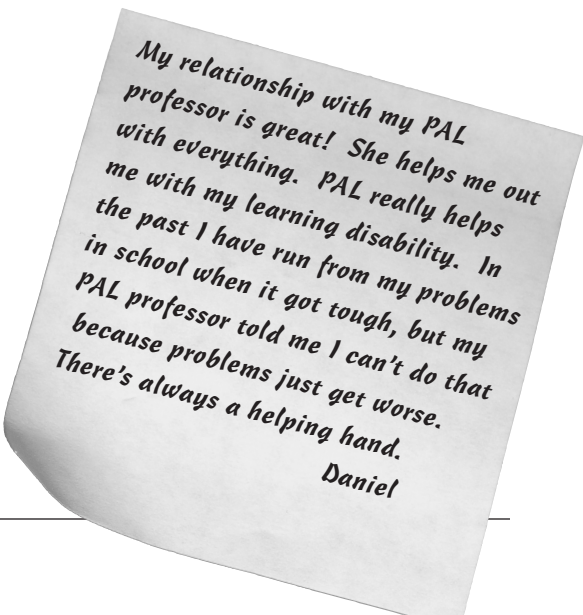
Who in my own life has provided the kind of support that Greg received?

What are similarities?

For Educators or Other Professionals

Here is a time I wanted to take control but allowed my student to take the lead:

Something I learned from that:

My relationship with my PAL professor is great! She helps me out with everything. PAL really helps me with my learning disability. In the past I have run from my problems in school when it got tough, but my PAL professor told me I can't do that because problems just get worse. There's always a helping hand.

Daniel

Reading Ourselves

Michelle Gabow, M.F.A.

"I don't write out of what I know. It's what I don't know that stimulates me. I merely know enough to get started" (Morrison, 1994, p. ix).
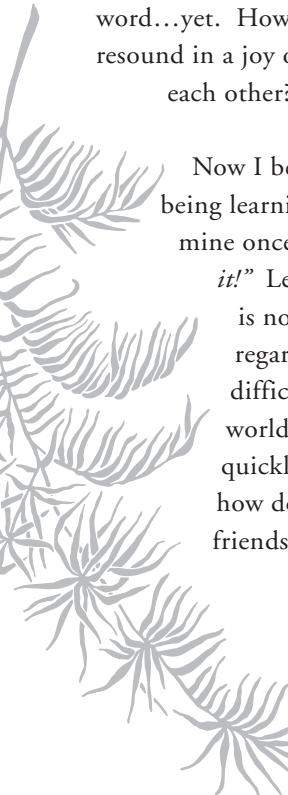
It's so much easier for most professors to write about what they teach. They teach what they know: History, Biology, Politics, Math. But what happens when you teach what you don't know?   James Baldwin writes, "The purpose of writing is to lay bare the questions that are hidden by all the answers" (Dixon & Smith, 1995, p. 7). So too is the reflective practice of teaching. We're in search of the surprises, our inner truths. We, students and professors alike, are learning how to read ourselves and each other. We are learning to be present to the truth in the moment or as PAL professors put it, to catch sight of and reveal the "teachable moment." It happens in our messes and by following our passion. It happens when we're still enough to look deeply and when we stop judging or hating ourselves long enough. It also happens when we're learning to manage our time, trying to understand what we read or memorizing three by five cards. It occurs when we come to the realization that strength and weakness are really twins in disguise as opposites. So, it's not a prescription I'm writing about, a cutting edge strategy or a drug. No, I'm painting a picture. And this picture is of a room, a space, a state of grace (not always pretty) where we have room to explore different realities, engaged "play" can happen in its truest form, foolish questions can dare to be asked and students, as well as professors, can rehearse transformation.

I teach two courses at Curry College: Script Writing and Metacognition (learning how we learn). Both are by definition *unteachable*. I teach the *unteachable*. From that premise, how do my students learn? In answer to that, I need to redefine teacher, because I'm not a teacher, in the sense of teaching what I know. As I said, I'm a painter, a writer. I set the scene. I create worlds, atmospheres. I design the set. I make room.
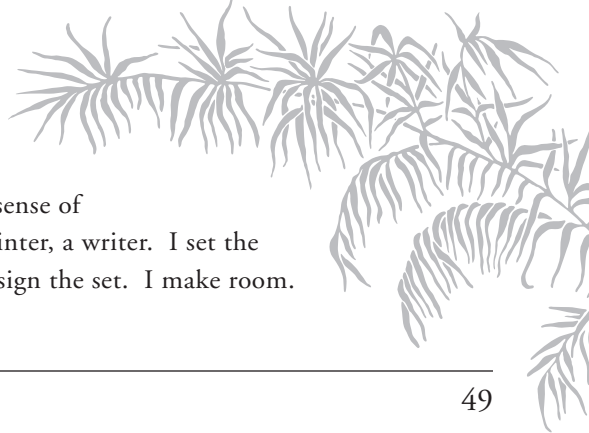
I make room for practice. In the practice, it's the form that teaches us, whether that form is writing script or learning how we learn. Our dialogue inside and outside of script becomes our teacher. Our characters become our teachers. Our mishaps and our successes become our teachers. And most of all, our students become our teachers. Although it may sound new age in the description, it's as old as Socrates, whose method of teaching also became the way.

But what does the *unteachable* look like? After all, *unteachable* isn't even a word…yet. How do we read ourselves like a book? How does being open to surprise resound in a joy of living, being and learning? How do we learn that in ourselves, in each other? How do we live from our most poetic selves?

Now I bet some of the readers are waiting. When is she going to talk about being learning disabled? My son, my daughter, my friend… A colleague of mine once said, *"If you get it in 'them' but you don't get it in you, you don't get it!"* Learning is a circle and we as teachers are a part of that circle. There is no difference between a student who is learning disabled and myself in regards to learning moments. They are often surprises. They are always difficult to confront. They're usually life changing when we do. In a world where war is talked about in terms of peace, lies are forgotten as quickly as they are told and denial has become a "normal" way of living, how do we look at truth, in a classroom, between mentor and students, friends, the society we live in? How do we ask the provocative questions?

I love the questions, my students', as well as my own. They hold a whole new reality; they give rise to unexplored territory, a new geography. Questions jolt us out of the reality we've been shuffled into. They propel us out of the boxes and old labels. Questions give us room to stretch, a way to become.
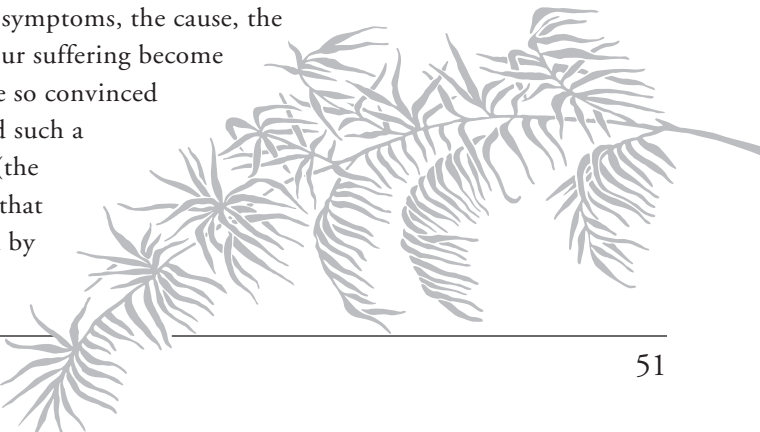
Asking the important questions and reading our students/ourselves is a difficult process at best. Students with LD come with a lot of old baggage. Some try to remain invisible because of the shame they've brought with them from all their school years; others self medicate or act out, another way of remaining hidden. Although we do have diagnostic testing at our fingertips, they do not provide the whole, real person sitting in front of us. Each person is different, every process is new. Each story is unique, although there is clearly a connection among all the stories.

This is also a difficult process because in order to be a reflective teacher, one needs to make time and space for her own reflective moments, as a teacher in relationship to students and also for personal reflection. In PAL, I consider myself extremely lucky because I have several colleagues that don't only share the philosophy of reflective teaching/learning, but live it. We reveal our teaching stories, successes, mishaps. And because we are not perfect teachers, we reveal the side of ourselves that are not our proudest moments. We call ourselves "the fringe." We are in the world of education where reflective thinking is no longer a priority. Education has become about testing and studying for the test. It's about training our teachers who are now training their students to learn for the test. I'm not ashamed to say that this terrifies me! When did integration, reflective learning/teaching, reading ourselves, critical thinking, and creative thinking become shoved into the background. If the space is not made for our students, for ourselves, for looking at the way this country is governed; our lives, this world will run away on us. Personally, I'm tired of being on the fringe, of having reflective teaching be on the cutting edge. But I know deep in my soul, I'm here for my students who have experienced fringe all their lives. That's why I stay. That's why I teach. That's why I'm writing this chapter.

The Numinous Fringe
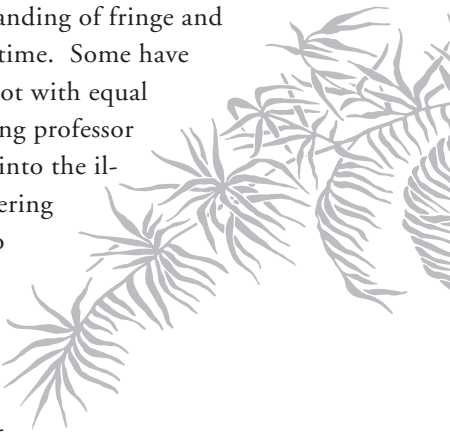
> *"Ring the bells that still can ring*
> *Forget your perfect offering*
> *There is a crack in everything*
> *That's how the light gets in"* (Cohen, 1992, track 5).

There are many life circumstances that *fringe* people from society. We're frightened of the fringe on a whole because we convince ourselves that there is a place called normal. We're not supposed to be depressed, have pain, learn differently, love our own gender or suffer. There are pills that focus us and keep us on an even keel. The many advertisements for anti-depressants even boast the ability to eliminate depression. Yet what drugs do much of the time is make promises that are impossible to keep (like making us happy) or cover up our pain and suffering. Unfortunately, when it is covered up, the symptoms, the cause, the power and the images of our suffering become even more hidden. We are so convinced that there is an answer and such a state as perfect happiness (the popularity of Dr. Phil) or that learning can be conquered by

prescriptive formulas that we are unable to see the suffering and the beauty of our lives.   We are so afraid of the fringe that we settle for mediocrity.

My students usually have a profound understanding of fringe and hatred of it. They have been trying to pass for a long time. Some have succeeded with great harm to themselves; some have not with equal harm. My job as a Learning Specialist and Scriptwriting professor is to not help students pass. It is to not help them fit into the illusive normal. My intention is to assist them in recovering that spark, that beauty, that pain and create from it, to read themselves like a good book, not for criticism or judgment, but for the ability to see truth, to see their uniqueness, the divine in themselves. What we judge as ugly or inadequate is many times the source of a creative, passionate life. Thomas Moore says it beautifully in his book *Dark Nights of the Soul :* "That which seems to have twisted your life or personality for the worst is the very thing that will heal you and give you meaning" (Moore, 2004, p. 256).

There is an amazing quality that transpires in us when we are experiencing life's traumas: an emotional crisis, chemotherapy, grief, or deep-seated feelings of inadequacy. We become, at different moments in time, translucent. My students come to me with shame, old baggage, anger, resignation, drug and alcohol dependencies, self-hatred, hope and fire. They are a living, breathing paradox of the hidden and translucent.

Students who learn differently have been sensitized to their own learning, usually in a negative way based on their weaknesses. They are fragile. They walk the world without a layer of skin. Those walls they think they have built are flimsy at best. They see feedback most of the time as assaultive or patronizing because on a whole that is what they know.   They and their families have been fighting the system to be seen and heard for so long that life has become a battle. To their credit, they and their families have become warriors, an energy that is of the spirit and when harnessed can be transformative. Unfortunately, many have internalized the oppression they feel and the battle has extended

to the self. They are at war with the self and this too makes them vulnerable. These students live in this heightened state of reality.

An Artist's Faith

It is by no coincidence that for the last thirty years, I have been experimenting with the form of heightened realism to create theatre. There is a truth, immediacy in the exploration of this state of mind. There is also a process that has affected not only my art but my teaching and learning life. My goal as a playwright is to stretch reality, turn it inside/out on itself like a fun-house mirror to reveal the essence of our beings and the edge of human possibility. Many times the characters appear to be comical. Laughter is often a way to strip our defenses and feel. I learn profound life lessons from these characters. They reveal the many sides to my own private wars with self and society.

When I begin a play, "I merely know enough to get started." A glimpse of a character in the street, a snatch of a conversation, a line from a book, a personal or political issue I'm obsessing about is the source, yet I rarely know where a play is going. I let the writing, the characters, push all the shoulds, woulds and coulds away. Michelle, the writer, doesn't try to make sense of the piece too early. I admit that I hate not having answers. I actually don't like a mess. I like things cleaned up. When there's a silence, I have a tendency to butt in. I am sometimes known for my strong opinions, which is an understatement. Letting my characters lead the way is a little like going against the grain for me. The mystery simultaneously terrifies me, creates doubts, gives rise to old fears, old haunts, yet provokes a life energy that is difficult to describe. That sense of being alive, that life force in each of us, is the core and the inspiration for writing and teaching.

There are times that I know what it feels like to be fully alive and present. Artists, no matter how satirical we appear to be, develop this weird trust, this faith, that somehow in the unknowing, a deeper knowing will take place. For a woman who is blatantly irreligious, writing has provided a definition of faith and spirit that makes sense. Exit Man, a character from my last play, Trainwrecked (a memoir) (Gabow, 2005), explores that definition in the last few lines of his poem.

Exit Man

"*Faith is not someone you follow but a leap into fear,*
Jumping when safety nets fail to appear,

Letting go when you want to hang on,
Loving the weak in your strong
Saying hello to the dissonant song in
The accident we didn't expect
The other side, the mother side of train wreck
The feminine degree, the ability to see
A particle of dust, a dot, a spec
Faith is" (Gabow, 2005).

This trust in the unknown is imperative in working with students. The ability to simply "be" with students, to actively listen, to see their trauma without cover and their power without justification or pause, is essential. As a Learning Specialist, taking that leap with students is a difficult process at best. We are expected to aid them in their daily course work, to help them fit with established patterns of teaching and to cure their learning disability. Many faculty members and parents see us as either having the answer or being a band-aid. Students are also experiencing many pressures from the academic environment and are looking for immediate answers. Though we as a PAL faculty talk about Metacognition (learning how we learn) as a course, it still continues to have the misperception of being an all-purpose tutoring service. Of course, tutoring is part of the process, as is advising students to take professors who challenge and support their learning profiles. Working on time management, memory, organization and self-advocating is also a component. But looking deeply into their philosophies of life, their struggles in learning, their gender preference, substance abuse, their fears, their dreams and the spirit of creativity is the vitality, the pulse of the learning process. We have to stick to our guns because we know that new priorities and new realizations present themselves and students become great learners. We, as teachers, learn to develop an artist's faith that students will reveal their truths in conversation, in their daily struggles and in their brilliance. It is a "leap when safety nets fail to appear"– it is a letting go. When writing a play, if I know exactly where it is going or have all the answers like a map or outline to follow, I not only end up with a mediocre piece of art but a lifeless process.

There is magic in the process.

Magic

Yes, I'm using words like numinous, faith and magic in regard to education. But then again, I've had the privilege to be a witness to this magic many times over. Like faith, magic needs redefinition. Magic has that element of surprise and wonder, yet it is often found in the ordinary. It's really a matter of looking with open eyes. Alice Walker writes in *The Color Purple,* "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (Walker, 1982, p. 203).

Steven, *my color purple in a field*, appeared early in my career as a PAL professor. He taught me my greatest lesson, a lesson that changed my life and transformed my world of teacher/student. We were a walking/talking paradox, a pair of screamingly mismatched shoes. This was someone who would have never been paired up with me as a PAL professor. He certainly didn't appear to be an artist or freethinker. Actually, after Summer PAL (a three week intensive), I tried to trade him with another PAL professor. But Steven was adamant about keeping me. I don't know if I ever thanked him. Thank you, Steven.

Steven took everything totally literally (couldn't decipher a metaphor if his life depended on it), was unable to touch or look you in the eye and absolutely despised lateness. His writing looked like chicken scratch; at that time there was less use of computers. He was socially awkward, unable to pick up simple social cues (which often got him in trouble). My liability and my gift with Steven was that I knew little about his struggles. I did understand, however, that the way he presented himself was not who he was on the inside. I caught my first glimpse of Steven in Summer PAL, when he took his chicken scratch to the computer. His first essay about being invisible at the playground as a child not only revealed his suffering but his humor, his passion, his quirkiness, and his depth. I looked all over his files but not one word about his writing was found. Perhaps, Steven couldn't find the metaphors in someone else's words but damn if he didn't have them in his own.
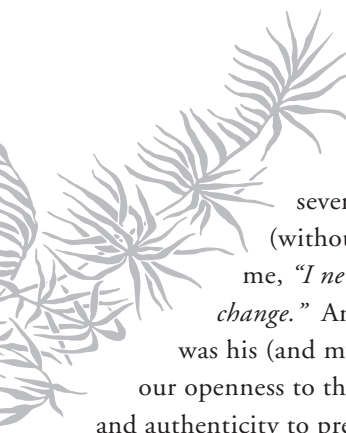
Steven remained my student for four years, the length of his matriculation at Curry College. We were the odd couple and had our rough times. If someone was passing the office, s/he might find two people arguing fiercely, Steven looking at the door or the floor while in conversation or storming out of the office, frustrated and

upset with himself in regard to his reading or his slow processing. The passer-by might not have noticed a young man falling in love with writing as a way in and a way out. His passion brought him to journalism and, eventually, the school newspaper. His difficulty in social situations resulted in joining a social skills group at PAL, a suggestion of mine that he bravely followed through. In his sophomore year, Steven (a young man with language and communication problems) became a Communications major. The satire and paradox in this choice never escaped either one of us.

Yet, life for Steven was still frustrating. Social interactions continued to baffle him, although he was beginning to engage in one or two real friendships. It was difficult for him to translate his own metaphors (which he understood quite well) to his reading. He still struggled with terrible impatience.

The point here was that there was no magical (old definition) potion. He didn't become a completely new person. In fact, he became more of himself, the good, the bad, the ugly, the creative, the obstinate, the compassionate, the courageous and the brilliant. He was becoming able to read and research himself with more truthfulness, less judgment and some pride. Steven was growing into himself.

In his senior year, he was promoted to editor of the school paper. In his last edition, he, with incredible fortitude and honesty, wrote about himself and his struggles in an amazing article from the editor.

Yet, what was most powerful in my memory of Steven was our last session together, which was difficult and tearful. That in itself was such an accomplishment. He was feeling what he was feeling at the time he was feeling it. In that session, he talked about a relative's depression, his own struggle with learning and depression, his time at Curry and looked me in the eye on several occasions. At the end of our hour together, we both rose (without forethought) and hugged (our first). Then Steven said to me, *"I never thought it was possible for me to do anything I've done or change."* And with a smirk, he stated, " I have… changed, haven't I?" This was his (and my) greatest lesson. Steven broke out of his box. Our ignorance, our openness to the unknown, actually created the space for challenge, acceptance and authenticity to prevail. He realized he was not somebody else's book but his own. He needed some of the successes to look at the whole picture of him. There it was… a revelation, a shift in "being." For me, our journey gave birth to possibilities in this work that I could have never imagined.
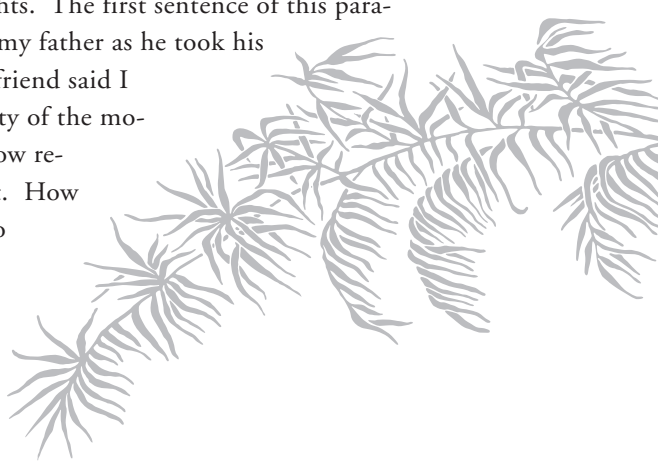
It would be easy for me to tell you that this kind of drama is rare. But it isn't. I chose Steven because he began my own journey into reading ourselves. I (and most PAL professors) could have chosen hundreds of others with equally dynamic and soulful stories. However, many of the transformations are not this dramatic. Some are disguised as failures. Other students swear nothing has happened in the session. I've discovered that they're the ones that usually keep in touch long after graduation. There is also what appear as failures to me, students who miss most of their sessions, unrecognized potential, those who I am unable to reach and are unable to reach themselves, at least while at PAL.

Although the dramatic stories are exciting and real, it's the small, the subtle changes that provide the synergy, synchronicity and power behind PAL. These lessons are so tiny, so *undramatic*, they are normally easy to miss. Yet, these are where the transformations come to light. It is the essence and the beauty of the work. It is where mindfulness, as a teacher, student and learner on both ends, takes stage.

The Learning Aesthetic

[In the] "practice of 'aesthetic psychotherapy'…you look closely at what is happening in your life. You don't judge everything too soon. You take and savor each element. You take note of the most subtle factors" (Moore, 2004, p. 223).

It is now 9:30 A.M. on an August morning and it is already 95 degrees. When many in Massachusetts and especially my neighbors are cranking up their air conditioners, I'm sitting on my favorite black chair in my studio; feet flopped on the daybed directly in front of a fan on high. Although my hair is shortly cropped, my mind is blowing in the wind. I'm contemplating life, my navel, this chapter, and the meaning of aesthetic. It's too hot to do anything but slow down. After awhile, I begin to write down random thoughts. The first sentence of this paragraph. The memory of being with my father as he took his last breath six years ago and how a friend said I would someday remember the beauty of the moment (I thought she was nuts). I now remember the beauty of that moment. How hard it is for my ADHD students to slow down. If I allow myself to be mindful of what appears to be random thoughts, dots begin to connect themselves.

Slowing down. Bringing my subconscious to the surface. The beauty of a moment. Mindfulness. Connections. ADHD students. These words, these thoughts are the rudiments of my definition of the learning aesthetic.

A crucial element of aesthetic learning is mindfulness. It's not easy for students who struggle with ADHD to connect their random thoughts because their minds are already speeding ahead to the next. They're either in the future or in the past: distracted by students walking by my office, the eraser on a pencil, hip hop/rock star fantasies, what they need to study for class or an argument with a professor an hour before. The biggest liability about a student who has ADHD is that it is so damn difficult to catch a moment, let alone the moment. It takes time to respect and reflect on our thoughts and become aware of the pattern. We know this is hard because those of us who do not have ADHD have trouble making time for reflection without judgment. We choose the pill for depression, the air conditioning so we can do more, the car instead of a walk. I'm not saying that a quick fix isn't sometimes necessary. But as we grow wise, we need the intelligence to differentiate. That is the key. Sometimes the only way to see, to feel, to learn, to connect and even to change is to do nothing but sit by the fan when things are heating up.

PAL professors are that time by the fan on a hot morning. Our job is to be absolutely present, to notice and to help students appreciate a moment. *"Max, I just noticed that the whole time you were writing, you were smiling. What's that about?" "Marc, how come when you did your time management, you allotted no time for the thing you love most, your guitar?" "Nora, do you realize that you apologized eight times in one session?" "I'm sorry,"* she whispers. I scream. We laugh. And the conversation of self-esteem and girls begins. *"Colin, that was great spoken word poetry. How can we work that brilliance into your essay?" "Aaron, did you notice that after you filled out your time management book you took a deep breath. What are you letting go of?" "You've been screaming about that professor all week. That must have hit an old learning nerve." "Dave, you said that being closeted does not affect your learning but you ended up not being able to produce the scene you wrote in class about a young working class boy who wanted to tell his father that he wanted to sing and received a "C" instead of an "A" in the course."*

Sometimes, I just shut up and somehow the attention helps them make their own connections, discover what they're
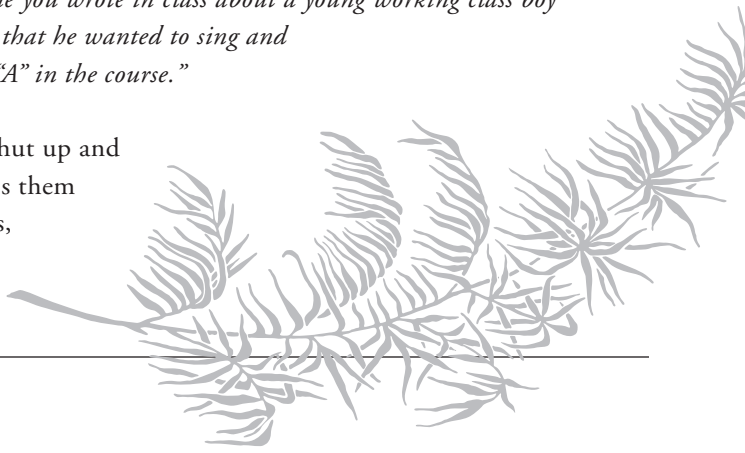
passionate about, let out their frustrations and reveal how they learn. Often, the connections occur in the process of a student engaging in her schoolwork. One young woman, Nora, one of my favorites, hated writing assignments. Her Writing Workshop professor complained because she never did what she was told, which came out as belligerence on her part. She could not follow these directions for the life of her. This is also my learning dilemma so I completely related. Next semester, I recommended a more fluid teacher, just so she could have a taste of her creativity. When the professor asked her to write a thesis on a book or film, she chose her favorite television show, South Park. Nora examined the philosophy and meaning behind it, how satire is used in society today, her attraction to satirical comedy, the history of its creation and the writers' creative process. She loved every minute of it but worked her tucus off to perfect it because writing (not creative thinking), putting her speeding thoughts on paper, was a difficult process for her. When she was asked to write about a piece of nature, she said quite defiantly that she's a city girl (New York) and of course refused to do the paper. We looked at her first reaction and began to explore her sense of nature in the city, what she deemed important or poetic in her life and where she gained a sense of solitude and belonging to a bigger picture. She wrote about "Strawberry Fields," the tribute to John Lennon in the park, and how poets and songwriters meet there and why it's meditative to her. She received her first "A" in English.

Sometimes, we just have conversations about students' dreams or their relationships and the connection to the way they learn comes much later on. As a PAL professor, you cannot be in a hurry no matter what pressures you are getting from students, teachers and parents. A smile, a story, a sudden burst of energy, are all the small moments to be savored. All can be transformative.

Rehearsal, Learning and Transformation

After a certain age we are told to stop playing and take life seriously. When you say, 'Stop playing; you have to be serious now that you are growing up', you are castrating the person, because 'playing' is one of the most powerful languages that you can have. To play is to use part of reality, to create and rehearse forms of transformation. You are playing, you are trying, you are rehearsing, you are getting stronger, so that you can go and transform reality.

(Delgado & Heritage, 1996, p. 35).

The purpose of an authentic education is to encourage what we can become rather than to fit into what is. There is nothing as ridiculous or as inane as adults accusing students, artists or teachers of not being in the real world. I seriously question anyone who tells you s/he is preparing you for the real world. It actually sends chills down my spine. Our job as student and adult learners is to remain in touch with ourselves, question authority, care for the real world and create a more humane place to live and breathe. Augusto Boal, a well known Brazilian theatre artist, not only took theatre to the students, factory workers and community and used it to explore real issues, beliefs, philosophies and oppression, he brought it into traditional government institutions where they began to use theatre to explore political issues and change the society they lived in. Theatre became a tool in the real world that reflected and altered the political, spiritual and social arena.
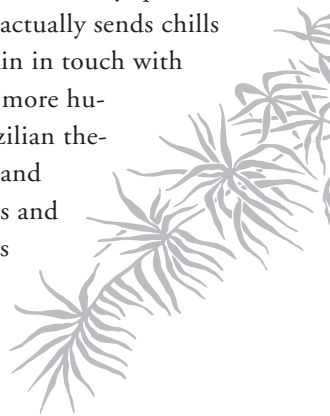
There is a reason I am a playwright and teach playwriting. I am a woman, almost sixty, who loves to play. I try to instill that sense of play in all my students. College gives us a good four-year rehearsal period. My canon is improvisation, whether it is in writing script, acting or in learning how we learn. But improvisation takes forethought and care. I don't just say improvise; there's a method to my madness.

In Scriptwriting, I use general exercises (what I call tricks) to trigger the subconscious and wake the dormant characters that live inside of all of us (bursting, I might add, to come out). I incorporate physical exercises such as tai-chi and chi-gong, meditation, drawing each other for character, lines from the newspaper, television news, or paperbacks, theatre ensemble exercises and games, conversations, music, photos, journal writing, color to character and poetry. Eventually, these students will be able to use all these exercises in their writing careers without the aid of a professor. In PAL, I utilize many of those tricks of the trade and a simple form, a script that keeps changing throughout the semester.

I think the key word here is simple. The form has four sentences. What are your strengths? What are your difficulties? What is a dream you have for yourself or a goal? What are your fears? One of the definitions of metacognition is learning about your strengths and weaknesses. What could take five minutes usually takes anywhere from a half hour to an hour and a half. Keeping it simple allows for depth. "*You're good at sports. What sports in particular? What do you like about that sport? Do*

you remember a particularly good play? Tell me about it?" As the semester progresses, we return to their list. The questions grow. "*When you wrote that paper, what did you use from football? What is the feeling you have when you make a particularly good play? Do you ever visualize the play before you do it? "* (This is something I learned from Michael Jordan). "*Are there other areas that make you feel this way? What particular aspects of that can help you with what you call a weakness? When does this weakness work for you?"*

The last question is especially important. For example, I'm very slow. All my life, my family made fun of me. "It takes you four hours to get into the car," they would joke. I was always scolded for daydreaming in school. My parents were very confused because in some teacher/parent conferences, the teachers would tell my parents I was slow and others would tell them that I'm bright. I went from the lowest reading group to the highest as an experiment in the second grade. I recall often falling asleep in the low reading group and being ridiculed. I don't know why my second grade teacher, Ms. Casey, conducted this experiment but I do remember that my learning flourished and excelled in the highest reading group. I simply found the books more interesting; therefore, I was able to stay awake (on many levels). However, I am still a slow processor. That slowness, that ability to take the time to see and hear everything in detail makes me a decent and sometimes inspired playwright. As artists, we know we don't always overcome our learning disability, our depression, our grief; we try and take it to the highest level.
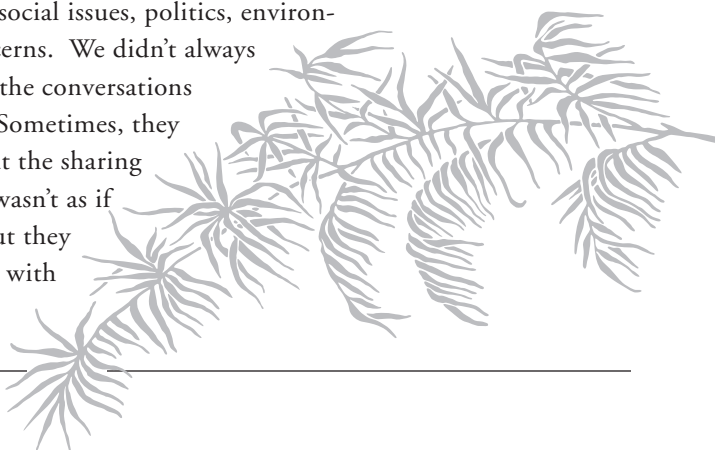
I need to reiterate that all the tricks, forms, and formulas in the world do not make one a good Scriptwriting or PAL professor. It is the ability to see your student, to see what s/he is trying to write, to encourage improvisation and risk-taking, to uncover her passion, to see the energy and power that can be unleashed, to see who s/he really is. And let me tell you there is no high like being seen. Students *become*. Parents are thankful. And teachers learn on levels that are almost impossible to write about.

But sometimes we miss a simple truth. Earlier in the chapter, I wrote about Nora, the student who received her first "A" in English. When Nora first came to me, she was hiding herself behind apologies, paranoia, baggie black (though cool) clothes, hair in her face and usually looking down. I became aware of the changes in her learning and her energy for learning as time progressed. But at the end of the

semester when my partner, who was directing a student's script met her, she said, *"You didn't tell me how beautiful Nora was."* I had missed the physical change. Her hair was no longer in her face, her clothes were still black but somehow no longer hiding her figure, she had penciled in doe eyes to pronounce her eyes. She was in fact quite a beauty. There is a life force that enfolds once you begin to see learning as not separate from yourself or your passions, once you begin to see yourself and like who you are and who you are becoming. A quality that translates as beauty. In the past, I had noticed it with other students both male and female. It always amazed me. The truth is that I'm a little in awe of my students and not ashamed to say it.

And there's something else. I don't know if other PAL professors experience this but it has surfaced more and more in my sessions with students. Nora is my reminder. When it first began early in my PAL career, I thought it was just a fluke, a rare occurrence. But 15 years of teaching here has proven me wrong. It happens at least every year, sometimes with one student, sometimes with several. Oddly enough, the female PAL students are always the initiators. It happens whether I think sessions are going well or poorly; my judgment has nothing to do with it. It is this: In the second or third semester a PAL student begins to bring a friend or two to the individual session. These friends are rarely other PAL students. I was surprised at first and perhaps a little uncomfortable. After all, this was an expensive endeavor for the family of a PAL student. I wanted them to get their money's worth. But slowly I came around. As I said, I'm a slow processor.

At first, I tried to conduct the sessions as I normally did. We'd process the week, the assignments due, the challenges and life issues in general. We'd have our learning conversations. But those conversations began to change, grow and expand somehow. I noticed that the student and her friend wanted to have discourse about issues plaguing them. Intelligent discourse being the key words. We started talking about relationships and classes but the conversations began to shift. Students wanted to discuss not only learning differences, but poetry, music, poverty, spirituality, feminism, sexual preference, war, social issues, politics, environmental issues and global concerns. We didn't always agree and even when we did, the conversations were heated and passionate. Sometimes, they weren't even conversations but the sharing of poetry or song lyrics. It wasn't as if I was teaching these things but they definitely saw me as someone with

whom they could explore and share their deeper concerns about the world. They began to bring in articles or pieces from their classes to back up their opinions.   It became a place where students could experiment with their learning, their philosophies, their opinions without fear of being wrong, without reserva-tions. But most of all it became a place where they could explore and rehearse their intelligence, critical thinking skills and creativity.

Learning about one's own learning gave students the desire to express opinions and learn on another level. They wanted to share these experiences with those who were close to them. Many still didn't feel comfortable in the class-room with their ideas. They needed a safer place to be. They were proud of them-selves, fired up, and ready to change their surroundings. They weren't trying to fit into reality but feeling strong enough to have opinions and ideas that could enhance it.

I often think I would have loved to have a PAL professor in college, someone who noticed that writing was my way of ordering the chaos, someone who had regard for my intelligence no matter how flawed I believed it was, someone who helped me see myself and who supported the way I learned. I might have entered my path at an earlier age and not have struggled so much with uncertainty, lack of self-esteem in re-gard to my intelligence and depression. These students who invited friends to share their sessions understood that learning differently was not just a PAL issue. It is a sorry state of affairs that students have to be diagnosed with a learning disability or ADHD in order to receive this kind of individualized mentoring or coaching at these tender and vulnerable stages in life.

There is a line from one of my favorite movies of all time, *Harold and Maude*, that reminds me of the possibilities of metacognition. It is delivered toward the end of the film in a scene between Harold, a depressed nineteen-year-old boy, and Maude. Maude, a vivacious and spirited woman has taken sleeping pills on her 80th birthday:

Harold: *You can't leave me… Don't you understand? I love you. I love you!*
Maude: *Oh! That's wonderful, Harold. Go – And love some more* (Higgins, 1971).

That's what I want to say to my students. Now that you are beginning to love learning, *"go - and [learn] some more."*

The Politics of Learning

Hopefully, you, as a reader, are beginning to ask yourself a few questions. Questions like: *If reflective learning is so successful, even transformational at times, why isn't it encouraged more in the public school system? What is it about reflective learning that is so scary? Do we as public school teachers and college professors need more control or less? What is the mindset behind this craving, addiction and espousal of immediate answers in our society? Could our administration be afraid of the probing questions? What underlies this reflective theory of learning from the personal to the political, to the global?*

As you can see, it's the questions that break the boxes, spiral us to profound learning, and inspire us. I don't intend to answer all of these questions. But I would like to open up a discussion of one or two.

It is by no accident that the PAL program was created and set in motion by a progressive female educator, Gertrude Webb. Her theory was based on the whole person and that an exploration of our personal learning styles could effectively change the design of learning to create a more inclusive and far-reaching system. Although she might not say so, her principles of learning were steeped in feminist theory.
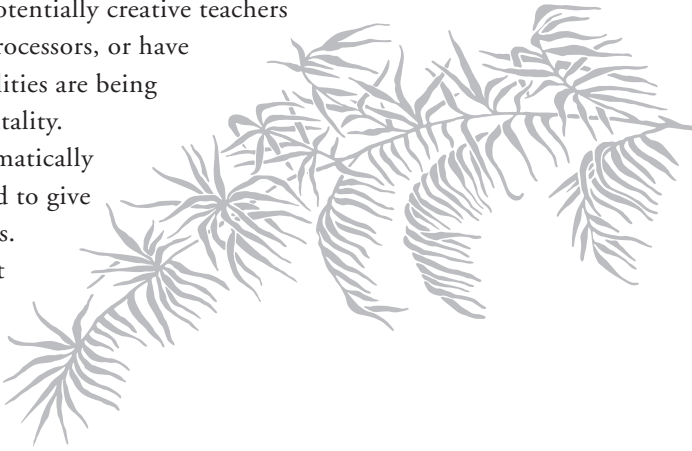
The personal is the political. There should be equal rights and opportunities for students, creating a playing field that is not run from the top down but is circular and collective in nature and where the students have more control of their learning. She believed that if each student was aware of the way s/he learned, both strengths (especially passions) and weaknesses, there was a way s/he could use these strengths and passions to transform weaknesses and even explore what was known as weakness to a learning advantage. For many students with LDs, learning had become a source of trauma and fear. The foundation of her theory was to restore and return to the joy and love of learning, thereby changing the system that had branded the students with disability and low expectations.

It is also by no coincidence that few PAL professors are men. This type of teaching/learning is circular in nature, where there are no easy solutions; it is not about finding the right answer but the means to discover it; students' strengths carry more weight than weaknesses, noticing the small changes becomes a great lesson, and sessions are basically student initiated and led. These are challenges for more traditional professors who prefer to be experts and profess. It is not easy in a male-dominated, departmentalized and subject-oriented university system, although progressive universities and colleges, such as Goddard, have been focusing on this

theory of teaching for years. To Curry's credit, there are professors who not only understand PAL and have open lines of communication but who also have incorporated reflective teaching into their courses. They too treasure the questions.

It would be negligent of me at this point in the chapter about the political implications of reflective learning not to address what is happening in our inner city public schools, a situation that Jonathan Kozol describes in his book, *The Shame of the Nation* (2005), and one created by the ripple effect of oppressive systems. The obsession with MCAS testing has created second class citizens; the more overcrowded and dilapidated the school is, the lower the students test and the more the teachers are required to teach to the MCAS. In many of our inner city schools, art, theatre and music have been abandoned, recess is considered a luxury and reflective learning, free writing and time for provocative questions have been all but abolished. Although there are occasions where these students learn music, it is not usually for the spirit, beauty or appreciation but for specific questions on the test. The squashing of questions and aesthetic learning equals the erasure of critical and creative thinking (Kozol, 2005). We are training students to fit into the real world absolutely and without reservation. If they don't, we lose them to the streets and we throw away our strongest hope for change. This is not only damaging to the self-esteem, creative and critical thinking of students but is restrictive and debilitating to the intellect, creativity and spiritual lives of educators. One of my closest friends and passionate teachers was reprimanded and threatened with removal for teaching free writing to her students. This year, she left teaching high school (after many years in the public school system) and we lost a brilliant and dynamic teacher.

Our young would-be educators in college are also being geared in this direction. Like the public school system, this has become a dilemma in our colleges if we want students to be certified. Potentially creative teachers who have ADHD, or are slow processors, or have dyslexia or other learning disabilities are being encouraged to adapt to this mentality. College students are being systematically coached for the test or persuaded to give up teaching in the public schools. They are being trained early that their strengths are inconsequential, not to fight the system or ask questions.
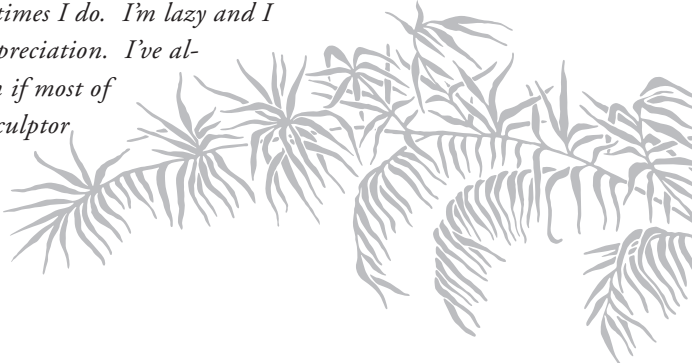
However, this is done mostly outside of classes where students are learning the opposite, a more progressive way of teaching where they accept and teach to differences and have their learning styles reaffirmed. It is confusing at best. They will be locked into schools where progressive education is no longer a possibility. And don't think this assessment focused education could never touch our precious liberal arts colleges. It has, and it wouldn't surprise me if soon our classes will be monitored more closely as to what we say, reflective time for students and what we teach. Forget about PAL and the kind of metacognitive education we provide.

There is a climate in this country of cowboy answers, war for peace and fear of difference. And this climate is affecting our students and how we teach. Every time we corroborate with this system, every time we decide to believe that the war in Iraq or Afghanistan is about 9/11 or democracy or the federal government's reactions to Katrina is not about poverty and race or that global warming has little to do with survival of our children or our lives, every time we are unable to challenge the system to stand up for teaching to different learning styles or allow dilapidated schools to exist, every time we are silent, we are a part of this unreflective system. We need to fight for reflection, learning for the sake of learning, fight for the provocative questions, for critical and creative thinking, for our children. **Connecting the dots is not just a game or even a style of learning.** It is a way of living, breathing, seeing and transforming. It is now a matter of survival. It takes commitment and time.

Back To Us

     STOP. This is the point where we stop, maybe just sit at our kitchen table, look around us, and take a moment. It really doesn't take much to do nothing. And yet, it's our biggest fear. In a world where multi-tasking is praised, doing nothing???? Well, that's just downright lazy. Ah, another word that begs for redefinition. This definition in journal form emerged on a recent writing retreat: *It's morning on the deck. Light and shadow present a morning gift as I sit just gazing. The wind, and there is a strong breeze, gives it its dance, its flutter, its song. The light and shadow opera. I could just sit here all day. Sometimes I do. I'm lazy and I don't say that with disdain but appreciation. I've always appreciated my laziness; even if most of the time I was the only one. My sculptor friend, Irene, claims that there is an art to laziness. Her Parisian accent often gives her words a glamorous edge,*

which elevates idleness. Sitting is my art. I could say it's the Buddhist way. But I think laziness always got a bad rap, and it's my duty to save it.

We need to take back laziness like the night. One doesn't need a retreat to take a moment. To just be still. To just "be." To close the door, if not to a room of one's own, at least to the chattering on one's own mind. Maybe if we begin to understand that stillness and reflection can change lives, can be role models for our children, and can promote better health and creativity, we will begin to respect that time.

Artists, poets and writers throughout the ages have understood the need for solitude, praised doing nothing and revered contemplation. The spiritual poet, Rumi, born in 1207 in Afghanistan, wrote:

> "Which is worth more, a crowd of thousands
> or your own genuine solitude?
> Freedom, or power over a nation?
>
> A little while alone in your room
> Will prove more valuable than anything else
> That could ever be given you"(Barks, 1996, p.260).

The essayist, critic, feminist and novelist, Virginia Woolf, born in the late 1800's in London, wrote: "It is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top" (Woolf, 1929, p.31).

The character of Max, a homeless poet living in the train station, from my play *Train Wrecked (a memoir)* (Gabow, 2005), expresses her despair at the end of a poem:

> **Max**
> *…Sitting senseless, save for the nameless*
> *behind the fear, career, the going here and there, never having a spare*
> *nickel, dime or time to disappear*
> *inside the face of the displaced, the sound in the song,*
> *the "how are you" and "fine thank you" of the strong,*
> *the echo echo echo of the wronged wrong who belong and don't*
>
> *Just accidents waiting to happen*
> *Underneath the ground of a poet rappin'*
> *In a parallel zone where no one is home*
> *Yet everyone is here* (Gabow, 2005).

It's time we all bring ourselves home to here. We can't become unless we practice being. For me, for the students, for you as a reader, the transformative moment is now. Let's begin to read ourselves with wisdom, a sense of play and care. Let's read ourselves on our porches, in our beds, on the train, at a fabulous cafe with the same wonder and magic as we would a great novel. And then, let's go and collectively dream a real world into existence.

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Reading Ourselves

For Parents or Guardians

Here is an example of a learning relationship that didn't appear to be accomplishing what I thought it would, but my child was transformed by the positive experience:

For Educators and Other Professionals
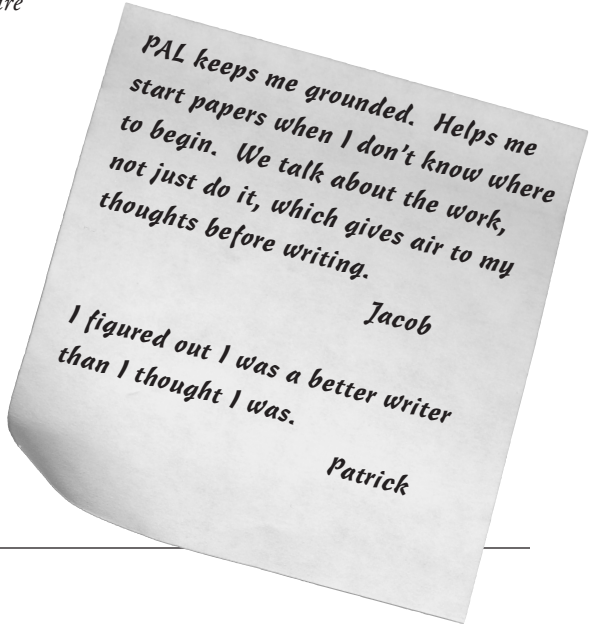
When have I been surprised in a teaching relationship?

What was transformational in this surprise?

For Students

"Sometimes the only way to see, to feel, to learn, to connect and even to change is to do nothing but sit by the fan when things are heating up."

How this applies to me:

PAL keeps me grounded. Helps me start papers when I don't know where to begin. We talk about the work, not just do it, which gives air to my thoughts before writing.

Jacob

I figured out I was a better writer than I thought I was.

Patrick

Meta-Metacognition:
A Wave Unfurled

Patty Kean, M.Ed., ET/P

"The whole truth is the story of a wave unfurled." With this metaphor, singer/songwriter Dar Williams (Williams, 2004, track 3) suggests that truth is a reality we can know… as easily as we can understand the wave as it comes ashore and is absorbed back into the depths of the sea. Simple. Just as simple as understanding one's understanding of one's thinking…smile.

So, how can we hold the wave of cognition on shore long enough to read the story our thinking process tells? Over the past 13 years mentoring, teaching, and befriending students in the Program for the Advancement of Learning (PAL), I have come to respect the power of meta-metacognitive conversations. These conversations address metacognition as intentionally as metacognition addresses cognition. I find that "meta" conversations are ones of liberation because they are based on situational learning. In other words, the waves that the student and I observe in our dialectic study of self and cognition rise from the student's ocean of experiences – and mine as well. Our intentional dialogue observes, describes, questions, and frames these experiences for learning sake. As an observer participant, I sit with the student on the shores of her experiences; I observe that wave unfurled in the voice, gesture, glance, and stories she tells – and then, holding the wave still as it unfurls (the tricky part),
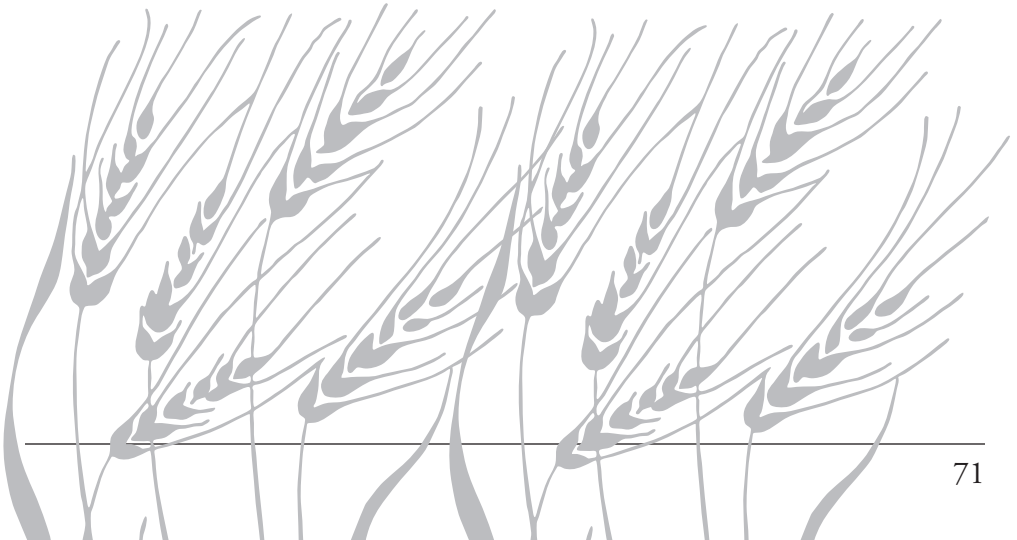
we both describe what we notice about her thinking (metacognition) and what we notice about our noticing (meta-metacognition).

When I think about my thinking during my work as an educational therapist in PAL, I see that my role is often that of a multi-sensory camera. Focused, I snap shots in the student's telling of the wave as it rises, peaks, folds in on itself and returns to the depths. I take these moments of the student's life – and I attempt to hold them still so that we can look at them from several perspectives. The quality of the snapshot I take is determined by the student's felt resonance of these moments held still. These physical emotional feelings are actually the frames for the pictures. They tell us so much about our thinking process when we focus on them from the place of meta-metacognition.

Just like taking pictures of the ocean's ebb and flow, I must be willing and able to just sit at the shore of the student's experience, listening and observing her telling. It is important to also note my own inner responses, both verbal and non-verbal, as I focus and refocus my lens – frame and reframe the picture or series of pictures – on the self who I am privileged to witness with all of its seen beauty and uncharted depths – in mirror-like moments of calm and in the stinging winds of tempests. I am not passively reflecting back to the student but actively choosing as I present the experience to be framed and reframed. In doing so, I become a reflexive researcher, an ethnographer of sorts, noting that my bias is a real shaping part of the story. Who I am in this relationship does influence what I focus on and what I leave out of the frame. What I experience in this relationship does inform me about the students' experiences. When the wave crashes into the shore, the water and sand swirl together for the moment, and then, return. Yet the shore is changed, slightly perhaps, but reshaped none the less.

The meta-metacognitive inner dialogue of the practitioner is the key to skilled noticing. Our questions do determine what we see. What we look for is what we will find. Importantly, our next set of questions looks at our metacognitive process: *Did I get this right? I chose to focus on this…what do you think? What did I leave out? Would you have put this detail in the center? Did you notice anything new about the event,*
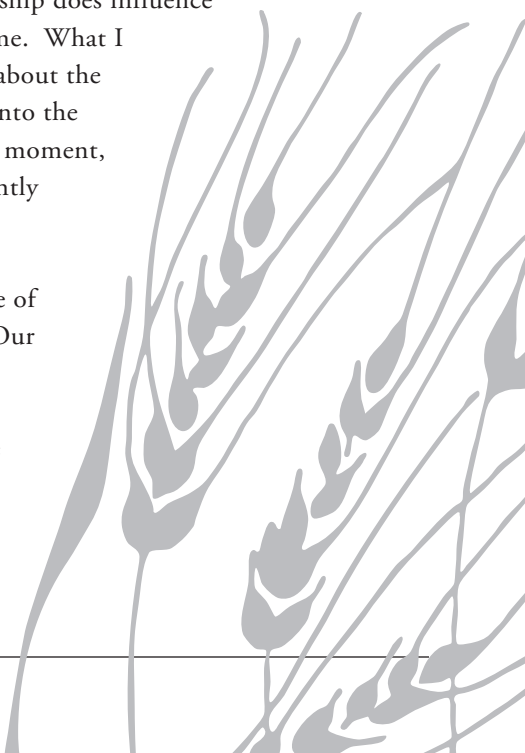
your feelings, or your thoughts in the telling of the story? I notice that I am feeling this way as you tell the story and as I retell it to myself…What fell inside and outside of the frame of the picture just taken? What informed our seeing? What aspects of the experience are in focus? Which ones are intentionally blurred? What details did I not see until we developed the negative (or downloaded the photo-card)? As in good research, if the metacognitive experience is to generalize beyond the immediate experience, the student and I must meta-metacognate, or edit. Together we edit the story – much like editing photos with a computer program – reframing, adding or deleting emphasis, zooming in on a particular detail, or allowing the detail to be given its diminished place within a larger frame of reference.

Liberating educational stances such as the ones I describe are real and available in any context and with any lived situation. It begins with re-spect or the willingness to look again at the first glance and the first set of assumptions of meaning. It is most important to respect oneself during these conversations. To look again at first assumptions and question and wonder: *What made me think that? How did I process this information? How did that influence my thought? What information didn't I see the first time?* Respect. Looking again, intentionally, at both the cognitive and metacognitive processes.

These liberating educational conversations foster respect for self for both student and teacher in the space. We both question to promote self-respect. *What do you think you meant when you said that? What did you feel when you said that? What feeling did you have when you made that decision? What do you feel now when speaking about the decision you made?* Promoting the student's self-respect and looking again, intentionally, at the thinking process, but importantly, learning how to do this together.

Calvin and I have been sitting together at the shore of his experiences for the past four years. At first, he was unsure of being there together, but he couldn't help but be himself! What I remember most vividly about our conversations during his first year at Curry was all the laughing. He just enjoys life and is honest about it. It took two semesters before he could sit next to me and describe the absolute terror he

has known in the deeper waters, in school, as a result of the mismatch between his way of navigation and the tools they wanted him to use.

Calvin has an expressive language disorder, which means for Calvin, that he comprehends or receives information on an above average level of sophistication, while having great difficulty expressing what he knows with spoken or written fluency. As Calvin tries to organize his language, his frustration mounts and mounts because he recognizes the inadequacy of his own expression.

> "That's not right! That's not what I mean! I hate this! I am so stupid!"
> "Calvin, do you feel like that every time you sit down to write an assignment?"
> "Yeah, it sucks".
> "Yeah, it really does. I can imagine that sitting down to write might cause you to feel anxious before you even start the assignment. Is this the case?"
> "Yeah! (Important to hear the relief in his voice.) *I hate it. I put it off because when I sit down, look at the computer screen, instead of writing something, I just feel stupid. The only way I can even stay put is to smoke a little pot, you know, not to be high but to be relaxed enough to stay at the screen."
> "What did you do before you began to smoke pot to relax enough to do start an assignment? I am a little hesitant to put 'smoking pot' on the list of suggested strategies for your writing process and time management."

He laughs.

> "What do you mean what did I do before I began to smoke pot? I put it off, typed it up at the last minute, and turned in shit. That's why my work is always turned in late. And, now I skip classes when work is due because I'm so embarrassed by the work. It isn't me! I'm turning in words that don't match my thinking! At least when I get high, I turn stuff in on time."

I sigh.

My approach during our subsequent sessions involved letting Calvin speak to me about his classes, the readings, lectures, assignments, friends, outings, anything. As he did so, I wrote down the words he said and read them back to him. And, then, the re-spect or meta-metacognition:

"Calvin, you said this… By this, did you mean this …or did you mean that?" I would offer Calvin some choices of how I interpreted his words.

Calvin would clarify, and suddenly, in the revisiting and the clarification of my interpretation, he found his voice. I continued to take notes as he clarified and asked for more respect, more looking again at what he said, what he meant. Then the meta-metacognition:

"*Calvin, how do you know which of my interpretations is the one you mean? When you are thinking about your thinking* (metacognition), *what do you focus on? The feelings? The words? Visual images?"* (meta-metacognition).

Becoming aware of how one thinks and revising how one thinks about one's thinking takes time and it takes relationship. Calvin is a senior this year. We have worked together for four years, and in his last semester, he stops by with an occasional paper. I note that he is describing for the first time the excitement he felt when writing his final thesis paper:

"*You know, Patty, I was sitting there…looking at the screen…and I tried to think of what to type and I figured I should just start typing - you know, like I would just start talking to you - and when I began to type, I started thinking about all those pesky little questions you asked me all the time…and then when I was reading my writing, your voice was in my head…and I answered the questions and revised the paper! And, get this, the paper is on time. I'm actually looking forward to going to class."*

Re-spect. A wave unfurled.

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Meta-Metacognition:
The Wave Unfurled

For Educators and Other Professionals

How aware am I of these as I work with students:

My assumptions

My biases

My questions

My inner responses

Building the relationship

How might I develop that awareness?

My PAL professor makes me feel more confident, and gives me better clarity on what my abilities are. We speak more like friends. Teachers of mine from the past said I'd never make it here; makes me want to go back and shove my grades in their face. PAL works far better than any other program I've ever heard of. Mutual respect.

Ross
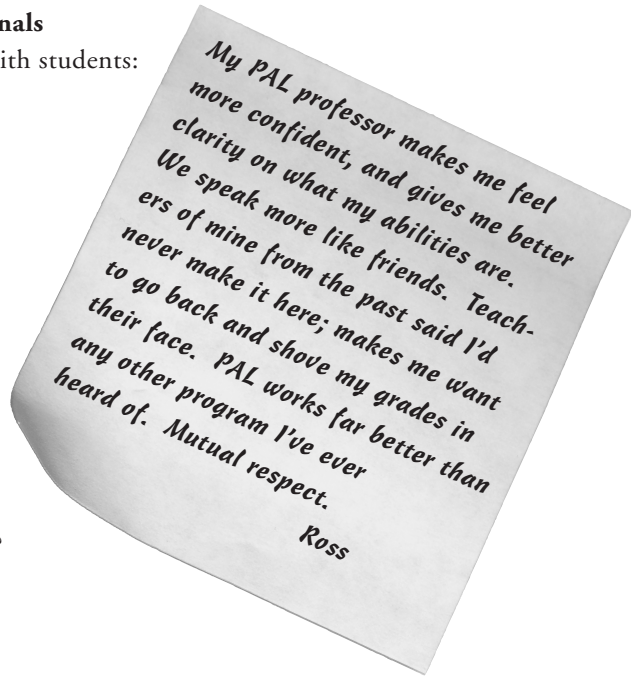
For Students

Who has taken the time to clarify with me what I mean - not just what I say?

What did I learn from that?

For Parents or Guardians

When, in my own life, have I thought about my thinking?

What was the value of that metacognitive experience?

METACOGNITIVE TEACHING & LEARNING

On Painting and Teaching: *Analogies*

George Herman, M.A.

I am a painter. I am a teacher.

Layers

My painting is very process oriented. By this I mean that before I paint, I usually have no idea what the final product will look like. I might have a general idea of an image, or a look that I aim for, but the painting is totally open to change. I paint, I scrape off the paint, I paint, I scrape, I wipe paint off, and paint some more. Bit by bit the surface becomes itself. Glimpses of the earlier layers appear through subsequent layers. The painting, when it is done, is the sum of the accumulation and the elimination, and the connections among the layers of the excavation.

My teaching is very process oriented also. I start out not knowing a great deal about the student. As we get to know each other, parts of the student are revealed: the intelligence, the learning style, personality, psyche, humor, interests and passions, strengths and obstacles that have, one way or another, become part of who this person is. Over time, the picture of this student is, contradictions and all, gradually seen, and, at least in part, understood.

The Dance

Painting is like a dance. Each partner in the dance is constantly giving and receiving information from the other—a touch here, pressure there, constant and mutual visual and kinesthetic feedback. Ultimately, hopefully, the dance flows gracefully. In painting, one partner (the artist) puts some paint down on canvas. The other partner (the painting itself) gives back information (about color, texture and composition) to the artist, who then
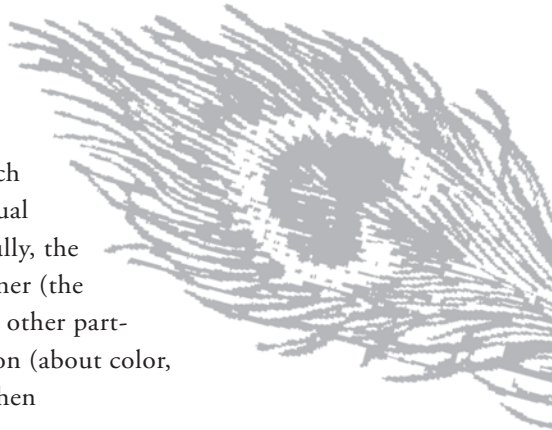
responds with more paint, more color. As time goes on, the purely visual/spatial feedback from the painting spirals into the psychological and emotional content, which, in turn, increases the creative energy of the artist. And so it goes.

The pedagogical process is likewise a dance. The teacher and student are, ideally, constantly sending communiqués back and forth. These messages consist of course content certainly, but also metacognitive feedback, emotions, feelings, jokes, a lot of non-verbal conveyances, relations of personal experiences. This process hopefully results in a teaching/learning experience that can reward both parties.

Way Way Down

Picasso referred to art as "the surprising truth at the bottom of the well." We go down deeper and deeper, into the wet, dark cold place, and pull out something wonderful/beautiful/strange/exotic/bizarre/amazing/unique. It takes time, strength and courage to get to the bottom to bring it into the light.

Both the teacher and the student need some of these same qualities. Each needs to challenge the other to get deeper, to move beyond what they've done before, perhaps into a dark, frightening place, to bring some "surprising truth" to light. That this can serve equally well as an analogy for the therapist/patient relationship is not surprising.

Straw Into Gold
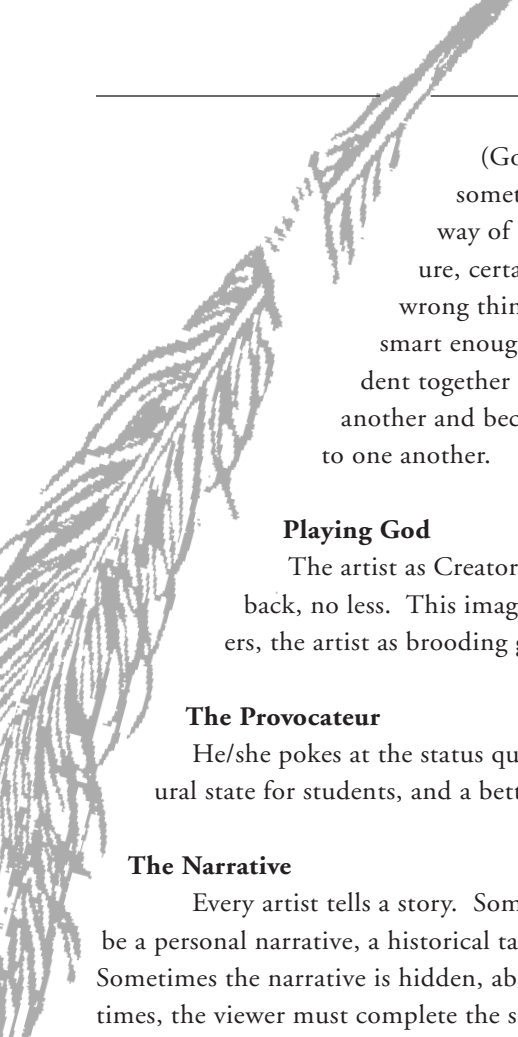
I have heard painting compared to Alchemy – taking base materials, raw materials from the earth, and by some (magical) process, turning them into something wonderful.

Sometimes teaching and learning involve sludging through the daily drudge and grind of talking and listening and reading and writing and sometimes it feels mind numbing and "what's the use" and why are we teaching/learning this. And, sometimes, an ember catches and the fire is lit, and the flame bursts and lights up the room.

Taking Risks

There is some risk inherent in any artistic pursuit. The fear of failure, the fear of wrong aesthetic choices, the fear of making something ugly, the fear of being judged as inept or being a bad artist or even having the temerity to think that you actually could be an artist.

(Good) teachers are constantly taking risks, trying something new, attempting some different, untested way of teaching a lesson. Students take the risk of failure, certainly, but also of looking foolish by saying the wrong thing in class, or thinking that they actually are smart enough to succeed in this class. The teacher and student together run the risk of opening themselves up to one another and becoming vulnerable by showing their true selves to one another.

Playing God

The artist as Creator. Michelangelo recreating the creation. On his back, no less. This image of the artist has been replaced by, among others, the artist as brooding genius, loner, and, more recently, as:

The Provocateur

He/she pokes at the status quo, disturbs the peace, upends decorum. A natural state for students, and a better model for teachers.

The Narrative

Every artist tells a story. Sometimes it is clear and straightforward. It may be a personal narrative, a historical tale, a fictional story, an expose of a hidden truth. Sometimes the narrative is hidden, abstract, or, perhaps, an anti-narrative. Sometimes, the viewer must complete the story or even create it in his/her own mind out of the raw material presented by the artist.

Ideas become clearer and more understandable when they are presented in the context of a story. Fiction, drama, music and art all can convey ideas better than a dry recitation of facts. Some teachers can give shape to anything - math, science and psychology as well as literature or history. Too often, students are often presented with a dry recitation of facts. They must create their own narrative, and put the content of the course into a form that has personal meaning for them - a story that will either make connections among the myriad facts with which they are confronted, or one that fits within the context of their own life story.

A Dialogue

Like "The Dance" (see above), but not as sexy.

Whole Brain

Although the right brain famously dominates in the visual arts, I have found that I use both sides. When I am in the painting, the right brain - holistic, visual, intuitive-- is running things. When I stop for a while, sit back, and study what I've done, my left brain - linear, verbal, analytical - takes over. And I literally see things differently.

In my teaching, although I tend to be right-brain dominant, and many of my students are likewise, we both need to be able to access the two sides. I need to have different ways to present material - left brained, right brained, verbally, visually, spatially, and kinesthetically. Students need to understand and utilize their strongest mode of learning, while remaining open to other possible ways of accessing information.

The Integrity of the Painting

Every painting is different. No painting can or should look like another. A painting does not have to conform to anyone's preconceived notion of what a painting is supposed to be. The important thing is that the painting must be unified within its own parameters. It must be true to itself. It must have the integrity of its own convictions.

Every student is different. Every teacher is different. Neither one can or should teach or learn like another. Neither the teacher nor the student should have to conform to anyone's preconceived notion of what they are supposed to be. Each must find his or her own way of being, and, like a painting, needs only "to work" in order to be successful.
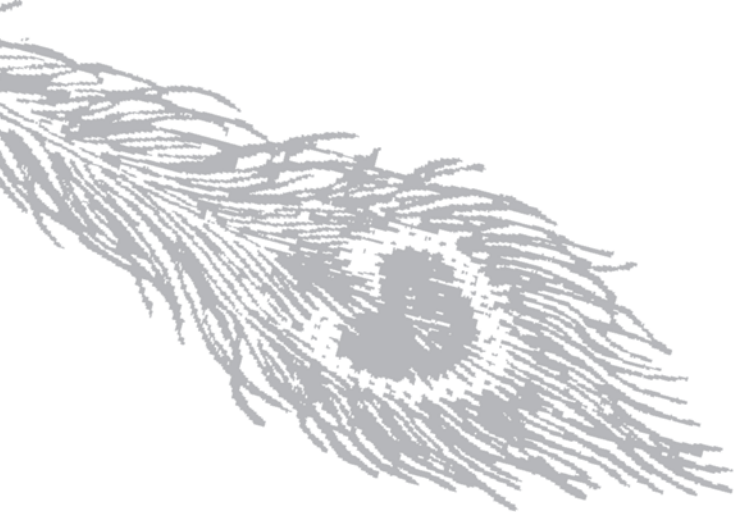
On Painting and Teaching:
Analogies

For Educators and Other Professionals
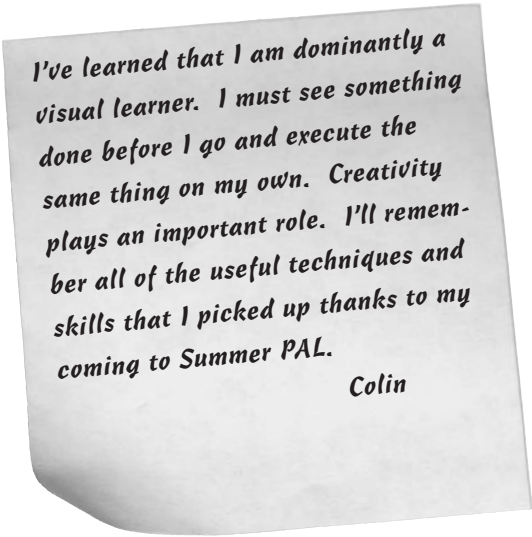
Which of these analogies applies to me?

How do they help me and help my students?

For Students

Which analogies catch my attention and why:

- ❏ layers
- ❏ dancing
- ❏ talking deeply
- ❏ turning straw into gold
- ❏ taking risks
- ❏ playing God
- ❏ poking at the status quo
- ❏ telling my story
- ❏ dialogue
- ❏ using my whole brain
- ❏ finding my own way

I've learned that I am dominantly a visual learner. I must see something done before I go and execute the same thing on my own. Creativity plays an important role. I'll remember all of the useful techniques and skills that I picked up thanks to my coming to Summer PAL.

Colin

For Parents or Guardians

Thinking of someone who has had a successful learning relationship with my child, what "*worked*?"

Which analogies relate to their process together?

The Professors' New Shoes:
Finding the Right Fit in Classrooms Full of Differences

Diane Webber, Ph.D.

Parents leave their children at the steps of colleges all over the country every fall, then cautiously drive away with a wide range of hopes, fears, and expectations for the teens they nurtured for so many years. It's often difficult for them to imagine what challenges these young students will encounter in the classroom, since so much has changed in the college scene in recent years. Students themselves often experience a wide range of emotions as they walk, clad in new jeans and new shoes, into a room filled with unfamiliar faces and professorial looks from a person standing at the front desk. What parents and students don't often realize, though, is that the teacher has her own hopes, fears and ranging emotions, regardless of how many times she has encountered a room full of apprehensive faces. She is also uncertain in her new shoes, wondering how she can tap the inherently wonderful uniqueness of each student. When the expectations of all involved are entwined with an array of complex teaching styles and learning differences, blisters and bruises caused by misunderstandings and lack of information can develop similar to those often caused by new shoes rubbing tender spots.

If we listen to what the teachers tell us about their experiences with students with learning differences as they interact with each other in the classroom, some of the fears may dissipate and the blisters may disappear. Much of my teaching experience involves working with college-age students with diagnosed learning disabilities. For the last six years, I also taught undergraduate and graduate courses, where classes include students with diverse age and skill levels. My challenge is to incorporate what I know about learning styles and

dis/abilities into a classroom of as many as 30 students with curriculum and time-frame marshalling their own departmental and administrative boundaries. I frequently seek suggestions from other faculty as I attempt to apply theories that work well in my individual and small-group mentoring settings, to a classroom environment with far more complex variables. I asked both experienced and novice professors to share their thoughts, feelings, ideas, hopes, concerns, obstacles, and accomplishments in working with students with LD and ADHD in the college classroom. What follows is a snapshot of selected responses.

Challenges

Many faculty have related anecdotally how working with students with learning disabilities at Curry can be both extremely challenging and rewarding. The challenges often involve layers of complex issues. One top layer involves finding multiple ways of engaging students in the learning process. Then it involves developing this engagement with a broad range of students' academic ability (regardless of a diagnosed disability). Further, engaging students with wide ranges of abilities is often within a context in which many students seem to come to a learning environment with a goal-oriented interest in learning, and view college as a means to an end to get jobs and make money. One professor noted, *"Perhaps the most difficult challenge comes in confronting students' defenses which serve to protect them from accepting their disabilities…and getting them to recognize the importance of an education and changing their behaviors in order to develop and be proud of their accomplishments…"*

The process of breaking through students' defenses is further exacerbated by a broader culture that, on the one hand, seeks political and social equality. On the other hand, however, is the reality that all human beings are not the same, are not equally adept at all endeavors, and process information in a myriad of ways at varying speeds. One literature professor gives this perspective, *"The distressing part is that [LD] students are often pretty far toward the extreme end of the lack of self-confidence spectrum, so that it is hard, sometimes almost impossible, to convince them that they are making good progress, and that they will 'get there'."* Then another professor replies, *"The result is often that parents, professors, friends, etc. give students unrealistic feedback about their performance, which only serves to incapacitate them and stifle their development and growth as human beings."* The challenge for faculty is to develop ways to build students' self-confidence within a realistic framework.
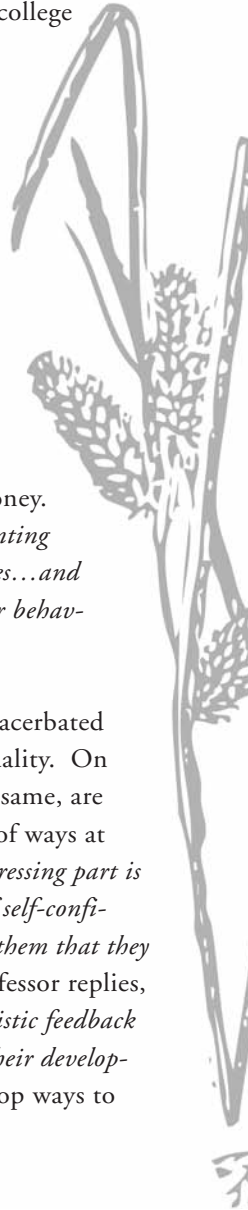
The heavy reading and writing requirements in college present challenges for many professors in content-driven disciplines, since they may not be prepared to teach those skills. A senior professor says, *"My only negative issue [about working with students with learning disabilities] would…be written expression…I have a student this term who is so sharp, but is unable to write in clear terms…what do you do with that?"* Professors often point students toward available support services, but then it becomes a matter of individual circumstances beyond the professor's reach whether the student accepts and benefits from the support. All too quickly, a student can fall into a hole filled with unread books and unwritten papers, leaving both professor and student searching for solutions.

One major shared concern is, *"…at what point do we begin enabling students toward learned-helplessness, and when/where do we set limits so students can grow inter-dependently?"* The frustration so many professors echo is the difficulty in meeting the unknown needs of students while guiding them toward self-sufficiency within the bounds of curricular and collegiate standards and expectations. In other words, how much "help" does it take before it turns to "hurt?" Even experienced professors feel vulnerable and wonder how they'll handle the challenge as they stand every semester in new shoes before a group of diverse learners with volumes of teaching and learning looming before them.

Rewards

Then there are the welcome rewards. One experienced professor mentioned that the *"…instructive and fun and rewarding part of working with [LD] students is that they have taught me to slow down, to explain, to get at assumptions in order to make a subject clear – in other words, they're really there."* Professors seem to agree that they have learned a great deal by working with students with learning differences since they constantly have to re-examine what they are teaching, how they are teaching, and why they are using certain methods and techniques. Everyone seems to benefit. One professor says, *"I have no doubt that I am a better teacher as a function of struggling with my students to make their education more fruitful."* An interesting observation is that, *"They've [students with learning disabilities] taught me to listen to intuitive responses more carefully because these code the more familiar logic of non-LD students."* The learning style of some students helps inform the teacher on ways to understand other students.

Here is another perspective from a visual artist teaching in the studio arts. *"I think I'm in a different place than many of our colleagues. Students often come to our*
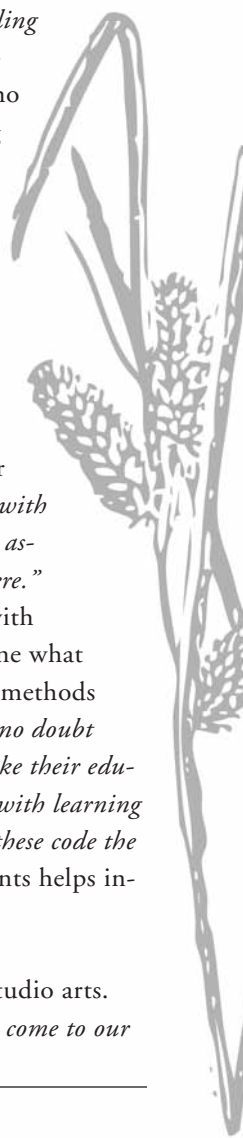
major late because they have had no exposure to the arts and have no idea that they have an interest in the arts. Those students with learning disabilities often discover that they have a strength in the arts that they may lack in other areas, or struggle with academically. It is always so exciting to see them succeed in an area that they never even considered." A communication professor reflects, *" My experiences with LD kids has been mostly positive. Many of the radio station's best leaders over the years have been students with learning issues.….I have many who have trouble writing, communicate most effectively with the spoken word.…and radio certainly provides for that experience."* Many professors expressed the pleasure they felt when students who had difficulty with writing really soared in their classes that demanded more experiential exercises, where students could act, draw, build, speak, work in groups, and be physically involved in learning.

I recently heard this from an experienced professor; *"I have expanded the use of various methodologies and have transformed my classroom greatly from years ago."* This type of comment is heard repeatedly in higher education and the exciting result is that teaching for students with learning disabilities benefits all students. Effective methodologies mentioned from across disciplines include: providing study guides, establishing study groups, using teaching assistants, varying examination styles by incorporating choices to address different learning styles, and, melding technologies like Blackboard into many assignments. One professor expressed the pleasure he felt *"…working with many students with various learning disorders who wanted a college education and who were willing to do whatever they could to get one. They have come to numerous office hours, study sessions, struggled with content, and over-time made improvements in their skills. Having these trusting relationships with students who know that we both have the same goal for them has been wonderful. I have contact with many of those students now and am very proud of their accomplishments. These students are an inspiration."*

Outcomes

The challenges and rewards of working with diverse learners seem to provide a balance that creates a "win-win situation" for everyone. Perhaps these professors' voices will help parents, staff, and students better understand the teachers' perspective. Perhaps listening to the voices of some faculty will inspire others to seek creative ways to work with diverse populations. Sometimes, knowing that other teachers have similar challenges makes them seem more manageable. Parents may want to know what to expect for their own kids in the college classroom, and this brief snapshot may provide a realistic picture that brings

expectations and reality closer together. When we work collaboratively to open up communication, to understand, and to share strategies for teaching and learning while breaking in new shoes, everyone walks more comfortably toward mutual success.

The Professors' New Shoes:
Finding the Right Fit in Classrooms Full of Differences

For Students

When have I gotten *"into my teachers' shoes?"*

How might that help the teacher and me in the future?

What *"unknown needs"* would be good to share?

For Educators and Other Professionals

How has working with students with LD/ADHD made me a better professional?

For Parents or Guardians

What can I say to my child to nurture mutual respect between professor and student and to encourage a *"win-win"* situation?

The relationship is not just a one way learning experience, I believe my PAL professor also learns and grows with me as I do with her.

Julia

After I graduate I'll remember how to skim read and read the summary of the chapter first.

Carly

Executive Functioning:
Doing Something Right All Along

Laurie Fox, Ed.D., ET/P

Executive function is "bursting into the educational scene…The label is so new there's no consensus what to call it - it's neither disability nor a syndrome, and it's not listed in any diagnostic reference" (Meltz, 2007, pp. C4, C8). Some call it executive dysfunction while others refer more generally to executive functioning weakness or control. Practitioners are noticing it. Parents are asking about it. Professional publications and conferences are talking about it.

Executive functioning skills were recognized at least 20 years ago as a set of higher order brain processes in the prefrontal cortex area. These processes act collaboratively with other regions of the brain as co-conductors for the symphony of tasks experienced in daily life.

> Executive skills allow us to organize our behavior over time and override immediate demands in favor of longer-term goals. Through the use of these skills, we plan and organize activities, sustain attention, and persist to complete a task. Executive skills enable us to manage our emotions and monitor our thoughts in order to work more efficiently and effectively (Dawson & Guare, 2004, p.1).

Of particular focus are tasks related to planning, organizing, predicting, prioritizing, initiating, sustaining effort, and completing goal-related activities. Self-regulation, such as inhibition of distractions to task, is considered critical (Brown, 2006), as well as working memory and attention (Grodzinsky, 2006; Brown, 2007; Mapou, 2007).

The more visible signs of executive struggles are weaknesses in impulse control, such as doing what is pleasurable rather than what needs to be done, focusing on or creating distraction of greater interest, or expressing feelings about a task rather than doing it.   When symptoms of weakness manifest themselves, teachers and parents might request testing, often searching for a diagnosis of learning disabilities and/or ADHD. Yet, those with executive function or attentional impairment may

not attract much notice until middle school, high school, and in the years that follow as demands become more complex and require more independence, and expectations for individuals to serve as their own executive managers increase.

Diagnostic Challenges

Evaluation of Executive Function Disorder has multiple problems. One is discerning primary weakness. There are so many subfunctions that comprise EF that the diagnostic process can seem overwhelming. McCloskey, Perkins & Van DiViner (2008) present a developmental model of executive function capacities that clusters subfunctions hierarchically. One cluster alone, Self-Regulation, has 23 subfunctions.

Another problem is the assumption that difficulties in executive functioning can be evaluated as discreet abilities, one at a time, via standardized measures. Rather, executive functioning requires a combination of basic abilities, such as attention and memory, with higher order abilities such as inhibition and flexible mental shifting (Gioia, Isquith, Guy, & Kenworthy, 2000; Delis, Kaplan & Kramer, 2000). Identifying which abilities are weak is no easy task. Moreover, in circuitous fashion, we tend to define executive functioning as that which can be measured by tests or subtests of executive functioning. This approach

> …simply cannot encompass and measure the complex interactive nature of executive function. Put another way, in seeking a new conductor for a symphony orchestra, one could not adequately evaluate candidates simply by having them rhythmically wave their arms or hum bars of a specific instrument's part in a section of a particular symphony….One would instead need to evaluate the candidate's ability to interact dynamically with the whole….A person's ability to perform the complex, self-managed tasks of everyday life provides a much better measure of his or her executive functioning… (Brown, 2006, p. 41).

It has also long been known that results can be falsely negative since the testing session provides both structure (external executive control) and novelty, which increase attention (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994). Alternately, EF skills may well be in someone's

repertoire yet are inactivated or unsustained depending on the situation or level of interest (Brown, 2006). Performance may be interpreted inaccurately by overlooking storage and retrieval demands of the test structure itself or by analyzing only aggregate indicators (such as index or composite scores) rather than items and subtests (Fox, 2009). These add to the quandary of EF diagnosis.

Another diagnostic problem is that Executive Function Disorder does not appear in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Symptoms are subsumed, in large part, under ADHD, especially the Inattentive Type. Additionally, descriptors overlap with learning, anxiety, and mood disorders. EFD may be included in future editions, with ADD referring to attentional problems and a new term, Hyperactivity-Impulsivity Disorder, to classify behavioral or impulse control problems (Brown, 2000) (Pruitt, 2007). Until it appears in the DSM, some will not use the term or accept the diagnosis.

Input from parents and teachers is important. Suggestions by Dawson and Guare (2004) include using The Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Functions (BRIEF) parent and teacher forms, The Comprehensive Behavior Rating Scale for Children (CBRSC), The Child Behavior List - Teacher Report Form with open-ended questions, and Brown ADD Scales. Informal assessment broadens the evaluation base, too. Interviews, case histories, observation, and samples of production over time are recommended. Metacognitive reflection is a critical piece of on-going assessment as the student, with an educational therapist's support, explores how he or she thinks, feels, and acts in relation to each facet of executive functioning in real life demands. Evaluating classroom and real-life performance are key (McCloskey, et. al., 2008).

Co-Existing Conditions

To further complicate diagnosis and treatment, there are conditions that likely co-exist with executive function disorder. Forman (2006) speaks of highly prevalent comorbidity between executive function disorder and ADHD, attributable, in part, to decreased prefrontal cortex electrical activity. Models of ADHD by both Barkley and
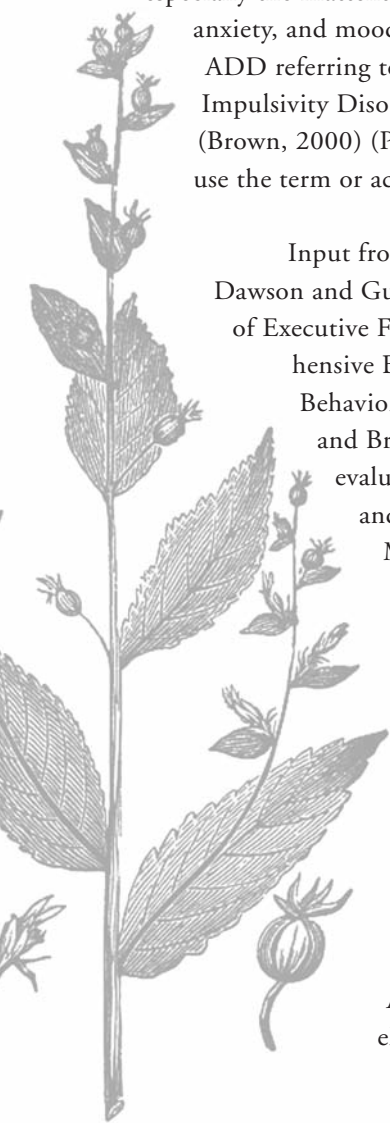
Brown attribute difficulties to developmental weaknesses in executive function. Whereas Barkley portrays the ability to inhibit (self-control) as the foundational executive function impacting ADHD (a behavioral focus), Brown postulates that clusters of regulatory functions are at the core (a more attentional focus) (Brown, 2006). Rabiner (2005) recommends routine EFD screening for those diagnosed with ADHD. Mapou (2007) uses the combined phrase: Inattention and Executive Function Disorder. Clarity on similarities and differences among executive functioning, attention, and hyperactivity-impulsivity will take more research. For now, it appears wise to assume that we don't know which might be keystone to the other or distinct from the other.

Executive functioning can be intertwined with many learning disabilities. It may hinder, for example, writing, math, following directions, independent work, and projects. Writing requires organization and planning. It also draws upon working memory (multitasking), by putting ideas on hold while expressing others and remembering writing mechanics. Math does, too, especially when previously learned facts must be accessed while processing details and steps of a problem. Difficulties with estimating steps or time needed for projects as well as with directions can have multiple roots. Initiation and sustained effort are constant demands in academia and are problematic for many who struggle concurrently with learning disabilities.

It is not uncommon to find co-existing executive problems and mood disorders. From such pioneering work as Benson's (1975) in the stress response, Hannaford's (1995) in brain and body integration, and Pert's (1997) in whole body communication networks, comes broad acceptance now that there is truly a mind–body connection. **Therefore, to view and treat a student's self-regulatory difficulties as separate from feelings of anxiety, depression, stress, fear, or failure is to likely miss the most powerful facet of the learning process itself, namely that feelings and thinking influence each other.**

Comprehensive Support

The recommended approach is comprehensive and

multimodal, taking into account the whole person (thoughts, feelings, behaviors) in the natural culture of daily life. Functioning patterns emerge over time. Those patterns can become part of an evolving organic curriculum that is flexible and adaptable to the student's changing demands, humiliations, and successes (Ungerleider, 1991).

A critical second factor is time for the change process. It requires opening up, loosening long-held habits, and letting go of familiar mindsets - safety nets woven throughout distressing experiences. Many of us have become so accustomed to working outside of our natural learning styles that we believe that learned mismatched strategies are best. Fear and anxiety are common, heavy baggage that must be addressed over and over and over again.

Each person's change process is unique. It takes self-disclosure, receptivity, and courage to let go and reach for something new. There must be a safe relationship of trust, of caring, and of commitment so that individuals will dare to try. Confidentiality and working one-to-one foster these. The process requires tender loving care, especially among those for whom shifting is a major task and the concept of change raises anxiety.

Doing Something Right All Along

It is this broad, deep, and long view that can infuse the learning relationship with honesty, practicality, and hope. Believing in the power of strength-based, individualized support has been the foundation of PAL at Curry since its history-making inception in 1970. We have taken a whole person perspective - in the context of daily life - all along. We provide a safe haven, a caring relationship, and commitment while nurturing the change process over time. Collaboration is the action; metacognitive discussion is a key process; transforming and internalizing for life are goals. The more we learn about executive functioning, the more it seems that we have been doing something right all along.

Dreams, frustrated throughout the school years, can come true if individuals learn how to successfully manage life's tasks. They become more clear as students understand their idiosyncratic, still-developing brains, as external structure becomes internal, and as success becomes a habit. These are all topics for the metacognitive relationship. Herein lie both the dream awakener and the dream toolbox.

We educational therapists, who concentrate mind, body, and soul on the whole person in the long view, dedicate ourselves to those dreams and to the dreamers who grace us with access to them.

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Executive Function:
Doing Something Right All Along

For Educators and Other Professionals

What is something critical that I learned a long time ago about helping people?
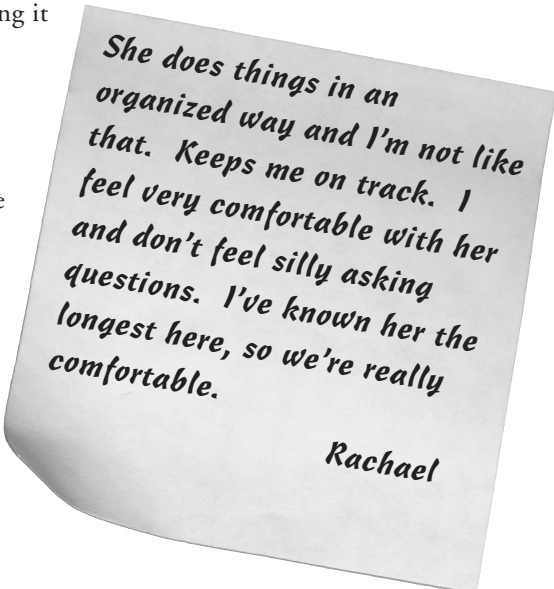
Did I lose it over time or have I been doing it all along?

For Parents or Guardians

How are my child and I alike in executive functioning?

How are we different?

She does things in an organized way and I'm not like that. Keeps me on track. I feel very comfortable with her and don't feel silly asking questions. I've known her the longest here, so we're really comfortable.

Rachael

Given these natural inclinations, what might I do - or not do - to encourage more independent conducting?

For Students

Imagining these scenarios, what did I do that helped?

I can find in 10 seconds what I need in my school bag.

I'm on schedule with my paper.

I'm in control of my attention to the task.

How We Proceed

Lori Lubeski, M.A.T.

As often, in the beginning,

like travelers in an unknown country –

testing, attempting, wondering, stumbling,

getting on the wrong train,

then finding our way.

As air traffic controllers,

being certain that each plane

is landing on the proper runway –

avoiding near misses and mid-air collisions.

As symphony conductors,

synchronizing each instrument

carefully –

in order to achieve the perfect sound.
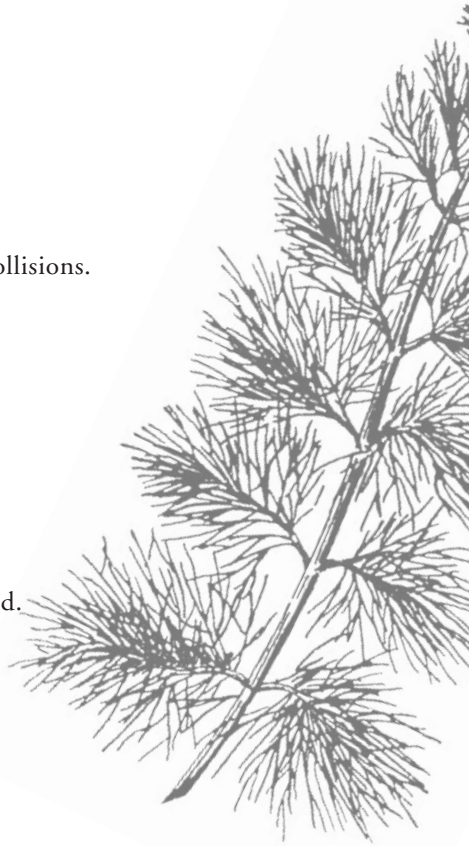
As lifeguards,

scanning the waves for arms

flailing in distress –

blowing the whistle

to warn those who may be

too far out in dangerous surf.
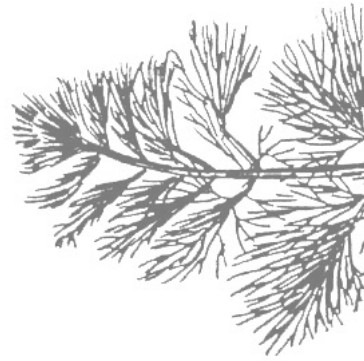
As tow truck drivers,

hooking up the damaged vehicles

after a crash –

bringing them in for repair.

And always, deftly,

as surgeons' hands

immersed in a body –

moving carefully

around the heart.
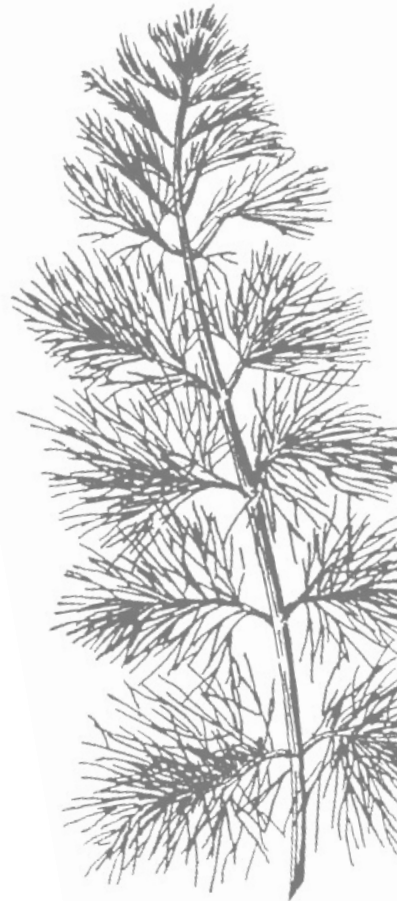
How We Proceed

For Educators and Professionals
Which image strikes a meaningful chord for me?

Thoughts on that:

For Students
Thinking of someone who has truly helped me, which image is strong and why:

Air traffic controller

Symphony conductor

Lifeguard
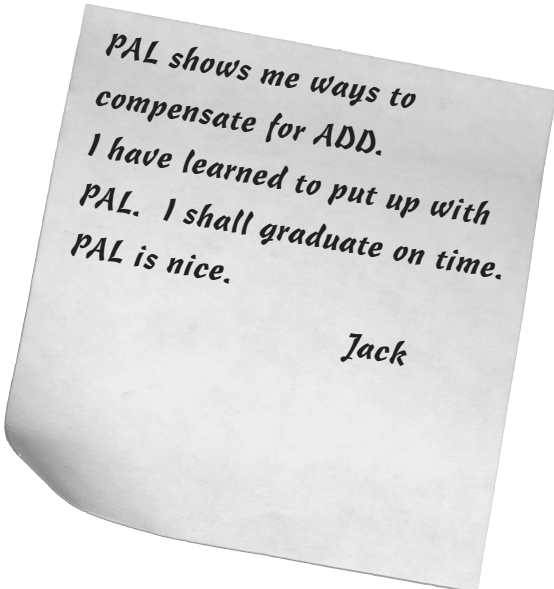
Tow truck driver

Surgeon's hands

For Parents or Guardians
Which image applies to me?

Thoughts on that:

PAL shows me ways to compensate for ADD. I have learned to put up with PAL. I shall graduate on time. PAL is nice.

Jack

An Inclusive Model for Articulating Curriculum in Higher Education

Maria Bacigalupo, Ed.D.

Teaching, teaching, teaching. How is teaching like civil engineering? Or health and safety? Not at all? Maybe teaching should be a bit more like these things. I learned that some cities and towns do research on intersections. If there are too many accidents at, for instance, a set of lights, they change the lights, perhaps making the yellow last a few seconds longer. We can all agree that the scofflaws running the red lights are wrong and that they could and should even be ticketed, so why, if they are wrong, do some cities and towns adjust the length of the light, seemingly for them? I guess it is to take responsibility for the intersection and make it work so there are fewer fatalities, fender-benders and close calls. This way, citizens can make it through the intersection safely. This works for me. I feel a little safer at these intersections, and I come out, well, more whole, if you know what I mean.

Many years ago, I lived on the North Shore of Massachusetts. There was a road in a community there where, if you were not familiar with it, you literally could get killed. Daylight hours were fine, but if you were to come off the highway onto this unlit road at night, moving along at a clip on this four-lane divided highway, you would find yourself at an unmarked T in the road. If you failed to notice that the road ended and that you had to take a right

or a left, you would crash into the wooded area dead ahead and not know what hit you. To my knowledge, at least two people died in just that way. But the town did nothing about it. In fact, the neighbors in the area finally got together and put up a sign with neon paint on it, "Road Ends Here." I remember my friends telling me that the town would not install lights because it cost $5000 to put in a set of lights. It wasn't until many years later that the town installed a traffic light. A few law suits later, and it was done. Now they take some responsibility for the intersection, and I bet a few others as well. Not then, though.

On our campus, we used to simply ignore minor accidents. Then a health and safety professor came along and said, no, we should keep track of all the accidents. You know, educate people to report any accident so someone can investigate and decide if changes could be made so that there would be no repeat. I took a spill on ice outside of the daycare center once. I had my three month old baby strapped in his car seat, and he went sailing landing upright in the seat. He cried, but he was fine. I, on the other hand, twisted my ankle, and fell on the ground. I examined the pavement more closely and lo and behold, there was a dip in it which collected water. It had iced over in the cold weather. I reported it, and fairly quickly, someone came and fixed it. Just like that.

Not so in the classroom in higher education. Many professors do not believe that they are responsible for the success or lack of it in their classrooms. Some professors tell me, I am not a teacher, I am a professor! I guess I should have started this article out with professing, professing, professing! Doesn't work, does it? That is because we do teach, and we should, most probably, be a little more responsible for our intersections of learning, at least hold ourselves responsible for a reduction in the number of fender benders and close calls at these intersections.

What would happen if we took responsibility for our intersections of learning – you know that intersection where we meet students every Tuesday and Thursday, every Monday, Wednesday or Friday, or once a week? What would happen if we noticed a slip or a fall, fixed the pavement, and were able to move on with the learning with the next learner a little more intact? What if our learning success rate was a matter of public examination?

Would we be proud of it, or not so much? Why teach and not profess? Why care so much, in the first place?

Yes, the United States is ensconced in the notion that competition is fundamental to our society, but we also, many of us, not all, believe that in a democratic, pluralistic society like the United States of America, we want everyone to be an informed citizen. We want everyone to understand that ideological positions or even votes should be based on research and facts, not only on opinion, for example. We want citizens to trust, but know how to verify, don't we? If we want our citizenry to be educated, we have an obligation to make every effort to reach each learner and to do our best to leave no learner behind, because if we are to prepare students for the diverse world they will encounter in their future jobs and professions, and if we are to prepare them for the changing world within which we live, then we truly have 'no one to waste ' (McCabe, 2000).

Another place to reflect about why we should care is the fact that we have over 4000 colleges in the USA, and without the success of our students, many of our colleges will be in danger of closing the doors. What if we took responsibility for our teaching and learning intersections, and more students succeeded? Cool idea, huh? We could all keep our jobs, which we love, and we could further educate the citizenry! Might just work. Hospital infection rates are another analogy. The Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths reports that since 2004 half of the states in the USA have laws requiring hospitals to disclose infection rates to the public[1] . By articulating our curricula, we likewise become more transparent about what we teach and whether it is taught at the introductory level, for reinforcement, or for mastery; how it relates to expectations set by the discipline as well as by the college or university; what we expect for results of the classroom experience; whether we check to see if students have learned what we thought we taught them along the way so that we can adjust instruction to help them better meet our expected results; and, whether and how we accommodate diverse learners.

In this article, I make the assertion that requiring transparent and articulated, inclusive college curricula is the first step in taking responsibility for the intersections of learning and improving the success rates for all college learners while maintaining standards and expected learning results. What is a good model for inclusive curricula in higher education and how would we articulate it? Why articulate curricula at all? Once articulated, why design it universally? Why differentiate? Why write about it, for that matter?

My own motivation emerged from the work I did over the past 30 years. This was primarily as an educational therapist with college-qualified, learning disabled college students in the Program for the Advancement of Learning (PAL) at Curry College in Milton, MA. I am also an undergraduate teacher in the education department at Curry College where I teach two multicultural courses, which help to inform my thinking about inclusion, and where I teach curriculum courses to teachers in Curry's Master of Education Program.

In my first years at Curry College, I thought it made good sense to educate professors about the array of disabilities of our students with whom we work. Those include attention, reading, math, writing, and language disorders, as well as non-verbal learning disabilities and about all of the co-existing disorders that can accompany these: depression, substance abuse, and obsessive compulsive disorder are a few. However, perhaps when I joined the Massachusetts Chapter of the Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)[2] , in the late seventies/early eighties, I began to realize that we had no hope of educating college professors about each and every disability as well as every learning disorder and accompanying potential condition. This is because their job is a more general one - to know the content. I also like to hope that they see themselves as responsible for effectively communicating their subject area and to assess student understanding of it in such a way that every student is in some meaningful way included in the curriculum, instruction, and assessment - respectfully, without having to request specific accommodations. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Enter curricular design and articulation, and enter Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) and Differentiated Instruction (DI). The former allows for the broad design and coordination of curriculum. Without this, whatever we universally design or differentiate is less effective. A professor must have an articulated curriculum before (s)he can differentiate it for a broad spectrum of learners. This involves aligning and articulating curricula that dovetail with discipline standards, and the departmental and college or university mission or goals for student learning. It also involves consciously and cooperatively scaffolding the curriculum so that entry level courses introduce and reinforce concepts, but upper level courses allow for students to be reinforced while they master concepts and skills. Without this level of cooperation and articulation, full and part-time professors whether teaching on the same campus or on various geographically dispersed campuses (and on-line) will teach essentially different courses.

Once the curriculum is articulated and scaffolded, the latter two curriculum design techniques, UDI and DI, will provide a framework for thinking about and addressing the continuum of learners within the classroom, not each individual within it. Universally designed and differentiated college classrooms make sense because they are attainable, and because they are respectful of the professor and the student. Most of all, these classrooms make sense because they succeed in getting students to live up to higher standards of understanding than they might have when they first walked into the classroom. Make no mistake, though, they are not designed to bestow A's to all students. Though nested in the larger topic of curriculum alignment and scaffolding, this paper will focus the reader more directly on why it makes sense to design and articulate differentiated curricula as well as on how to do this, and not on the alignment of curricula with discipline standards or on scaffolding.

Once the curricula is aligned and scaffolded, what UDI and DI have to offer is worthy of additional study on the part of institutions, curriculum committees, accrediting agencies and classroom professors. Although external motivations to improve curriculum design, such as accrediting agencies and institutional goals, certainly may be present[3] , the motivation to design a classroom in this way ultimately must come from within the professor and from the heart of the institution. By heart, I mean the core of the organization as well as the spirit and sense of community. Universal design is not differentiation, although the case is made here that differentiated curriculum and instruction are universally designed. Readers should understand that the Universal Design for Instruction Model originates out of the disabilities movement and yet it benefits a wide array of people (Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2001)[4]. The curriculum differentiation model grew out of the gifted education movement, and such curriculum design also benefits the entire continuum of classroom participants (Tomlinson, 1999)[5]. All American colleges and universities can benefit from a close look at each of these approaches.

Universal Design

Quite interestingly, the term universal design originates not from the field of education but from the field of architecture (Scott, et al., 2001). Relationships between the application of universal design concepts in architecture and in education can help us build an understanding of what is meant by universally designed college classrooms and why we should care. Such an examination can help us to understand the significance of universal design to the variety of learners who can be found in

any college classroom.

In the field of architectural design, the concept of universally designed buildings emerged when the law began to require that colleges and universities create buildings that are accessible to people with physical disabilities. Out of respect for people with disabilities, architects now design buildings accessible to all so that people with disabilities do not require any special adaptations to negotiate their way in and around buildings. A crucial aspect of the law concerns the fact that the building's accommodations should be such that no disabled person should need to request further adaptation. Why? When additional measures must be taken, the person with the disability must ask for assistance which causes inconvenience, embarrassment, and the perception that people with disabilities must depend upon able-bodied persons simply to gain entry to the same public spaces that able-bodied people access effortlessly. In short, universally designed structures are respectful of all those who enter and negotiate their inner spaces. The same should be true of curriculum and instruction. Those who enter the classroom, negotiate their way through the curriculum and instruction, and exit the experience ought to come and go feeling that they have been treated with a great deal of respect for their readiness to learn, their learning profiles and perhaps even their areas of interest (Tomlinson, 1999[6]).

Happily, universally designed buildings also benefited others. If you have ever broken your leg and been temporarily wheelchair-bound or on crutches, you will know how helpful ramps can be. Parents pushing children in strollers benefit from curb cuts and ramps. Elderly people and those who are not physically able to easily climb the stairs, profit from use of elevators which have become commonplace. Those of us from previous generations do not take such conveniences for granted, as they were anything but widespread in our day.

Indeed, many in the disabilities movement refer to their able-bodied friends as temporarily able-bodied. The resulting uncomfortable feeling we able-bodied people get is the point of the label. We will all be at least partially disabled in some way at some point with age if nothing else: hearing loss, sight loss, and loss of physical proficiency will prevail for most of us in the end. If our own disabilities do not motivate us, perhaps our own aging
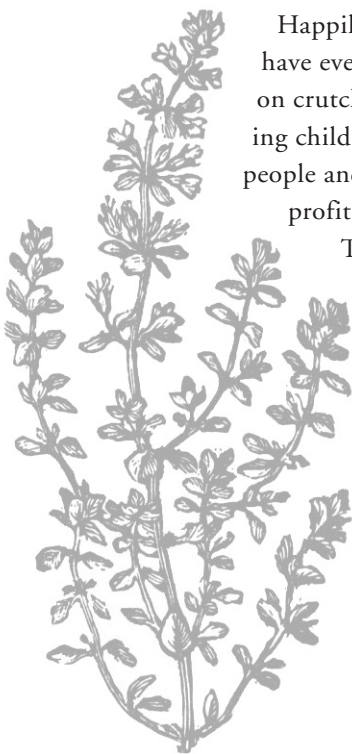
will as we become less visually able, less physically able, and in more need of a variety of services. Perhaps compassion for our loved ones who have already or who may succumb to disability will motivate us, or perhaps not, but the fact remains that access to buildings and transportation is now a well-accepted conceptual and practical reality in America and in higher education[7]. An inaccessible newly built or renovated building? Unimaginable! The same should be true of learning in all classrooms in higher education. They should be user-friendly, and respectful with the curriculum accessible to all.

The UDI model is useful as a theoretical and practical checklist to ensure that the curricula and instruction offered are equitable, flexible, simple and intuitive, perceptible, tolerant for error, require low physical effort, are respectful of size and space needs and account for learning styles and climate (See Appendix A). The research institution through which the concept of UDI is being developed is the University of Connecticut's Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability. Their work is supported through grants from the U.S. Department of Education, and the Office of Postsecondary Education. Through their FacultyWare website[8], faculty can develop and publish classroom strategies that are universally designed. The submissions are rated and juried using the principles for UDI developed by Scott, McGuire, and Shaw. While extremely useful and seminal in the field, a potential constraint with this tool is that it does not seem to provide a complete and thorough framework for course design where the user articulates the overall design of the course in a comprehensive fashion while accounting for the principles of UDI.

Differentiated Instruction

In my work in the Curry College Master of Education Program, I teach courses in developing and adapting curriculum. In so doing, I have come to realize that it is useful to merge two frameworks for thinking about effective curriculum and instruction for diverse learners: Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) and Differentiated Instruction (DI).

What are some vital aspects of the construction of curriculum and differentiation? How do we describe and discuss our curriculum? How do we articulate it in such a way that we can be sure that we are including access to the

college curriculum for all learners? It has been useful to glance at the nine principles of Universal Design for Instruction developed by the University of Connecticut group. Examining Carol Tomlinson's framework (1999) for thinking about teaching and learning will also prove to be useful. The practical framework in Appendix B called the Curriculum and Instruction Organizer demonstrates briefly how to integrate the two. (Appendix C serves as a key to the terms used in the Curriculum and Instruction Organizer).

How Do We Differentiate Instruction to Make a Course Design Universal?

Course design is the first consideration. Of what is a course comprised? Carol Tomlinson (1999) points out that teaching is comprised of three elements: 1) the content, 2) the process we use to assist students to understand the content, and 3) the product or, the way we assess whether the students have learned what we intended for them to learn.

Content

In the college-level environment, content is the meat of the course. It is the material found in the content outline. Content is made up of the textbooks, the articles, the lectures, the films, and all of the material we intend the students to learn. Our class outlines, our notes, activities and other course materials, comprise students' daily doses of course content. If the course is Statistics, for example, we might expect that descriptive statistics, probability, statistical inference, correlation, and regression analysis might be included in the content of the course. If the course is American History, there may be either chronologically arranged historical content (e.g. Europeans and others discovering the people and the land of the Americas, American Revolution, Civil War, WWI and II), or, there may be a conceptual construct for American History (e.g., American constitutional government shaping the character of American society; analysis of decisions, actions and events that influenced continuity and change in United States History; use of geographic tools and concepts as they apply to historical contexts

in order to interpret the past, understand the present and make predictions; analysis of roles individuals, businesses, and government play in the US economic system, and analysis of how the changing culture of the US is shaped by the actions and beliefs of various groups)[9]. We expect that the professor will discuss these topics and demonstrate the constructs and solutions to the topics and concepts covered. We might also expect that professors will give students the opportunity to process their understanding of these ideas in the classroom, check for student understanding, and let the data about successful or non-successful comprehension of course material inform their teaching for the following class or for the next offering of the course.

Process

Process is quite apart from content, and in higher education environments, it is often not included in classroom instruction. Process in the elementary classroom is easy to picture. Stations and centers allow students opportunities to process math. Students may have been introduced to the concept of perimeter using whole group instruction. Five stations may be set up in advance by the teacher with perimeter-related activities in increasingly difficult order. Perhaps all students start at one station and eventually proceed through all the stations. Or perhaps, the teacher asks students to start at stations that are more commensurate with their ability levels, interest areas, or learning styles. They proceed through the stations until they have experienced several perimeter-related experiences. It is within these stations where the teacher might design an opportunity for students to process the content that the teacher has previously taught. (S)he will use observational data about whether the students learned what (s)he thought (s)he had taught, then decide whether to move on, circle back, or re-teach for a small group after school.

We are comfortable and familiar with process activities that take place through homework assignments. This is where the student demonstrates to the teacher that (s)he has a grasp of the content that was taught. This is not so much product where the teacher tests the students, but process where the student has an opportunity to process the new information and try his/her hand at applying it. Another process strategy is cooperative learning activities in the classroom where the teacher establishes small groups and students manage, discuss, and report out critical aspects of the content. Learning that takes place in these small groups provides an opportunity for the teacher to observe whether the material the teacher taught prior to the small group activity was actually learned before summative testing. If in the small groups students cannot skillfully and accurately manage the material and report it out to the larger group, the teacher may circle back over the material in a different

fashion, and re-teach the concepts to ensure it was truly grasped by the students. At the university, we probably spend too much time on the content and too little time on the process, assuming that the student "got it" or "should have gotten it." We move directly to the product element of instruction where we test to see if the student "got it." Skipping the process stage is risky because without taking the time to process the information or skill, students may not have learned the material. This may cause them not only to do poorly on the summative assessment, but not having truly learned the material from one section of the course may cause students to miss the foundational concepts for the next section of the course. It creates a high stakes environment for the students who have to produce evidence they have learned the material before they have had enough practice to process it properly.

Product

I once attended a conference where a professor from a community college was presenting a lecture to a room full of professors on what turned out to be process. The session was made all the more interesting for me because the professor taught biology, one of the hard sciences. We know how well-respected those who teach the hard sciences are. This professor said that if you have given a test, and 50% of your class has received a D or below, it is your fault not the students' fault that they failed. He then allowed an enormous pregnant pause followed by, *"It is your fault because you did not check to see if the students learned what you thought you taught them."* I never forgot that moment, but it was not until years later, when I examined Tomlinson's framework for thinking about teaching and adapting curriculum and instruction that I was able to place this experience into her framework for thinking about the classroom instruction. The biology professor had taken his content and determined through summary assessment that the students had not actually learned what he thought he was teaching. Later he incorporated some process activities and embedded observational and other forms of ongoing assessment into his teaching. This was done so that he and the students could learn sooner than at the examination points if they had not mastered the information. At this point, if needed, he would re-instruct the class in some adapted fashion, giving them all another pass at the material.

Frameworks for thinking about teaching such as Tomlinson's are helpful because they simplify. Granted, one cannot really reduce teaching to a simplified model. The bottom line is that teaching is a complex activity. However, we can arrange our ideas and practices about teaching in a systematic way that may help us to articulate what we do and then to differentiate it. Tomlinson's framework for differentiating instruction goes a long way to helping us organize our thoughts and practices about teaching, even at the college level.

Professors may not yet be convinced that they should emphasize process, or should embed assessment into instruction to inform their teaching, or that they should ever re-teach course concepts. But it is hard to deny that content, process, and product exist in nearly every course taught. Bringing this construct to our conscious level of awareness helps in understanding the most criticial part of Tomlinson's construct where she characterizes how to differentiate content, process and products through readiness, interest and learning styles.

Differentiating Content, Process and Product by Addressing Readiness, Interests and Learning Styles

Readiness

Students arrive to our classrooms with differing levels of content knowledge assumed to be a prerequisite to the course, levels of readiness in their abilities to understand and process the material, and levels of the necessary skills that will be used in the course. Recognizing that there is a continuum of learners in every classroom is a beginning. Some are not challenged enough; others may be in a bit over their heads. Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1986) described in his research a concept he calls the Zone of Proximal Development. Students do best when they are moderately stretched and challenged and not so well when they are challenged too little or too much. He notes that the learning experience is not all about the stage of development at which the student is performing or even about a static conception of intellectuality, it is also about the fact that the social interaction between the learner and another person (teacher, parent, peer, etc.) makes a significant difference in bringing the learner along to the next level of understanding – a level he might not have reached without the aid of such an assistant. To include a wide array of learners, it is a good idea to plan content, process, and product opportunities for advanced learners, proficient learners, and those needing improvement. This does not mean that all students must earn A's for effort, but it does mean that all students get access to the curriculum instead of being bored by it (as in the case of the advanced learners) or being overwhelmed by it (as in the case of those learners needing improvement). In addition, and this is no small add-on, interactions with others, teachers, peers and the like make a difference in the student's being able to move to the next level of understanding. Vygotsky focuses on the collaborative and cultural nature of development; Rogoff (2003) calls it 'guided learning.' It is not controversial to say that as professors we pass on culture. But it is a bit controversial to say that we do this collaboratively, or that we guide the learning so much! Normally, we do not. We lecture (flash the green light of learning). We stop lecturing (the red light). Yet, we pay little attention to the intersection of learning – was the concept learned? Was it not? We

test. We move on. Building on Vygotsky's concept, it seems to make sense that if we interact with students, build relationships with them, and even check in on their levels of understanding from time-to-time and intervene at the right moment in time by structuring intervention opportunities, thereby guiding the learning, we can bring students to levels of understanding that would not be possible by them alone.

Interests

All students bring with them different interests in the world around them and in the particulars of subject matter. I recall being thrilled in my undergraduate studies every time I could choose a topic to investigate because I always tied it to my own interests. Interests come from life experiences. Allowing opportunities to connect abstract course material to real life experiences that help students to apply, bond with and remember the content of the course. Incorporating interest choices into the curriculum can be a meaningful way to get students to understand and care about the subject matter and apply it to their world after they leave the classroom.

Learning styles

Whether we acknowledge it or not, all classrooms have a range of learners who bring with them a range of learning styles. Some students' approach to learning is quite sequential. For some, a more random way of experiencing learning works well. Some are more concrete. Some are more abstract. Some are more verbal. Some are less verbal and more visual. Some learn best alone. Some learn best in groups. From Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences[10] construct, to Bernice McCarthy's 4MAT[11] , to Anthony Gregorc's Mind StylesTM Model[12] , numerous models for understanding learning serve as ways to incorporate varied learning styles into a college-level classroom.

Tomlinson points out that each teaching element, content, process and product, can be differentiated three ways: by readiness, interest and learning style. Thus, one could differentiate nine ways: content differentiated by readiness, interest or learning style; process differentiated by readiness, interest or learning style; or product differentiated by readiness, interest or learning style.

Building Classroom Culture

All of this is embedded in the important notion that the classroom should be a safe and trusting (respectful) environment for the

instructor and for the students. Professors should take time to establish a safe and trusting classroom environment (Gibbs, 1995). One way to do this is to provide activities where students get to know each other. Another is to offer the right to pass on answering in-class questions from time-to-time (circle back to them as well), or to provide wait time where the professor poses a question, gives students a moment to think and write down their thoughts, and then takes hands (Rowe, 1987). Community building activities such as these establish a classroom culture where students are willing to take risks in front of the professor and the other students. They also help students to get to know each other and feel comfortable taking cell numbers and meeting for lunch, something students crave. It is one small but extremely powerful way in which professors can make a cultural impact across campus by assisting in the building of interpersonal relations. With our diverse student population, it gives an opportunity for the athletes to mingle with the theater majors, the African and Caucasian American students an opportunity to mingle with students of other races, and foreign students a way to connect with others. In every undergraduate class where I have taken the time to do this, students have responded with, *"Why don't all the professors do this, Dr. B.?"*

The Curriculum and Instruction Organizer

Colleges and universities need to require articulated and scaffolded curriculum from departments, and as they do, they ought to require that the curriculum be articulated in a certain fashion, and that it be universally designed and differentiated. An organizer or template for curriculum and instruction and a model of such a template will assist faculty in offering a course which is aligned with institutional goals for student learning, and with departmental goals for student learning. It will allow for the department to scaffold the coursework, committing to introducing fundamental course concepts, reinforcing them or mastering them. Once this is done, professors can then adapt the organized curriculum, using DI and UDI to establish an inclusive classroom environment. It is important to implement a few strategies at first, not too many all at once. Once curriculum and instruction are adapted to teaching style and to the classroom, results are imminent. In time, more can be added including some content strategies, some process strategies, some embedded assessments, and differentiated product choices. Some strategies will simply become part of a repertoire for almost any teaching situation. Some will be used only in certain courses. Adapting, refining, and recharging will become part of reflective practice.

The Curriculum and Instruction Organizer (C & I Organizer) offers a more comprehensive opportunity to describe the course and its universally designed and differentiated strategies in detail. It is loosely based upon various curriculum development tools (Blythe, 1998; McTighe and Wiggins, 1999; Posner, 1996), the concept of universal design for instruction developed by Scott, et al., (2001), as well as the framework for thinking about differentiated instruction developed in 1999 by Carol Tomlinson.

As a way of getting college-level teachers started, I have attached an example of my own curriculum which I articulated using a C & I Organizer. Please see Appendix D. Not included are the lesson plans which flesh out the differentiated lessons. (Perhaps that will be for a more comprehensive future publication.) Most of the strategies that I use in my classroom are simple, easy to implement, low preparation strategies. Thinking about classroom strategies in this way, by planning and articulating each course, makes it possible to negotiate today's diverse college classrooms of today for your students to gain access to the curriculum they need. Likewise, planning our curriculum and instruction this way succeeds in assisting all students to achieve higher standards of understanding, and isn't that the point of our work with them?

The Imperative for Change in Higher Education

Thanks to the laudable and inspiring work of researchers, authors and speakers such as Carol Tomlinson (1999), Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins (1999) and Robert Marzano (1993), K-12 education in America is in the midst of making an enormous leap in the understanding of differentiated and universally designed curriculum and instruction. Changes are occurring all over the country in teacher in-service education and in the classrooms of our children. Differentiation of curriculum and instruction is a well-respected topic in K-12 education, and teachers and administrators are not only listening, but they are also beginning to change their classrooms.

They are listening in part because they recognize that K-12 in America means teaching everybody's children. More and more K-12 teachers accept and accommodate diversity. Many school leaders and teachers want to make a change in classroom instruction because they see that better access to the general curriculum by differentiating their curriculum and instruction is necessary as a path to improve scores on state-sponsored and required tests. It has been no small shift, and we at our Program for Advancement of Learning have noticed that the students we now see are

indeed more prepared than those we accepted years ago. In general, we see better readers, better writers, and better test-takers with a better knowledge bank than just eight or ten years ago. Many of us believe that that is, at least in part, due to the fact that the public schools around the entire country are taking better responsibility for teaching and learning.

We in higher education have not, however, fully made the leap to classroom access for those who experience invisible and intellectual disabilities or differences. These disabilities do not only emerge around structural barriers to the classroom, but also around teaching and learning barriers in curriculum and instruction. Let us take a moment to consider college and university student audiences in America.

It is a given that our public schools must accept, teach and have high expectations for everybody's children. However, many Americans do not think of higher education quite that way. One could make the distinction that in higher education, our young adult learners as well as our adult learners do not have to be admitted to the higher education academy, and thus, we do not have to worry about teaching all children. We will only teach the best and the brightest. But is this really so? Public and private institutions of higher education accept a wide variety of students for a myriad of reasons. Because of the civil rights legislation of 1964 which guaranteed the rights of people regardless of race, sex, national origin, or religion and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which guaranteed full participation of all those with disabilities in American society, nearly every institution of higher learning has made it its mission to provide access to all college-qualified individuals, and additionally, many pride themselves in providing access to lower income students.

Does it not enhance and complete the mission of every institution of higher education to provide better access to all those we accept? Truthfully, the image of every institution that does so is improved; for those institutions that have not opened their doors to all are viewed, at best, as incomplete in important ways. It has become accepted practice to make appropriate accommodations to our

buildings, and yet, we have much to do to provide better access to our college and university classrooms for access to the curriculum by the diverse array of individuals whom we choose to serve.

Enter transparent curriculum, aligned with standards and missions, as well as universally designed and differentiated curriculum and instruction. Like the designers of buildings with universal access, builders of universally designed classrooms, motivated by respect for the enormous range of learners we have in our classrooms, devise teaching and learning experiences to be usable by all learners without the need for additional accommodations and revisions. The desire to establish curriculum and instruction that needs no further revision by the learner is taken from the "universally designed buildings" page of the disabilities movement. It is a fundamental value of UDI that it is unacceptable to make people have to ask for a revision. This attitude or approach is proactive resulting in a plan that is truly accommodating and respectful, and one is exhilarated from the success that such approaches bring to college-level teaching.

Universally designed and differentiated classrooms routinely offer accommodations and options for anyone who can benefit. These classrooms take the approach that specifically accommodating each and every learner's individual needs is not possible or even necessary. It is not possible to educate professors in every disability or difference because it is not especially practical for them to learn all there is to know about individual learners, all there is to know about their particular accommodations, all on a semester by semester basis, with new class enrollees each term. Thus, the Tomlinson approach of adopting respectful, stimulating, challenging and accessible curriculum and instruction for all, coupled with the Scott, McGuire, and Shaw approach of equitable, flexible, and perceptible use (etc.) is much more compatible with the college professor's primary interest and goal: know thy subject and enthusiastically (and successfully) pass on the knowledge of such subject to the next generation. Universally designed and differentiated classrooms and transparent, articulated curricula are respectful of the continuum of learners found in any college classroom. They help us to raise the standards by allowing access to the college curriculum to a wide array of diverse learners, and by employing unique and inspiring curriculum development and teaching methods which help us to help students to better achieve the goals we set out for them. They help us to take responsibility for the intersections of learning that occur in courses, and in that way to raise the standards through techniques that result in deepened levels of understanding of the subject matter by providing access to the curriculum through readiness points, interest channels, and accommodations of differing learning styles.

Colleges and universities must begin to require that departments align their curricula to discipline standards and their departmental and college or university missions and goals for student learning. They should require that departments scaffold the articulated course work so that freshman courses cover concepts and skills at the introductory level, but upper level courses cover concepts and skills that are reinforced at more abstract levels and even mastered so that all professors, full and part-time, more closely subscribe to the plan. Doing so will provide an institution with a common language addressing teaching and learning, a common framework and vocabulary for understanding, discussing, writing about and even improving college and university teaching and learning. It will provide a framework for articulating curricula that is respectful of and accessible to all learners by bringing to the conscious level of awareness and putting down in writing a commitment to differentiated instruction and universal design. Why bother? Because our students and our institutions will be better for it. We have an obligation to make every effort to reach each learner and in actuality leave no worthy college student behind. Not only is this a moral imperative, it is a smart one, too.

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[1] http://www.hospitalinfection.org/. Retrieved 11.9.2008.

[2] "AHEAD is the premiere professional association committed to full participation of person with disabilities in postsecondary education."
http://www.ahead.org/about.php

[3] Accrediting agencies and institutional goals are among the compelling motivations (external to the classroom) for curriculum design and articulation as well as for inclusion of all learners.

[4] For complete information about the theory and framework behind Universal Design, see http://www.facultyware.uconn.edu/udi_information.cfm.

[5] For complete information about the theory and framework behind Differentiation, see http://www.caroltomlinson.com/.

[6] The framework for differentiation (content, process, product, each differentiated by readiness, interests and learning styles) is Carol Tomlinson's theory.

[7] Federal and state funds cannot be accessed by colleges and universities that do not plan for access to new buildings or even to remodeled buildings.

[8] http://www.facultyware.uconn.edu/home.cfm

[9] These history and government concepts are from the Rockwood School District, Eureka, MO.
http://www.rockwood.k12.mo.us/lafayette/socialstudies/Main%20Dept%20Folder/LearnTargets/americanhist.pdf Retrieved October 31, 2008.

[10] For information on Howard Garner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, see:
http://pzweb.harvard.edu/PIs/HG.htm
[11] For information on Bernice McCarthy's 4MAT, see:
http://www.aboutlearning.com/

[12] For information on Anthony Gregorc's Mind StylesTM Model, see:
http://gregorc.com/

Appendix A:

The 9 Principles of Universal Design for Instruction[©]

Principle	Definition	Example(s)
Principle 1: Equitable use	Instruction is designed to be useful to and accessible by people with diverse abilities. Provide the same means of use for all students; identical whenever possible, equivalent when not.	Provision of class notes on-line. Comprehensive notes can be accessed in the same manner by all students, regardless of hearing ability, English proficiency, learning or attention disorders, or notetaking skill level. In an electronic format, students can utilize whatever individual assistive technology is needed to read, hear or study the class notes.
Principle 2: Flexibility in use	Instruction is designed to accommodate a wide range of individual abilities. Provide choice in methods of use.	Use of varied instructional methods (lecture with a visual outline, group activities, use of stories, or web board based discussions) to provide different ways of learning and experiencing knowledge.
Principle 3: Simple and intuitive	Instruction is designed in a straightforward and predictable manner, regardless of the student's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level. Eliminate unnecessary complexity.	Provision of a grading rubric that clearly lays out expectations for exam performance, papers, or projects; a syllabus with comprehensive and accurate information; or a handbook guiding students through difficult homework assignments.
Principle 4: Perceptible information	Instruction is designed so that necessary information is communicated effectively to the student, regardless of ambient conditions or the student's sensory abilities.	Selection of text books, reading material, and other instructional supports in digital format or on-line so students with diverse needs (e.g., vision, learning, attention, English as a Second Language) can access materials through traditional hard copy or with the use of various technological supports (e.g., screen reader, text enlarger, on-line dictionary).
Principle 5: Tolerance for error	Instruction anticipates variation in individual student learning pace and prerequisite skills.	Structuring a long-term course project so that students have the option of turning in individual project components separately for constructive feedback and for integration into the final product; provision of on-line "practice" exercises that supplement classroom instruction.

Appendix A:

The 9 Principles of Universal Design for Instruction©

Principle	Definition	Example(s)
Principle 6: Low physical effort	Instruction is designed to minimize nonessential physical effort in order to allow maximum attention to learning. Note: This principle does not apply when physical effort is integral to essential requirements of a course.	Allow students to use a word processor for writing and editing papers or essay exams. This facilitates editing of the document without the additional physical exertion of rewriting portions of text (helpful for students with fine motor or handwriting difficulties or extreme organization weaknesses while providing options for those who are more adept and comfortable composing on the computer.)
Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use	Instruction is designed with consideration for appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulations, and use regardless of a student's body size, posture, mobility, and communication needs.	In small class settings, use of a circular seating arrangement to allow students to see and face speakers during discussion— important for students with attention deficit disorder or who are deaf or hard of hearing.
Principle 8: A community of learners	The instructional environment promotes interaction and communication among students and between students and faculty.	Fostering communication among students in and out of class by structuring study groups, discussion groups, e-mail lists, or chat rooms; making a personal connection with students and incorporating motivational strategies to encourage student performance through learning students' names or individually acknowledging excellent performance.
Principle 9: Instructional climate	Instruction is designed to be welcoming and inclusive. High expectations are espoused for all students.	A statement in the class syllabus affirming the need for class members to respect diversity in order to establish the expectation of tolerance as well as encourage students to discuss any special learning needs with the instructor; highlight diverse thinkers who have made significant contributions to the field or share innovative approaches developed by students in the class.

* Note: From *Principles of Universal Design for Instruction* by S. S. Scott, J. M. McGuire, and S. F. Shaw, 2001, Storrs, CT: Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability, University of Connecticut. Copyright 2001. Reprinted with permission.

Maria T. Bacigalupo, Ed.D. and Margaret Dougherty, Ed.D.

Appendix B

Page 1: Cover Page

Curriculum *and* Instruction

Organizer

An Articulated Model for Higher Education

Educator Name: __Maria Bacigalupo__   Date: __Spring 2007__

1. Course Name: __*Developing Community Circles*__   Level: __Sophomore+__

2. Student Audience: __*Children, Youth and Community Majors and Students from Any Major Taking Multicultural Education Liberal Arts Requirement*__

3. Curriculum: √ Inclusive Curriculum   √Interdisciplinary Curriculum   Subject-Centered   Other, specify: _____

4. Principle/ Supplementary Focus: (Mark "P" for Principle Focus and "S" for Supplementary Focus.)
     √Needs of Learner   and/or   √Needs of Subject   and/or   √Needs of Society   and/or   Needs of Milieu

5. **B. Connection to University Mission:**

" … the institutional mission of the College is to develop liberally educated persons who are able to gain and to apply knowledge humanely, intelligently, and effectively in a complex and changing world. … To achieve its mission, Curry College promotes individual, intellectual and social growth by engaging its students in achieving these educational goals… to think critically… to listen, speak, read and write well… to articulate an interdependence of individuals, family, societies… to examine value systems… to make informed choices with awareness of responsibilities… to increase tolerance and appreciation of diversity… to access information… to create change and to prepare for lifelong learning." *Curry College Catalog, 2008-2009* (UDI #8)

6. **Connection to Standards from the Discipline: National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Draft Standards)**

Standard 1. Promoting Child Development and Learning: Students use their understanding of young children's [human] characteristics and needs, and of multiple interacting influences on children's development and learning, to create environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for all children

1a. *Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs*
- Coursework in child development, emphasizing current research and its applications

1c. *Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments*

Standard 2. Building Family and Community Relationships: Students know about, understand, and value the importance and complex characteristics of children's families and communities. They use this understanding to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families and to involve all families in their children's development.

2a. *Knowing about and understanding family and community characteristics*
- Attention to growth in understanding of and respect for diversity, as well as assessment of students' foundational understanding of how children's development and learning may be influenced by family and community contexts.

2b. *Supporting and empowering … communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships*

Standard 3. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families: Students know about and understand the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment. They know about and use systematic observations … in a responsible way, in partnership with … other professionals, to positively influence children's development and learning.

3a. *Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment*

3b. *Knowing about and using observations…and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches*
- Opportunities to learn and practice practical uses of assessment to inform daily planning for children

Standard 4. Teaching and Learning: Students integrate their understanding of and relationships with children and families; their understanding of … effective approaches to teaching and learning; and their knowledge of academic experiences that promote positive development and learning for all young children.

4a. *Knowing, understanding and using positive relationships and supportive interactions*
- … well –designed assignments that prompt students to reflect on and plan how to develop and maintain positive relationships with young children, including those with diverse backgrounds and abilities.

4b. *Knowing, understanding, and using effective approaches, strategies, and tools for early education*
- Opportunities to begin and learn and practice a variety of teaching techniques --- though observations [and] simulated teaching…

4c. *Knowing and understanding the importance, central concepts, inquiry tools, and structures of content areas or academic disciplines [classroom and community development and management]*

4d. *Using own knowledge and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum to promote positive outcomes*
- Opportunities to see multiple models of excellent curriculum through direct observation or videos.
- Programs expectations for students' activity plans or project plans call for discussion of meaningfulness and challenge.

Page 2 (Know and Understand): Content:

Bloom's cognitive taxonomy: (What will the student know/understand as a result of the course? Facts or concepts? Foundational knowledge, etc?) specific goals from the discipline, and plans to differentiate this content for readiness, interest and/or learning style.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Content: Connection to College/University mission (goals for student learning).	Content: Connection to Discipline Standards	Content: Essential, student-oriented Questions:	Content/Product: Intended learning results (ILRs):	Sequence: Will the content be Introduced, Reinforced, or Mastered?	Process: Learning concepts and activities employed to meet intended results in column D.*	Process: Embedded Assessment to determine if students learned what was taught.	Product: Summative assessments.*	Differentiated Instruction and UDI Principle Applied *
"…to develop liberally educated persons who are able to gain … knowledge humanely, intelligently, and effectively in a complex and changing world…" "…to think critically…to …read … well… to examine value systems… to increase tolerance and appreciation of diversity…to access information …to prepare for lifelong learning." *Curry College Catalog 2008-2009*	**Standard 1. Promoting Child Development and Learning:** 1a. *Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs* (Coursework in child development, emphasizing current research and its applications) **Standard 2. Building Family and Community Relationships:** 2a. *Knowing about and understanding family and community characteristics* (Attention to growth in understanding of and respect for diversity, as well as assessment of students' foundational understanding of how children's development and learning may be influenced by family and community contexts.	**Essential Questions:** What's the social situation got to do with it? What's group development got to do with it? What is it about me that you don't know or understand? **Reading Matter:** Aronson, E. (2000). *Nobody Left to Hate: Teaching Compassion After Columbine.* NY: Worth Publishers. Gibbs, J. (1995). *Tribes: A New Way of Learning and Being Together.* Sausalito, CA: CentreSource Systems. Spradlin, L. K. and Richard D. Parsons (2008). *Diversity Matters: Understanding Diversity in Schools.* Belmont, CA: Thomson Higher Education.	Students will understand the profound influence of the social situation. Students will know and understand the three stages of group development. Students will understand the impact of historical and cultural differences among various groups.	Introduced and / or reinforced Introduced Introduced and reinforced	**Concepts:** Normal people: Abnormal situations. Root vs. Peripheral causes and interventions. The importance of reflection/embedded assessment Social Psychology Research: Milgam and other studies Three stages of group development Listening attentively Plusses of positive and respectful group climat Marginalized Status Minority Fam. Attitudes, academic expectations, and treatment in schools. Native American, Asian Am, Laatino/a Am, African Am, Working Class, Women's, Gay and Lesbian, Disability Stories The Achievement Gap **Films (UDI#2) &Learning Activ's:** Film: Race Film: Bowling/ Columbine Film: The In-Crowd and Social Cruelty Film: Title IX clip Film: Gay Youth Film: Clips from Powerball Literary Tea Party (UDI #1)	Reading Logs Observation of in-class activities and discussions. Tickets out (UDI #5) Distribute Exam Study Sheet on first day, review periodically, and teach concepts directly (UDI #3)	Midterm	For plans to differentiate Columns C, F, G and/or H for readiness, interest and/or learning style, as well as additional UDI principles addressed, see example of several lesson plans attached.*
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Page 3 Skills (Listen, Think, Speak, Teach, Manage Groups): Bloom's cognitive taxonomy: (What will the student be able to communicate or do as a result of the course? Write, use technology, think, speak or write abstractly or conceptually at the level of analysis, synthesis or evaluation, etc?)

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Content: Connection to College/University mission (goals for student learning).	Content: Connection to Discipline Standards	Content: Essential, student-oriented Questions:	Content/Product: Intended learning results (ILRs):	Sequence: Will the content be Introduced, Reinforced, or Mastered?	Process: Learning activities employed to meet intended results in column D.*	Process: Embedded Assessment to determine if students learned what was taught.	Product: Summative assessments.*	Differentiated Instruction and UDI Principle Applied*
"...to develop liberally educated persons who are able to ... apply knowledge humanely, intelligently, and effectively in a complex and changing world ...to listen, ...to speak...to make informed choices with awareness of responsibilities ...to increase tolerance and appreciation of diversity...to access information...t o create change and to prepare for lifelong learning." *Curry College Catalog, 2008-2009*	**Standard 2. Building ...** Relationship:[Students] use... understanding to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families [and classrm or group community]... 2b. *Supporting and empowering ... communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships* **Standard 3. Observing...** 3b. ... *using observations... and other... assessment tools... approaches...* Opportunities to ... practice practical uses of assessment to inform daily planning ... **Standard 4. Teaching and Learning:** 4a... *using positive relationships and supportive interactions... and* well –designed assignments that prompt students to reflect on and plan how to develop and maintain positive relationships with [diverse groups]... 4b. ... *using effective approaches, strategies, and tools* --- through observations [and] simulated teaching... 4d. *Using ...resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful... curriculum to promote positive outcomes:* Opportunities to see multiple models of excellent [cl. Mngmt] curriculum through direct observation ...[through] disc. of meaningfulness	**Additional Reading Matter:** One additional (optional) book of choice for those writing papers. Others may choose to take a final. (UDI #2) **Essential Questions:** What's listening got to do with it? What's appreciation got to do with it? What's respect got to do with it? How can we take responsibility for developing a safe and trusting group environment?	(UDI #8 & 9) Students will lead a community circle activity using *Tribes* activities – adapted as needed for the intended audience – which will increase tolerance and/or appreciation of diversity. Students will be able to pro-actively address conflict and difference in a group by presenting an activity that addresses the 'influence' stage of group development. Optional in lieu of final: Students will read an additional book of their choice from a prepared list and write a paper on the book applying course concepts throughout.	Introduced Introduced Reinforce concepts	(UDI #7 & 8) Participation in 'inclusion &community' stage Tribes activities and group energizers where students will, in an authentic fashion, participate in inclusion activities and learn to know, and interact with all classmates. Participation in authentically developing class agreements around making a safe and trusting teaching and learning environment. Students will lead Tribes activities at the 'influence' stage of development where students have an opportunity to positively teach conflict resolution skills and address group conflict. Syllabus contains diversity statement (UDI #9)	Reading Logs Tickets Out	Paper Or Multiple Choice and Short Answer Essay Final (UDI #2)	For plans to differentiate Columns C, F, G and/or H for readiness, interest and/or learning style, as well as additional UDI principles addressed, see example of several lesson plans attached.*

Maria T. Bacigalupo, Ed.D. and Margaret Dougherty, Ed.D.

Page 4 Values/Affective Responses:

Bloom's affective taxonomy: Working and/or contributing Goals (Will the student learn collateral skills such as how to organize or study effectively; to perform some civic responsibility; to respond to and value art, etc?)

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Content: Connection to College/University mission (goals for student learning).	Content: Connection to Discipline Standards	Content: Essential, student-oriented Questions:	Civic Responsibility: Intended learning results (ILRs); Collateral Skills: Intended learning results (ILRs)	Sequence: Will the content be Introduced, Reinforced, or Mastered?	Process: Learning activities employed to meet intended results in column D, and plans to differentiate these for readiness, interest and/or learning style.	Process: Embedded Assessment to determine if students learned what was taught.	Product: Summative assessments & differentiation plans for readiness, interest and/or learning style.	UDI Principle Applied
...to articulate an interdependence of ... societies...to examine value systems...to make informed choices with awareness of responsibilities...to increase tolerance and appreciation of diversity.... to create change ... *Curry College Catalog, 2008-2009*	**Standard 2. Building Family and Community Relationships**: Students value the importance and complex characteristics of children's families and communities. **Standard 4. Teaching and Learning:** Programs expectations for students' activity plans or project plans call for discussion of meaningfulness and challenge.	**Essential Questions:** What responsibility do I have?	Civic Values: Students will articulate an affective appreciation of inclusion, conflict resolution, interdependence, responsibility, tolerance, and appreciation of the human diversity they may encounter in any work or group setting. Collateral Skills: Students will discuss the meaningfulness of the course content and skills as well as the challenges ahead.	Introduced and Reinforced Introduced and Reinforced	All films and clips will reinforce the values of tolerance, appreciation, and interdependence. Through participation in Tribes inclusion and other activities, discussions and reflections, students will have an opportunity to discuss the personal meaning and challenges of taking responsibility for respectful classroom and/or work environments	Reading logs Appropriate participation in Tribes activities (UDI #8&9) Discussion in optional paper and tickets out	Final paper or comprehensive multiple choice and short answer essay final	For plans to differentiate Columns C, F, G and/or H for readiness, interest and/or learning style, as well as additional UDI principles addressed, see example of several lesson plans attached.*

Appendix C
C&I Organizer Key

Bloom's Cognitive and Affective Taxonomies:	**Benjamin Bloom's Cognitive and Affective Taxonomies** are useful for thinking about and holding oneself accountable for teaching at all the levels of thinking and feeling that are appropriate for the subject matter being taught. The C & I Organizer is broken into three categories: Page two asks the professor to address the fundamental building blocks of knowledge and understating. Page three asks the professor to articulate whether there are skills taught in the course (writing, computational, technical) and whether the course addresses higher level thinking skills such as analysis, etc. Page four asks professors to articulate whether the course will address the work habits and/or affective realms: working in groups, values, art or literature appreciation, etc.
Collateral Learning:	**Collateral Learning** is learning that occurs, but is not part of the primary focus of the course, and it may not be part of the explicitly stated goals. (Ex: In a management class, the professor requires cooperative learning teams. The students refine their strengths at working together collaboratively, but this learning, which occurs along with the classroom and textbook learning, is a consequence of the management course.) It is a good idea to bring collateral learning opportunities to the students' and the professor's conscious levels of awareness, to explicitly articulate them, and, in at least some small way, to grade them. Often they are habits of mind which are life-long learning goals of education. Teach these skills. Do not assume they are present in students.
Embedded Assessment:	**Embedded Assessments** are seeded within the educational experiences for the purpose of guiding a developmental learning process that allows students to improve before being summarily assessed. This form of assessment informs the professor about whether (the students learned what (s)he thought (s)he taught. In this way, embedded assessments inform instruction, that is, they inform the teacher as to how (s)he might adjust the teaching plan to better achieve intended student learning results. Common forms of embedded assessment are observational assessment, metacognitive assessment, reflections, journals, and drafts in the portfolio process.
Essential Questions:	**Essential questions** (EQs) are the three or four broadly stated and overarching questions which are directly related to the course and that the professor poses in a student-oriented format. These questions guide all instruction in the unit or course. They are directly connected to the course rationale.
ILRs:	**Intended Learning Results** (ILRs) are the goals, objectives and/or outcomes that the teacher expects students to achieve by the end of the unit/course. They start with the phrase: "The student will…" ILRs are aligned with the essential questions.
Principle/Supplementary Focus: ♦ Needs of the Subject ♦ Needs of the Learner ♦ Needs of the Milieu ♦ Needs of Society	**Foci:** The two most frequently expressed primary foci are the needs of the "subject" and the needs of the "learner." The needs of the subject are most primarily considered by content area teachers. Since nearly all teachers must work with a range of learners in their classrooms, usually, the needs of the learner is at least a supplementary focus, but in courses which address basic skills such as pre-college-level math or writing courses, they may be a primary focus. Occasionally, the needs of the milieu prevail as in a freshman year courses where teaching and learning about school culture might be strong. The needs of society prevail or come into play as a supplementary focus when teaching students to be good citizens is a goal of the unit/course as in a mentoring or conflict resolution course.
Sequence:	**Sequence:** Will the course introduce, reinforce or provide opportunities to master course concepts, skills and/or affective values, work habits or appreciation of art or literature?
Summative Assessment:	**Summative assessment** is appropriate in most classes. It usually occurs after students have had exposure to the material and an opportunity to master the material. It often occurs at the end of a unit. Traditional summative assessments are papers, finals, projects, and exams.

Appendix D
Readiness and Interest

(Use this to plan a portion of an entire course or course concept rather than one lesson.)

Name: Bacigalupo   Course: ED 2150

*What will be differentiated?   X Content,   Process   or   Product
Briefly Describe: Reading activities

 *How will it be differentiated? X   Readiness   Interest or   Learning Style

Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement
Literary Tea Party: Invite them to take the challenge of the additional book and paper instead of the final exam. Guide them to an appropriate selection at the advanced level. List options on an Amazon wish list and assist students to locate a book that dovetails with their interests as well as readiness levels.	**Literary Tea Party:** Invite them to take the challenge of the additional book and paper instead of the final exam. Guide them to an appropriate selection at the proficient level. . List options on an Amazon wish list and assist students to locate a book that dovetails with their interests as well as readiness levels.	Recommend **Kurzweil** for reading Recommend **Dragon Naturally Speaking** for written composition **Literary Tea Party:** 'Invite' students into the reading process by showing a video clip of the author of *Nobody Left to Hate*. Explain the title of the book and direct them to one of the major premises expressed in the book. Invite them to take the option of the additional book and paper instead of the final exam. Guide them to an appropriate selection at the needs improvement level that also provides additional conceptual development re course topics at their level of understanding. List options on an Amazon wish list and assist students to locate a book that dovetails with their interests as well as readiness levels.

Maria T. Bacigalupo   4/27/2009

Appendix E

Learning Styles
Multiple Intelligences / Gardner

(Use this to plan a portion of an entire course or course concept rather than one lesson.)

Name: Bacigalupo   Course: ED 2150

*What will be differentiated?   ___Content,   X_Process   or   X____   Product
Briefly Describe:

 *How will it be differentiated?_____Readiness   _Interest or   X____Learning Style

Students will present tribes activities Students will work in small and large groups **Verbal**	Students will do Tribes activities that will occasionally involve visual and spatial activities **Visual/Spatial**
Interpersonal Group Activities Jigsaws	**IntraPersonal** Midterm and Final Reflections Tribes activities reflections

Maria T. Bacigalupo   4/27/2009

An Inclusive Model for Articulating Curriculum in Higher Education

For Parents or Guardians

Here is a situation from my own life where those in charge seemed prepared for all kinds of learners:

How that helped me:

How that helped others:

For Educators and Other Professionals

What might I rethink as I review the 9 Principles of Universal Design for Instruction:

I know I have a learning disability and I always will, but PAL shows you how to work around it and how to be successful in different ways.

Anthony

1. Equitable use
2. Flexibility
3. Simple and intuitive
4. Perceptible information
5. Tolerance for error
6. Low physical effort (or, for some, need for movement)
7. Size and space
8. A community of learners
9. Instructional climate

As I prepare for teaching, what can I imagine doing to differentiate instruction for a wide range of learning styles and needs in terms of:
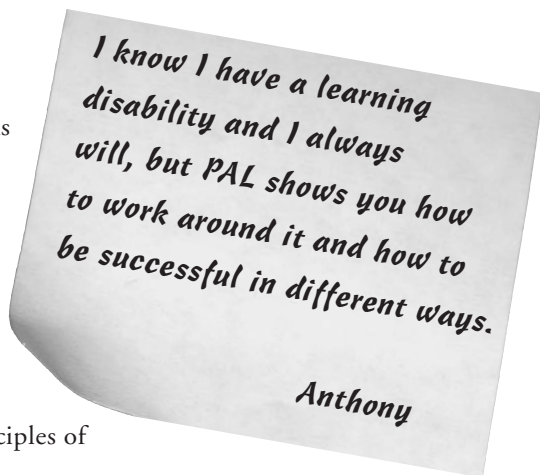Content

The process toward deep understanding

How (and when) I might assess whether students have learned what I'd intended

For Students

Here are 3 things I wish teachers would do in class that would help a lot of us:

Learning Conversations that Foster Metacognitive Development: *A Magician's Work*

Susan W. Pennini, Ph.D.

Most magicians are simply people who have refined more than the rest of us the art of understanding how the world works. They know the fault lines, the clefts, the barely visible seams in what we call "real." In working their magic they simply scramble the line between imagination and reality, for they know that the greatest illusion is to believe we have no illusions (Daloz, 1986, p.19).

As the number of students with documented learning differences (LD) has increased on college campuses, so has the opportunity to better understand and serve this population. Students with LD have an array of strengths and competencies that enhance the community of scholars. They may easily understand and verbally articulate concepts presented in class; they might be gifted poets and artists; they might be able to visualize mathematical formulas and theories related to physics; their intuitive strengths in social interactions may help them become leaders on campus. However, they also bring primary and secondary problems directly associated with the diagnosed LD that negatively impact their academic and personal lives (Brinkerhoff, McGuire, & Shaw, 2002; Wong, 1996).

Many students with LD are knowledgeable about the "label" they have been given that speaks to their weaknesses, but have little understanding of the cognitive strengths they have that will guide them through the challenges they will encounter in higher education. Their lack of self-understanding has significant effect on both their academic performance and self-concept (Brinkerhoff, et al., 2002; Pennini & Peltz, 1995; Vogel, Leonard, Scales, Hayeslip, & Hermanson (1998). Research also suggests that helping adults with LD to develop self-understanding is foundational to empowering them to navigate the academic and psycho/social challenges they

encounter on college campuses. It is within the safe context of a mentoring relationship, that goes far beyond the boundaries of a conventional teacher/student relationship, that the complexities of the damaged self can be explored (Brinkerhoff, et al., 2002; Daloz, 1999; Margolis & McCabe, 2003; Price, 2002).

The term mentor has only recently resurfaced to define a unique learning relationship which is characterized by a concern for the academic as well as the overall development of the student. In the Greek mythology, *The Odyssey*, Mentor was the name of a longtime friend of Odysseus who was given the responsibility of looking after his son, Telemachus. Mentor served as an instructive guide for the young man as he searched for his father, Odysseus. In this role, Mentor served as a classic transitional figure, assisting Telemachus on his journey from youth to establishing his identity in adulthood.

Mythology attributed the success of Mentor to magic; educators attribute the success of the mentor to expertise and understanding. I believe that the magic of a mentor dwells in that place where expertise and connectedness abide; where technique and relationship exist. At the heart of this relationship is the mentor's ability to help her/his students understand themselves better so they can reach their goals as well as achieve accomplishments they may never have dreamed of before.

Metacognitive Development

To understand how a mentor helps a student develop metacognitively, we first must understand metacognition. The study of metacognition as a separate entity from cognition was begun by John Flavell. He suggested that metacognition involves, "One's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them" (Flavell, 1976, p.2).

Later, Brown (1987) described metacognitive knowledge as "the understanding of knowledge, and understanding that can be reflected in either overt use or description of the knowledge in question" (p.65). Central to both of these definitions is the notion that metacognition involves two distinct forms of competence: declarative knowledge about the cognitive system, "knowing that," and effective regulation and control of that system "knowing how." For example, a student might know or believe that he has a poor memory (declarative knowledge). As a result, he has learned mnemonic strategies to improve his ability to recall (procedural knowledge).

A second component of Flavell's conception of metacognition is metacognitive experience. A metacognitive experience can be a simple or complex experience in which a person focuses on where s/he is in the process. For example, a person taking an exam might sit back after the first half that involved multiple choice questions and wonder whether s/he should approach the essay portion differently. It appears that metacognitive experiences serve to inform ongoing activities as well as inform metacognitive knowledge. It also seems likely that metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, and cognition are constantly eliciting and informing one another during any cognitive task.

A Mentor's "Magic"

I conducted a case study of the work of Diane, and three of her students, Jacob, Christine, and Matthew to better understand how a mentor of college students with LD helps students develop metacognitively. I chose Diane because I knew from my many years of work with her that she was committed to fostering metacognitive development while working with her students. I had interviews with each of the participants and observed sessions in which Diane worked with her students to help them meet the demands of their college courses and experiences. When I began my research, I was focused on understanding how a mentor facilitates metacognitive growth for college students with LD. As I began framing the data for the case study, I realized that the language I was using, like the language in the literature, was too sterile, too focused on cognition alone to describe what I was learning. Jacob, Matt, and Christine spoke of her in tones of reverence and awe. Each told how she was able to do what no one had done before, help them succeed. Magic! "Mentors give us the magic that allows us to enter the darkness: a talisman to protect us from evil spells, a gem of wise advice, a map, and sometimes simply courage" (Daloz, 1999, p.17). Those qualities were clearly present when listening to and watching Diane and her students.

Sitting in the front seat of the theatre, the audience sees the magician effortlessly wave the wand or use the magic cloak and think it is what makes the magic. If the magician invites you back stage to watch, you see more clearly what is happening. The magician uses the wand and the magic cloak to capture and focus your attention while she orchestrates the real magic. From your new vantage point you see that the true magic lies in her

ability to perform very complicated techniques using the natural to create what appears to be the supernatural. Most magicians will neither allow you to watch from behind the scenes nor explain their magic; but some must because, as talented and intuitive as they are, their expertise is born from the study of the art and science of their magic, as well as their years of observing their mentors and practicing, practicing, practicing. Diane and her students allowed me to observe and talk about her magical ability to nurture and support their personal growth and academic success, and the experience helped me to better understand how she is able to make it happen.

From the Side Wing

As I analyzed the data from my "side wing" vantage point, I gradually shifted my thinking. Rather than equating metacognitive development with coming to understand oneself as a learner as Flavell and others had suggested, I realized that understanding oneself as a learner is significantly more. It integrates the metacognitive, developmental, and emotional dynamics. None of these constructs alone suffice; nor can they be considered separately. They must be integrated. An effective mentor is able to scramble the lines between the artificial clefts and seams theorists have created between these aspects of an individual; understands how they are brought together to create a whole person, and knows what s/he must do to nurture the student's understanding as a learner.

Diane used the term "learning conversations" to describe the ongoing interactions. I recognized characteristics of Vygotsky's (1978) notion of shaping inner language within the "zone of proximal development." He spoke of those skills that are just beyond a student's ability to accomplish independently, yet are accomplished in cooperation with a mentor, as falling in the zone of proximal development. Mentors become models for developing inner language that assesses and directs activity when approaching new fields of learning that are just beyond the student's capability. This is best accomplished through a scaffolding technique which begins with the mentor initially taking responsibility for the task and gradually transferring the control of the activity to the developing learner by modeling the language that guides the activity. Though Diane's learning conversations had characteristics of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, it also seemed to have more breadth and depth. Vygotsky's
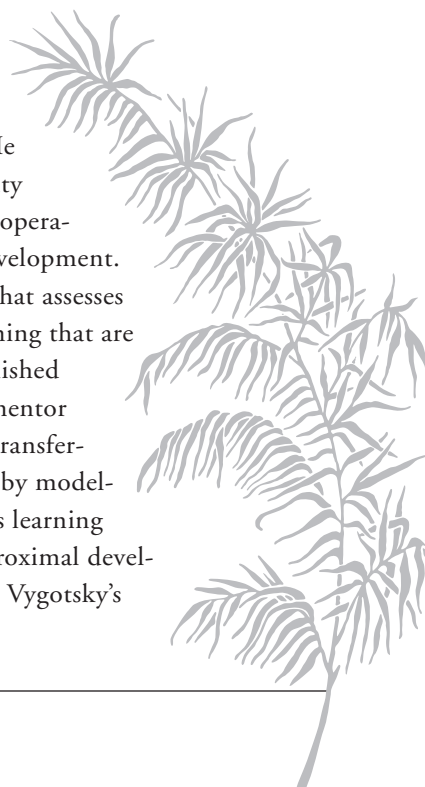
description of navigating the zone of proximal development seemed to have the behavioral starkness of the science of cognition. The interactions Diane had with her students had a deep, rich description of the type of dialogue Michelle Gabow, another mentor of college students in PAL, described in her writings about her work with students.

> The power of dialogue allows us to both embrace our inner strength and shed a constricting skin. Too often in our teaching, in our psychology, in our politics, we look for the cure, the easy answer-a learning strategy, Prozac, taking women off welfare. Learning differently is a powerful tool of exploration-painful, exciting, brilliant. The quality of dialogue opens the door to a student's abyss and her treasure (Gabow, 1995, p.154).

Learning Conversations

The learning conversations I studied integrated the metacognitive, emotional, and developmental considerations in a variety of mixtures and admixtures on each step along the students' journeys. These conversations recognize the brilliance of what it means to learn differently as well as the weaknesses and vulnerabilities LD entail. First and foremost these learning conversations were a **true conversation**. Second, they **focused on helping students understand themselves as learners.** Third, they were consistently **developmentally sensitive**.

A True Conversation

The first consideration expressed in Diane's learning conversations focused on the very nature of a conversation. The interaction that Vygotsky (1986) suggested seemed to initially place the majority of the expertise and control on the mentor; yet, a conversation involves both parties giving and receiving information. Diane's learning conversations seemed to more model a true conversation. She explained:

"For me the learning conversation involves listening more than talking, and its hard not to be the teller. I have to keep reflecting on, and watching and hearing what they want to talk about. I try to let the student begin sessions talking about what they want to talk about. I am always watching for these cues, something mentioned in passing. Something they are letting me know they want me to dig out a little bit. I have a new student this year and she had a horrible childhood. She made little allusions and I eventually asked her questions that brought it out. She told me all about it and we both cried. It was ok for me to ask her because those allusions are a way of her telling me that she wanted me to ask."

As I listened to and observed Diane and her students, I increasingly respected her emphasis on listening and how that influenced the approach she took to help them. Though Diane seemed to draw from theories related to teaching and learning, I believe this quality of listening helps blur the artificial dichotomies that theorists create to examine learning. She focuses on what the student says, not on a theoretical construct, to direct her path as she works with them.

Another important ingredient Diane contributed to her learning conversations is herself. Diane shared aspects of herself with her students in the course of the conversations she had with them. When I observed a session she had with Christine, they began by talking about Easter. Christine talked about the traditions she shared with her father's new family; Diane shared how she created an egg hunt for her grand niece and neighborhood kids. She also finds opportunities to weave in her own metacognitive analysis when she is working with her students.

"I usually tell them that I'm very linear. Most of them get to know my styles, too. It usually happens when we are doing something. They know I can only do one thing at a time 'cause I'll say, "Wait a minute, no, no, don't go there. We're only talking about this right now 'cause I can only handle one thing at a time. That's the way I process."

Lastly, Diane's willingness to share power and control over the agenda and conversation is another element of a true conversation.

"I keep a folder on each student and I'll put down notes at the end of each session that remind me what they are going to be working on during the week, but often they come back with something different; I need to be willing to abandon my plan which is hard for me. But if you're really going to be a mentor you can't control the time plan. It needs to come from them; they need to see that what they are working on is important to them."

One day Jacob came into the room, put down his books, and told Diane he had the instructions for the term paper he needed to write. Diane referred to her own agenda book and said, "Before we go on to that, can we just go back a minute to the midterm you got back?" They then had a short discussion about the grade he received on a take–home midterm, and discussed the option the professor gave to rewrite it to include more articles, and have the possibility of raising the grade. They discussed the relative pros and cons of resubmitting the paper, and Jacob decided he

didn't want to do a rewrite. With that, they moved on to conceptualizing and organizing the research paper he'd brought. Jacob was focused on the research paper he needed to write. Diane made sure he recognized the opportunity for improving a grade on another project, but allowed his priority to be the deciding factor in determining what they would do during their time together that day.

Diane explained to me how important it was that she allow her students to set the agenda. She knows her first agenda item is to win their trust; however she acknowledged these decisions are some of the more significant struggles she has.

"In the beginning Christopher would never let me help him with his papers. He was very avoidant. I would try to get a hook into them by referring to his time management book. Every week I'd say, 'Let's take a look at the paper you have due.' For a long time he'd respond, 'That's ok. I'm all set on that.' Next week, again I'd say, 'Would you like any help with that?' He'd respond, 'Nope, I know how I'm going to do that.'"It was baby steps until he finally dared to let me in on it. His writing was weak and he was worried I was gonna think less of him, so he made sure we didn't work on it.

Understanding Themselves as Learners

Diane used sessions with her students to help them develop an inner voice that is articulating, and eventually orchestrating and evaluating the thinking process.

"It's really integrated so much with whatever the task is. It's not a separate thing. I don't do, 'Here is a learning style inventory; let's sit down and do it'. I just weave it in gently. I would say in every session I have with them, there is at least one conversation about that."

Understanding Themselves as Learners: Test Results

Diane begins facilitating metacognitive development when she reviews her students' psycho-educational testing with them. Each student must submit a Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale and academic achievement tests to be admitted into PAL. Diane uses these tests for the basis of the discussion.

    "We take a look at their test scores and go through it piece by piece. Most of them have not been introduced to it before. I ask them if anyone has explained what their learning problems stem from or what their strengths are. Usually they say, 'No.' They will be able to say that they are a poor writer or speller or they have trouble reading or losing everything, but they don't understand why. They also don't know what their strengths are."

    Diane further explained that students ask to go back over their testing when they are beginning to have an understanding of themselves. Sometimes they turn back to the testing as a way of finding "evidence" that will support the impressions they are now constructing about themselves. Students also want to review their testing again to clarify questions they have about their learning or even their learning disability.

    "I try to refer back to the testing when I am working with them. I will say things like, 'Remember in your testing your visual memory was very good? That's why creating a visual image to help you remember this term works well for you.' Or, I will say, 'Do you see why it's hard to organize this? Do you remember that from your testing?' I try to bring it in when I can; not hit them over the head with it, but gradually. And many times, later, students will say, 'Can we go over my testing again, Diane?' At the beginning, they only pick up a few things, and later on they want to know more."

    When Christopher and I discussed how he developed a better understanding of himself as a learner over time, he talked about the way Diane used an analysis of his WAIS to further his understanding of himself.

    "Diane talked to me about my testing when we first met, but we went back to it later on. We didn't just talk about the test, but also how it applies in life. For example, she explained to me what the (subtest) block design was and what it had to do with what I was struggling with. I thought it was just a puzzle and I knew I was good at it, but I thought it was just kiddy stuff. In my mind, I could do the kiddy stuff, but couldn't do the real grown-up stuff. She helped me to see that they were both grown-up stuff. When we went back to the testing, I really understood better how different components come together to say something about your learning style and how I can apply the areas that I'm really good at to the areas I'm not so good at. The more I understood that, I think, the more I understood how to handle things."

Diane's explanation of their testing played an important role in their developing understanding of themselves, I considered another reason why it was such an important element. Many of the students with whom I worked told me about the evaluation meetings they attended as they were growing up. The majority of those students described their hatred for the testing they were subjected to because it made them feel "stupid." Often the explanations of the testing were provided in an "educationalese" that did not help them understand themselves better. The results of the testing provided a label; i.e., dyslexic, slow auditory processor, etc., not an understanding of their learning profile. Typically the results and labels focused on what they were not able to do, and never focused on what their strengths were. Diane's explanations probably stood in stark contrast to what they had heard before. They finally were beginning to understand what the tests really meant, and they discovered that the very tests that had been used to label them negatively actually indicated that they had significant cognitive strengths that could be used to approach whatever task they choose. What a victory!

Understanding Themselves as Learners: Metacognitive Experiences

Diane further helps students develop a better understanding of themselves as learners by co-constructing metacognitive experiences within the context of the course work students bring to her for assistance. She ties metacognitive development to her students' course work by always focusing her students' attention on the processes involved in completing specific tasks as well as the products. She explained that she accomplishes this by first drawing attention to the process while they are working on a task.

"I am always telling them what I observe. I will say, 'Well, you seem like you have trouble organizing this' or 'Wow, you seem to be really finding this task pretty easy. How did you now to do that.' If they are doing something and I give them a suggestion, I ask, 'Why am I making this suggestion? Is this a good way to do this? Is this helpful? Do you like doing it this way?' Usually I am showing them more than one way of possibly doing something and then asking them how it works for them. 'Do you like doing that? Was that hard for you? Would you like to try a different way? Maybe we could come up with a different way to try it.' "

Diane's questions are co-creating possible metacognitive experiences. By approaching their work with these questions she is helping them not only to focus on what they are doing, but also on how they are doing it. She is also conditioning them to analyze the tasks that they are attempting to complete. This is an important step in metacognitive development. Students must

recognize that there is a process to accomplishing a task in order to reflect upon their approach to that process. Diane suggested that another important opportunity for creating metacognitive experiences is after the task is completed and they have received feedback from another professor on the assignment.

"I think more of the processing comes afterwards. It's important to identify causes. I'm big on that. I really try to get them to look at the reason why something is happening. 'Why is this giving you such trouble? Why did you fail that test?' Why-whatever it is. I try to tell them that it's all we care about. 'It doesn't matter that you got a D; let's figure it out.' I then try to help them generate alternatives to the thing that's not working."

Jacob came to Diane wanting help to write a paper on terrorism. They began by analyzing and clarifying the professor's description of the paper, and Jacob showed Diane the notes he took from the sources he had. Diane asked Jacob how he was going to go about doing the paper, and he indicated he wasn't sure. They then began a learning conversation about how he would approach writing this research paper.

Diane: *This is the first paper that you've had to write where you've had to integrate so much stuff.*

Jacob: *Yeah.*

Diane: *In Animal Farm you were just integrating the information from one book really.*

Jacob: *Right.*

Diane: *It's a big leap to try and integrate six or seven articles*

Jacob: *Yeah.*

Diane: *What do you think your biggest challenge will be?*

Jacob: *Writing it probably.*

Diane: *The actual coding it into a paragraph will be the biggest challenge?*

Jacob: *Yeah.*

Diane: *Actually I don't think you're going to have that much trouble with that part of it. You phrase things well; you have good sentence structure, language; all that comes out pretty well.*

Jacob: *The problem is getting started. Once I have what I know I need to focus on, it sometimes flows.*

Diane: *In this case, the getting started will have a lot to do with getting some kind of a picture of all the pieces of it.*

Jacob: *Yeah.*

Diane: *Because you won't know where to start until you try to look at what the parts are gonna be.*

Jacob: *Right.*

Diane: *All right. Let's just brainstorm a little bit on that.*

(Diane takes out a piece of paper and begins to visually categorize the different components of the paper that Jacob provides.)

While Diane guided Jacob through the process of writing a paper that integrated several sources, she provided feedback that helped him to continue to identify components of his learning profile and how they influenced the way he should approach writing the paper.

Diane: *What's the biggest challenge to writing this paper?*

Jacob: *Writing it probably.* (Jacob is providing a broad, global response)

At this point Diane provided feedback to his response breaking "writing" down into its parts identifying his strengths and weaknesses in the process.

Diane: *Actually I don't think you're going to have that much trouble with that part of it. You phrase things well; you have good sentence structure. The language in your writing comes out pretty well. What's going to happen before you get to that point? Are you ready for that? Sit down and start writing?*

Jacob: *It's hard getting started, because the introduction is the hardest part, but once I now what I know I need to focus on, sometimes it flows.*

Diane now explains how he can use his visual strength to address his difficulty figuring out "what to focus on."

Diane: *And in this case the "getting started" will have a lot do to with getting some kind of picture of all the pieces of it, because you won't know where to start until you try to look at what the parts are going to be.*

Diane continued to help Jacob visually structure how he would obtain information from the articles using different colored highlighters and integrating the

information on charts. She explicitly linked the strategy they chose to strengths in his learning profile and noted possible pitfalls that are attributable to his cognitive weaknesses.

During this metacognitive experience, Diane guided Jacob through a learning conversation that related his personal strengths and weaknesses to the processes of writing the paper. She helped him see where he would be using his strengths and where his weaknesses might impact the process. She then drew upon his visual strength to help him "see" all of the pieces that he would need to conceptualize the paper. Jacob acknowledged that once he understood what he needed to focus on, the writing would flow.

Understanding Themselves as Learners: Developmental Considerations
Diane's learning conversations were developmentally sensitive. What I found in the data was that Diane listened and responded to her students in a manner that acknowledge and affirmed their current developmental stance while also providing a context for growth .

A signature characteristic I found in Diane's interactions with her students was that she approached metacognition as a developmental process. Most of the research I have found related to metacognition focuses on metacognitive skills and their effect on other cognitive and academic skills. Little research has focused primarily on the developmental phenomenon itself. Diane's students' expressions of their understanding of the way they learn suggests that metacognitive knowledge is not a static understanding and skill; rather, it is made up of understandings and abilities that develop over time and through experience. Their description was more reflective of a model Shraeder (1988) proposed that described five levels of metacognitive development. Woven within these levels is the development of an inner voice that is articulating, and eventually orchestrating and evaluating the thinking process.

As I considered the data from Diane's learning conversations, I noted how she sensitively nurtured the overall metacognitive development of her students. Kegan (1982) similarly described a supportive culture of embeddedness that fosters development by affirming a person in his/her current place of development while finding the appropriate time to begin to call the person out to a new developmental understanding of him/herself.

It appeared to me that Diane provided a supportive culture of embeddedness that affirmed what Jacob has begun to know about his own learning and challenging him to begin moving to the next level of complexity. Jacob has begun to recognize specific components of his learning profile. Diane reinforced that knowledge, helped to identify more components and guided him to explicitly acknowledge how they impact what he is attempting to do. It is interesting that Diane is only fostering the metacognitive skills that are associated with his level of metacognitive development, and beginning to have him think about those metacognitive skills and abilities that are in the next level of complexity. She has not, for example, asked Jacob to reflect upon his approach to writing and evaluate it based on his strengths and weaknesses. At this point she only helped him identify the components of the process and began to discuss how those components are linked to his personal style. Explicitly taking responsibility for evaluating and orchestrating how he learns best will come later.

By patiently guiding Jacob's metacognitive development slowly building from the simplistic to a more complex understanding of himself, Diane is allowing him to integrate what he is learning about himself without becoming overwhelmed. This is why it is important to consider metacognition as a developmental set of skills and understandings. By doing so, metacognition is appropriately viewed as a complex cognitive enterprise that must be progressively nurtured and developed over time. At the most simplistic level, it requires recognition how we approach a given task. Progressively, there is movement to a more sophisticated level of reflection where we separate approaches to a given task from the task itself. At the most sophisticated level of metacognitive development, we can evaluate the process and consider other options. These qualitative differences in metacognitive development require more and more complex levels of abstractions and thus cannot be treated simply a set of skills that are taught, but rather cognitive development that must be nurtured.

Understanding Themselves as Learners: Emotions

One of the revelations I had while analyzing the data from the interviews and observations was that Diane attended to the emotional considerations of her students as part of helping them understand themselves as learners, not solely as a context for it. Previously I had thought it was important to recognize the emotional struggles students might be facing when mentoring students with LD, but I conceptualized it as somewhat separate from the academic work I did with them. When I

recognized an emotional issue presenting itself, I knew I needed to help the student address it so we could then get on to the academic and metacognitive tasks at hand. It was always important to me that students felt better about themselves as they came to understand themselves, yet somehow I thought about this process as happening parallel to their developing metacognitive and academic skills, not intimately woven within it.

I found it interesting that Flavell's definition of metacognitive knowledge relates solely to the cognitive domain; however, his definition of metacognitive experience moves beyond the cognitive realm. Flavell's (1985) definition asserted that metacognitive experiences are "cognitive or affective experiences that pertain to a cognitive enterprise. Fully conscious and easy-to-articulate of this sort are clear cases of this category, but less fully conscious and verbalizable experiences should probably be included in it (p.107)." I found it curious that Flavell recognized the affective domain when thinking about metacognitive experiences, yet did not consider it when conceptualizing metacognitive knowledge. As I wrestled with this seeming contradiction, I further realized that I, unknowingly, followed closely in Flavell's footsteps. In my work with students, I explicitly facilitated metacognitive experiences that acknowledged and helped students work through emotional issues, yet I did not systematically help students translate those experiences into metacognitive knowledge as I did with cognitive experiences. I further realized that the vast majority of the literature on metacognition overlooks this key component.

At their initial meeting, Diane asks students if there is anything she should know about them that would help her help them. Their responses provided information she might not have known reading their files, such as students saying, "I have been treated for depression and in the winter time I tend to get depressed and kind of disappear. So you should know that, and if that happens, that's what's going on." She uses this information, as she does other information she learns about her students, as a platform for beginning her work with them as she helps them explore how their emotional life impacts their learning.

Diane nurtures her students' affective understanding of themselves in the same manner she nurtures the cognitive. She uses her sessions with her students to facilitate metacognitive experiences to help them understand what they are feeling,

how it relates to what they are trying to accomplish, and what they might do to gain control over it. She explains:

> *"I might be working with a student and see that a kid is anxious or afraid. I could presume that they know, but sometimes they don't know what the feeling is that they're feeling. I try to talk with them and ask them questions to help them identify it. Sometimes you find out that what they think is fear may actually be shame. I have found that many of my students have memories of school that cause them shame. When students are having a particularly bad experience they don't want to stop and talk about it. I usually wait until afterward and have them reflect on what happened to see if there is an insight they can provide."*

In an article, Diane highlights the hope a mentoring relationship can bring.

> Through educational therapy, adults with learning disabilities can become consciously aware of the way their early memories are impacting them today and can be helped to reframe those memories, gaining a greater understanding of both past and present. Within a safe, supportive therapeutic situation they can begin to unpack the painful memories they have carried with them for so long and start to come to terms with them (Goss, 2004, p.10).

As I have worked in this field, I have found there are many practitioners who believe academic mentors should not become involved with psychological issues in their settings, because they are not trained to do so. Diane appeared to be comfortable discussing them as they surface, but also acknowledged the need to refer to counselors when issues were beyond her expertise. I believe that addressing the cognitive without the affective leaves students confused when obstacles that they were not able to either identify or address arise in one of the domains. Diane's ability to blend the two and work with the whole student was central to the magic of her learning conversations.

Transformations

Houdini understood that the true art of his magic was not solely in the individual elements of the illusion; the art of his magic was how he masterfully orchestrated all of the components together to create what seems impossible. So too, was Diane's magic. Each element of her learning conversation is crucial to understanding her interactions with her students yet, as is true with most phenomena, deconstruction alone does not suffice. Her learning conversations

needed to be considered as a whole to recognize and appreciate how she is able to weave them together to support her students.

Diane's work with Jacob, Christine, and Matthew underscored the transformative power in mentoring relationships. Each of these students came to college with aspirations and fears that were shaped by the individual contexts from which they came. Though their stories were all different, they had two common threads: all three of them were profoundly impeded in their educational pursuits by their learning disabilities and all three of them had the courage to enter into a learning relationship to explore how they would be able to continue their educational journeys. As they each now reflected on that journey, they not only saw the obstacles they overcame, but also identified new aspirations and goals they had not thought possible before. More importantly, they each took steps to define themselves in a new way; a definition they created, not one that was imposed based on their "disability."

Interestingly, this case study revealed the transformative nature of a mentoring relationship for the mentor. Two important ingredients of Diane's mentoring were her reflectivity and her willingness to reveal some of who she is in her mentoring relationships. Together, these qualities create change not only for her students but also for herself. The experience can be both confirming and humbling as we find hidden strengths and pools of expertise as well as weaknesses and vulnerabilities. During our interviews Diane explained how she has been able to develop her expertise for listening and following the lead her students provide to help them. She also revealed the challenges she faces. Willingness to face both with openness and honesty illuminates a path for educators to follow.

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Learning Conversations: Fostering Metacognitive Development: *A Magician's Work*

For Educators and Other Professionals

"I believe that the magic of a mentor dwells in that place where expertise and connectedness abide."

Here is a personal experience that serves as an example of that:

For Students

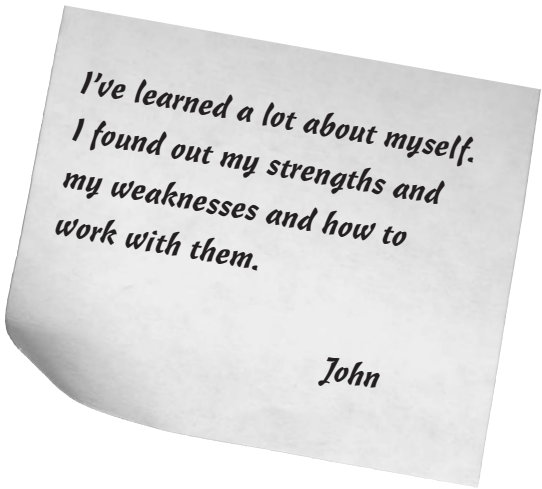On a scale of 1 (little) to 10 (completely), how well do I understand myself as a learner?

How do my emotions impact my learning?

For Parents or Guardians

What are my child's natural abilities?

Here is how he or she might tap those strengths to handle 2 potential difficulties ahead:

1.

2.

I've learned a lot about myself. I found out my strengths and my weaknesses and how to work with them.
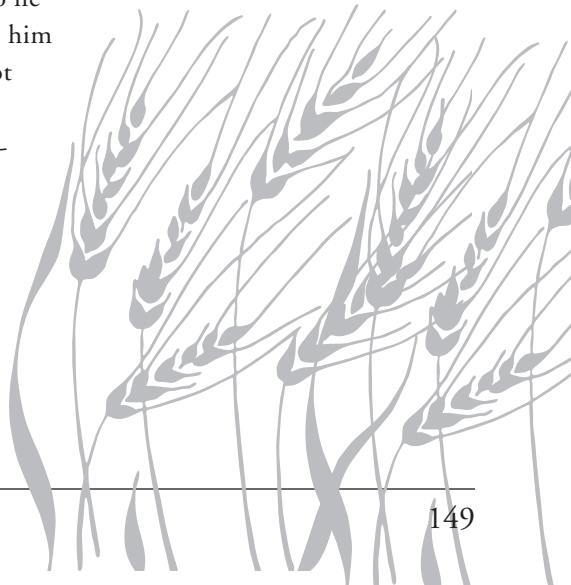
John

The Locker

Andrea L. Baldi, Ed.D.

Andrew walked down the steps of school and began to head home just as he always did. He lived right next to his new middle school so his walk was always short. So far things seemed to be going OK in 6th grade or so he thought. Just then his gym teacher, Ms. Collins, caught up to him on the sidewalk and asked Andrew where he was going. *"Home,"* he said. Ms. Collins laughed telling Andrew, *"It's only 1:00; school gets out at 2:30."* She was very nice and in her soft voice told Andrew to trot back into school and she wouldn't say anything to anyone about seeing him sneaking out early.

The problem was Andrew wasn't sneaking out early, he really thought it was the end of the school day. He felt so embarrassed, he started sweating as he went back in the school and was real confused about where to go. Where was his classroom? Then he remembered, he was in English class when he left the room and headed home. Oh no! Now he had to go back to that class and walk into that room full of other kids. *"They'll laugh at me again; what am I going to do?"* Andrew thought. Andrew felt sick to his stomach, really sick.

Then Andrew began to think out loud, *"Maybe I wasn't gone all that long and they'll think I went to the bathroom. Yeah, that's it. I'll say I went to the boys' room."* Andrew starting walking to his locker to get his English vocabulary notebook. The hall was quiet so he tried to be invisible so no one would notice him in the hall alone. Then he realized he forgot where his locker was. He couldn't find it. Andrew thought it was right down this hallway, but it wasn't. Instead, Andrew found himself staring at a big old sink. Andrew gave up on finding his locker and getting his vocabulary notebook. He knew he had to get to that English class and fast. Andrew opened the squeaky door of his class and could feel 22 sets of eyes peer-

ing at him. He glanced at Mrs. Calatto. She glared at Andrew and said, *"You will report to this room after school today."* *"Great."* thought Andrew. *"Another day after school, another day getting home later than the other kids, another day when mom gets really angry with me."*
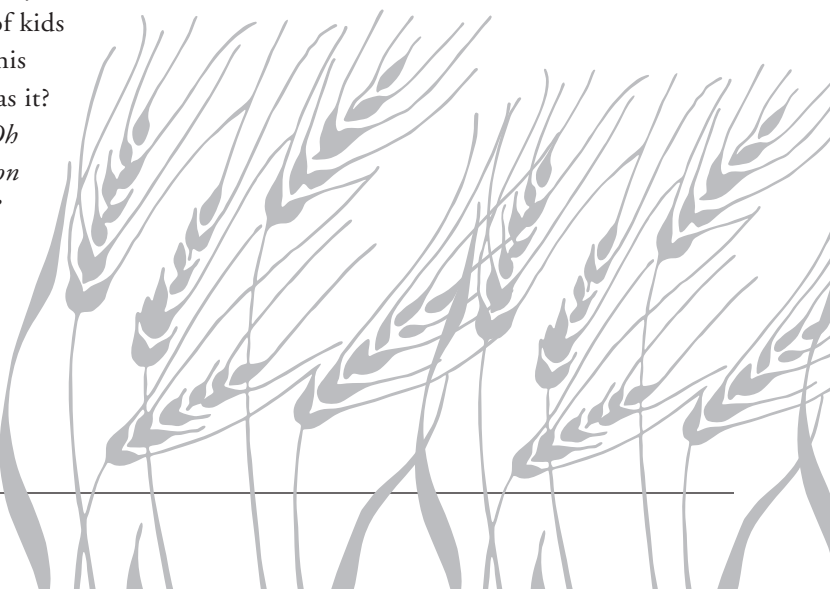
After Mrs. Calatto's class, Andrew headed down the hallway when he got stopped by the school secretary. *"Andrew, you need to follow me."* So he did. Who was he to question why? The secretary led Andrew down a long flight of stairs to the basement of the school and down a long tunnel-like corridor that he had always wondered about. The secretary stopped at a door and said, *"Here you go, Andrew; Mr. Percy is waiting for you."* Andrew opened the door and went in. There were about seven other kids in the room sitting at round tables. Andrew wasn't really wasn't sure what was going on. No one told him why he was there. So he sat down at one of the round tables. Finally, Mr. Percy looked up from his desk where he was reading the newspaper and said, *"OK, folks, take out your reading primers and get started."* Then Mr. Percy went back to reading his newspaper at his desk and never said another word. Andrew didn't have a "reading primer" and Mr. Percy never gave him one. The other kids were chatting and laughing. One kid was eating his brown bagged lunch, and another kid was sleeping. No one got out their "reading primers" (whatever they were). It was weird. Still Andrew didn't know why he was there or what was going on. Finally, the kid next to him said, *"Welcome to the reading class for dumb kids."* Andrew felt sick to his stomach again, as Mr. Percy kept reading his newspaper.

The 2:30 bell rang and for everyone it was the end of the school day, but not for Andrew. He climbed up the grey stairwell while all the other kids were going down. Pushing his way through the crowd of kids Andrew headed for his locker. But where was it? Andrew thought, *"Oh no, not again. Am I on the 1st or 2nd floor?"* He looked around through the crowd of kids but all the lockers looked alike. Andrew began to feel sick

and dizzy and the grey lockers began to look kind of wavy. He knew he still had to report to Mrs. Calatto's room for after-school vocabulary, but how could he do that if he couldn't find his locker! Andrew felt like the room was spinning.   Then finally he saw it in the third row of lockers and he ran towards it. Just then Andrew's own voice screamed in his head, *"Oh no! The combination! What was it?"* He tried turning the knob but his hand was so sweaty it kept slipping and the numbers kept flying past the notch on the lock. He started yanking the lock and it finally opened. Andrew grabbed his vocabulary notebook and coat, slammed the locker shut, and took off as fast as he could down the hall.

Andrew headed for Mrs. Calatto's classroom. When he finally got there, he took a deep breath and went in. Without even looking at him she said, *"Sit down, Andrew, and take out a pencil and some paper; you have a lot of writing to do."* Andrew did as he was told, just like he always did. Mrs. Calatto went over to the blackboard and started writing some vocabulary words on the board. As she was doing this she started on Andrew again. *"Well, Andrew, since you are behind in your vocabulary word list, I don't think it's a good idea for you to also be late for class like you were earlier today."* Andrew thought, *"How can I tell her I wasn't really late? How can I tell her I wasn't coming from another class or gym? How can I tell her I was late because I was going home at the wrong time of day?"* If Andrew told her why he was really late and that he really thought it was the end of the day, Mrs. Calatto might send him to the principal, or call his mom, or think he was crazy! Andrew thought to himself, *"Maybe I am crazy."*

The vocabulary words Andrew didn't know filled half the blackboard. Every day when he went to English, Andrew got to see them filling up more of the board than the day before. So did everybody else. All the words were right under Mrs. Calatto's handwriting that said *"Andrew's List."* You see, every time Andrew got some vocabulary words wrong on a quiz they got added to the board. Andrew sat down and did what he always did. He began writing the

words over and over and over again. He kept writing and peeking at the clock as it got darker outside. All the teachers at the Grant Middle School never thought it was wrong keeping Andrew after school so late because they knew he lived right next door. They knew he didn't have far to walk home. They also knew that Andrew's mom would probably take a walk over to the school to get him. She worked in the school cafeteria and all the teachers knew her. This was always when Andrew wished he lived further away from the school and had to take the bus like most of the other kids. Even in this way Andrew felt like he was different!

Finally Mrs. Calatto let Andrew go with yet another stern warning. As he began the short walk home, Andrew could see his mother walking towards him. Once again she had that angry look on her face. She knew where he had been and why. Once again his mom wasn't happy. Andrew felt like it was his fault; it was always his fault. Andrew believed he couldn't do anything right in school and always when he got home he felt the same there, too. Andrew's mom started yelling at him again, *"What's wrong with you, Andrew?"* He just wanted to escape but there was nowhere to go. There never was. Andrew was stuck again on that short sidewalk between school and home.

It was back in 1961, over forty eight years ago, when Andrew was in middle school. Through much determination Andrew has grown to find his own successful place in the world. However, sadly, there are still too many Andrews walking our school hallways today with sweaty palms and heart palpitations. These are the kids that work real hard to hide their pain. These are the kids who wish they were invisible. Please, watch out for them.

The Locker

For Students

What school memories or feelings do these trigger for me:

Stern looks from teachers and parents not happy with me as a student.

Wishing for escape but no place to go.

Hearing a lot about what I don't know or can't do well.

Trying to be invisible.

Feeling lost.

Feeling physically sick & dizzy, anxious.

I have learned my strengths and weaknesses. She is very understanding and knows what college students go through.

Kevin

For Parents or Guardians

How did I react to my child's learning struggles?

What might I say now - that would be comforting for my child to hear - about those reactions?

For Educators and Other Professionals

What can I personally learn from this story?

I'm achieving higher than I and other people expected because of the attention. My PAL professor really knows the way I learn.

Scott

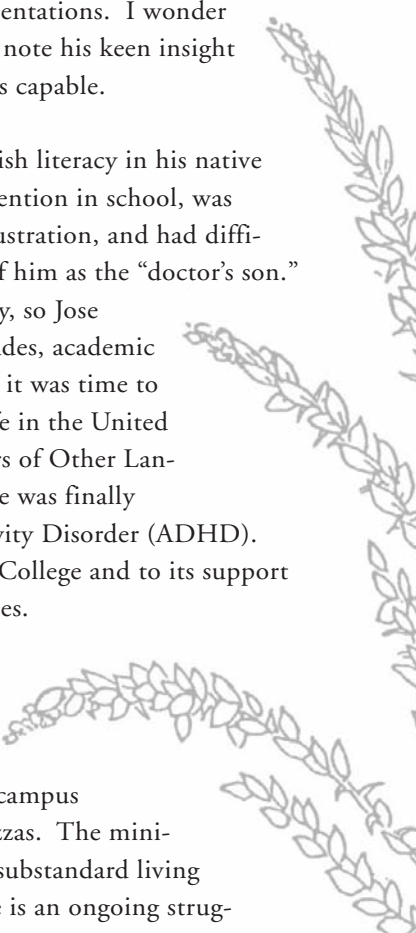# PAL for Multilingual Students with Learning Disabilities

Pat Mytkowicz, Ed.D. and Grace Rooney, M.Ed., M.A.

Jose

Jose, a 25 year-old transfer student, saunters into his college writing classroom, late again, but he tells me he "needed" to stop for food. As his writing teacher, academic advisor, and learning disability (LD) support provider, it takes me two semesters before I begin to understand the complexities of Jose's life and their impact on his learning. His papers are always late, he misses class and appointments, and he avoids oral presentations. I wonder if he is serious about pursuing his bachelor's degree, yet I note his keen insight and obvious intellect in class discussions, so I believe he is capable.

His story unfolds slowly: he struggled with Spanish literacy in his native South American country, had great difficulties paying attention in school, was often in trouble because of his uncontrolled anger and frustration, and had difficulty living up to the native townspeople's expectations of him as the "doctor's son." His father was also an administrator at the local university, so Jose managed admission despite his prior difficulties. Poor grades, academic failure and disciplinary action followed, and Jose decided it was time to leave his native South American country to find a new life in the United States. After several years of classes in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and marriage to an American woman, Jose was finally diagnosed with dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). With this necessary documentation, he applied to Curry College and to its support program for multilingual students with learning disabilities.

As he started his first year as a transfer student, he was coping with a failed marriage, financial difficulties, cultural issues, and deep-seated shame. The reason he "needs' food before class is that he has just arrived on campus sleepless and hungry from an all-night shift delivering pizzas. The minimum wage he earns in his 40-hour workweek provides a substandard living with very little time for study and assignments. Jose's life is an ongoing strug-

gle balancing financial and academic demands along with unresolved emotional difficulties, self-doubt, and anger.

As I slowly learn more about Jose, I understand that writing a paper requires hours as he struggles to find and spell the English words that he needs to express his thoughts. When he finally begins to trust me, he slowly reveals the extent of his reading and writing problems. I'm amazed at what he accomplishes when I see the scope of his literacy difficulties. His English acquisition is severely impacted by his dyslexia, yet he displays determination. As an immigrant with few external support systems in place, he faces constant pressure from other sources. His car breaks down again; his wallet is stolen; his temper erupts; he is involved in a fight and arrested; he misses his young daughter and family in South America; he is alone in a new country.

Transformation and Connection

While Jose's story is uniquely his, the struggles are similar to many of those students we encounter in college classrooms across the country; our increasingly diverse group of immigrants, first generation students, and international students face a difficult transition. For any non-native English-speaking student, postsecondary study can be daunting. Add a learning disability to the student profile, and the situation becomes overwhelming at best. This is particularly true for students whose cultures or educational backgrounds do not recognize or accept the reality of an LD (Gallardo, 1999; Preece, Rice, Beecher, Roberts & Stearns, 2002; Sunderland, Klein, Savinson & Partridge, 1997).

Thus, for Jose and students like him, transformation and connection are the keys to success. Transformation for students involves examining negative self-images and developing a positive view of themselves. In PAL, this change is nurtured through the student-mentor connection. Change, however, is not limited to the student. The mentor, too, will transform through the relationship as it brings new awareness of how to help students believe in the power of their individual strengths. When the mentor is working with students from different cultures, the transformation is even more complex. For the ESOL/LD population and those that work with them, many selves and many worlds need to be understood, integrated and accepted. This process takes courage, knowledge, reflection and the ability to change.

What assumptions might multilingual, multicultural students with learning disabilities bring to the table? Many students with learning

disabilities carry negative self-scripts: *"I am stupid, abnormal, unable to learn anything important…I can't succeed in school…"* But culturally diverse students may have additionally paralyzing thoughts: *"No one will understand me because of my accent…I can't learn in English…I'll never learn to spell English words…* This language is impossible with all its exceptions…" The ESOL/LD population may also believe that it is better to conceal their learning difficulties, either to protect their families or to save face themselves: *"I need to hide my problems so my family and I will not be ashamed or disgraced… Americans think they are better than anyone else…they don't understand me, my country, or my culture."* Negative suppositions based on learning disabilities as well as cultural expectations hinder progress for these types of students. However, progress can also be impeded by teacher misunderstandings.

The mentor/teacher can hold many hidden assumptions. Even educated Americans sometimes hold ethnocentric views: *"Everyone should be happy to study in the U.S… that student has been here long enough to do things our way…why do they insist on speaking their own language in our country?"* Some educators don't understand the difficulties involved in English language learning: *"This student speaks English very well so her reading and writing should be better than this… that vocabulary is simple… this idiom is so common that everyone knows what it means… I can't understand this student when he speaks; he probably isn't too smart."* Nieto (1999) reports, "teachers of European American background have had very little experience with bicultural students, and they may in fact harbor negative or stereotypical ideas about them" (p. 97). Cultural stereotypes can limit the connection that an educator and a student need to make as a prerequisite to progress: *"People from that culture just don't value education … those people are lazy …Asians are supposed to be good students."* Biases such as these can result in lowered or unrealistic expectations and be particularly destructive to the ESOL/LD population.

As a result of these conflicting, often unrecognized, deeply hidden beliefs, students and those who work with them must make changes before a strong relationship can be formed. Without transformation, that is the ability to confront and change restrictive beliefs, students and mentors are unable to make the connection that is foundational to real progress for ESOL students with a learning disability. Relationships need to be built so students and teachers can recognize their hidden as-
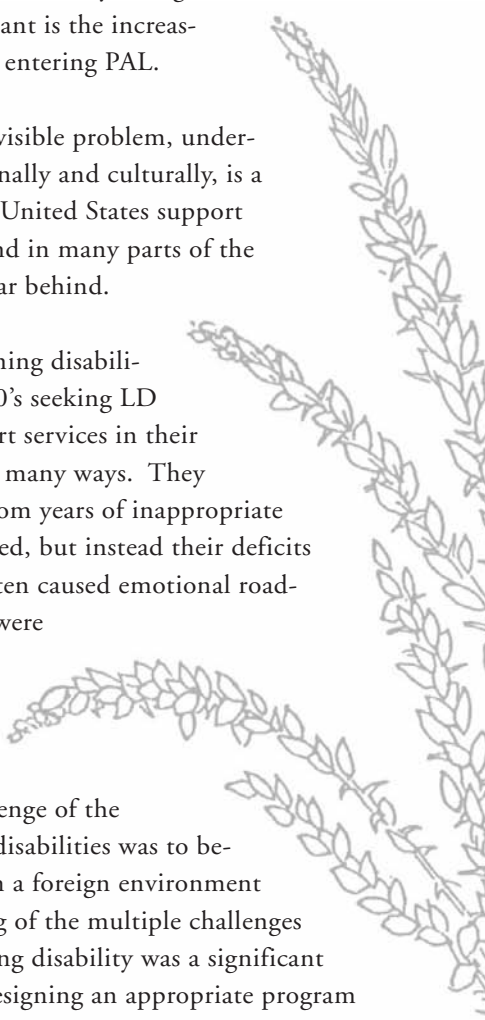
sumptions, develop a better mutual understanding, and eventually learn from each other. The power that results from truly transformative relationships serves as the theoretical underpinning of PAL for Multilingual Students.

PAL for Multilingual Students

The special challenges faced by multilingual, multicultural students with learning disabilities were the impetus for designing a unique program at Curry College. Curry had previously pioneered a support program for bright students with learning disabilities by launching the Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL) in 1970. Over the past 40 years of success, PAL has seen many changes in its student population. One of the most significant is the increasing number of multilingual, multicultural students entering PAL.

Because a learning disability is often an invisible problem, understanding people with learning disabilities, educationally and culturally, is a relatively recent area of study. For example, in the United States support services were not mandated federally until 1973, and in many parts of the world recognition of learning disabilities still lags far behind.

International students with identified learning disabilities began to arrive at Curry in the 1980's and 1990's seeking LD assistance because there were no appropriate support services in their home institutions. These students were familiar in many ways. They were bright, but frustrated learners. Many came from years of inappropriate schooling where their intelligence was not recognized, but instead their deficits were the main focus. Failure haunted them and often caused emotional roadblocks to approaching college learning. Yet, there were also some important differences between the ESOL students and the traditional LD population that PAL had been serving. The international students' languages and cultures, integral parts of every individual, were different. The challenge of the multilingual, multicultural students with learning disabilities was to become successful learners in another language and in a foreign environment with faculty and peers who had little understanding of the multiple challenges they were facing. For all of these students, a learning disability was a significant factor, but only one of many to be considered in designing an appropriate program of support.

Structure and Theory

PAL for Multilingual Students is based on LD theory with an understanding of both language acquisition processes and cultural awareness:

- Recognition of multiple intelligences supports success (Gardner, 1993).
- Evaluation of test results for the ESOL/LD population must be a broad-based process that includes educational and cultural background, past performance, and on-going performance (Ijiri & Rooney, 1995).
- Support benefits students as they move through one level to next in learning development (Vygotsky, 1978).
- Developing positive ideas about selves and future possibilities through "preservation of pride, protection from humiliation and strengthening of strengths" (Levine, 1992, p. 268) is vital to students with learning disabilities.
- "Affective filters" such as low motivation, poor self-esteem and anxiety impede language acquisition. Lowering of "affective filters" increases meaning and integration of language (Krashen, 1982).
- Fluent conversational skill is not reflective of equal skill in academic reading, comprehension of higher-level vocabulary, or production of accurate writing (Cummins, 1980, 1984).
- Learning disabilities impact the acquisition of cognitive academic language skills making achievement inconsistent and slow (Levine, 2004).
- Direct teaching of academic language, analysis, and synthesis is important mediation for the ESOL/LD learner. This population often does not recognize the syntactical, grammatical, and spelling patterns which are second nature to strong language learners (Ganschow & Sparks, 1993a, 1993b).
- The hidden acculturation process must be made transparent to aid student control over cultural transition (Schumann 1986).

The program is structured to provide students like Jose with strong connections to the learning environment. The coordinator of the program mentors students through the following channels:

- Providing academic advising
- Working with the students as LD support provider (PAL professor) or consulting with their PAL professors
- Maintaining contact with college and other constituencies that affect the student's life including faculty, staff, administration and parents
- Teaching American Culture and Language classes

Almost all PML students enroll in a semester of American Culture and Language, a developmental writing course that explores the deep connections between language and culture. Metacognitive reflection is part of the course through direct strategy instruction, class discussion, and journal writing, thus encouraging students to confront and understand the transformation and change they need to experience in order to become successful learners. The teacher also learns more about the class members by closely observing their strengths and challenges. These connections help bring about learning conversations that result in growth and progress. Cultural and social issues are important components of learning discussions. Students need to talk about their cultures and values, but it takes time and tact to break down students' protective walls. Emotional support around transitional issues such as loneliness, culture shock, different social customs, family issues, balancing freedom and responsibility, and even activities of daily living, such as understanding and paying bills, are important parts of PML assistance.

Student Voices

A more personal way of understanding the learning challenges of multicultural, multilingual students is to hear their personal stories. Each life history is complicated and unique; however, there are many common threads reflecting the issues that need to be addressed to support the ESOL/LD population in reaching their academic goals. In order to build success with these students, faculty mentors need to understand differing cultural feelings about learning disabilities, complications of language acquisition with a learning disability, classroom obstacles for second language learners with learning disabilities, and most important, the value of building a transformative connection with ESOL students who have learning disabilities.

Cultural Attitudes and Learning Disabilities

For many PML students, especially those whose cultures do not readily recognize the concept of LDs, the label causes shame and fear of embarrassment. Oi Yee, an international student from Hong Kong describes cultural expectations. *"In China you're expected to do well in school. A lot of kid mom compare your grade to other genius kid."* Even after she was diagnosed with dyslexia, Oi Yee's family neither recognizes nor appreciates her daily struggles. Her dyslexia has impacted both her Chinese and English learning and has resulted in self doubt and paralyzing fear. To compound this, the pressure from her parents continues to torture her.

Khalid, a Middle Eastern student, shared information about his LD with his mother, but says, *"I didn't tell my dad."* Both Akousa, from an African country, and Cammi, from a Caribbean island, were also reluctant to share their LD diagnoses with family members. Akousa says, *"My family still doesn't know that I have a learning disability. I don't want her* [mother] *to think I'm not smart."* Cammie admits, *"My mother doesn't really understand what a leaning disability is and she sees it's kinda my fault, so I choose not even to go there with her."*

Perhaps Ivan, an international student from an island in the West Indies best expresses the cultural implications involved in accepting disability. *"Come on, my family is one of the most well known families* [in his island country]. *It would be an embarrassment."*

Language Learning and Learning Disabilities

Both ESOL learners and students with learning disabilities often present misleading appearance as they may be adept social communicators whose conversational facility often disguises deeper language problems. Fluent interpersonal communication often masks difficulties in comprehending the more complex language used in the classroom and in academic reading and writing. It can also hide possible learning problems, which are more likely to surface as a student encounters increasingly complex academic language and literacy demands. ESOL learners "who are coming to terms with the academic and linguistic demands of the curriculum through a language which is not their first language have a major task to close the gap on their English-speaking peer group".… [Those] "who are at the same time dyslexic [or LD] are doubly challenged" (Deponio, Landon & Reid, 2000, p. 52).

Akousa, a native speaker of Twi, reflects on her early difficulties trying to learn English in her native African country: *"Teachers didn't pick up my problem because English is our second or third language."* She expresses the difficulty in learning English as a second language speaker with a learning disability: *"Always, everyday struggling with your speech and tryin' to find words for what you're tryin' to say. A learning disability affects everything."* Oi Yee admits that she has difficulty with both her native Cantonese because she can't remember the visual symbols in Chinese and with English because of her weak phonological awareness.

Although Cammi comes from an island where the official language is English, her native tongue is a patois, a language peppered with African,

Spanish and indigenous influences. She describes Caribbean Creole as *"a way of short-enin' English. The order of the words is different and you leave out the ands and the buts. You leave out the stuff that isn't important. I omit words so maybe I am writin' like that."* In fact, both Cammie's oral and written English reflect her speech patterns established in her native Patois and her auditory sequencing problems associated with her dyslexia; that is, her speech omits many sounds, particularly endings, and her spelling and writing show evidence of mis-sequenced sounds, and omitted phonemes as well as whole words.

Akousa, Oi Yee, and Cammi are not unique in their descriptions of their English language learning problems. Most PML students, in fact, admit to parallel difficulty in both their first and subsequent language acquisition.

The Postsecondary Classroom and the ESOL/LD Population

Khalid is an example of a student who would surprise most college faculty. He presents as sophisticated, polished, assured, with excellent oral communication skills. Consequently, many professors are surprised at the discrepancy shown in his poor written communication. He had developed many strategies to hide this discrepancy: hiring tutors, choosing oral reports whenever possible, and even cheating when necessary.

Professors of Cammie's classes, too, were shocked when they saw her unedited written work full of distortions, misspellings, omissions and incomprehensible syntax. Her written output did not match the capable, articulate responses they witnessed in class discussions.

On the other hand, Josef, a student from another Caribbean island, rarely spoke in class and when he did, his responses were so slow that professors were anxious to move on. Yet, given the opportunity to write a paper, Josef was far more successful in communicating his ideas. Magndis, a young woman from a Scandinavian background, shone in her accounting classes; consequently, business professors were surprised at her difficulties understanding her required textbook assignments. Gog, a student from Southeast Asia, appeared overwhelmed during lectures but could synthesize and integrate the material if given the time to do so.

The Mentoring Relationship for the ESOL/LD Population

Relationship building with caring faculty appears to be helpful in assisting both culturally diverse students and those with learning disabilities. Teachers who take the time to get to know their students as people, who show respect, particularly for different cultures and learning styles, and who demonstrate an ethic of care can positively impact student learning (Collinson & Killeavy, 1999; Peart & Campbell, 1999; Talbert-Johnson & Beran, 1999; Tebben, 1995). Over and over again, PML students talk about their trusting and mutually respectful relationships with their PAL professors as instrumental to their success.

Josef describes his interactions with his mentor. *"I was really comfortable in the relationship. I could also talk to her beyond academics about personal relationships that I might be having and stuff that was recently happening back home."* Akousa, too, speaks about the connection she has made with her PAL professor. *"She's learned about me personally. When someone believes in you and encourages you that always overcomes everything. That makes you feel important. That makes you feel like you'll succeed."* Finally, Ivan clearly shows the importance of the connection that he and his PAL professor have forged. *"She knows more about the international students, being aware that you are far away from home and there are many other factors, not just an LD.* [She knows]*, he's far away from home, he misses his family, the culture is different, the language is not his native language, so having a person that is willing to keep all that in mind, and able to keep all that in mind, and acknowledge it and cope with it is what helps."*

Lessons to be Learned from PML

Although the setting for PML is in a private postsecondary institution, the lessons learned from working with these students have a broad application for teaching college students and adults with learning disabilities whose first language is not English. Postsecondary institutions can structure support for the LD/ESOL population by taking into consideration five critical factors which have led to the success of many PML students.

1. Staff, faculty, and students need to get past first impressions and work to understand each other.
2. Previous test reports should be viewed cautiously as they may not reveal the actual strengths of the student.
3. Metacognitive reflection on the impact of learning disabilities and on the

student's home culture's view of LD helps the student understand and change negative self-images.

4. Direct teaching of academic language and its conventions is very important since language learning is often adversely affected by learning disabilities.

5. Students need a connection/mentor between themselves and the academic, cultural and institutional environment.

The most important conclusion, however, is the belief in and need for a mentor who can effect transformation and change. PML participants express the need for this connection. Ricardo Stanton-Salazar (as cited in Nieto, 1999) believes that multicultural students, in particular, require "institutional agents, that is individuals who help negotiate institutional resources and opportunities, including information about academic programs, career decision making…role modeling, and emotional and moral support" (p. 97). Students with learning disabilities need to make strong associations with service providers and need to feel that LD specialists know them personally and care about them (Adelizzi, 1995; Corey, 2003; Finn, 1999; McLoughlin, Beard, Ryan & Kirk, 2000; Pennini & Peltz, 1995; Preece et. al., 2002). Rooney and Schwarz (1999) suggest that multilingual students:

> appreciate learning strategies for time management, organization, spatial orientation, reading, writing, listening, speaking, and note taking, but having "their own person" to listen to, encourage, and understand them, helps them develop a sense of self-worth and self-confidence that can carry them to independence and success (p. 14).

Transformative connections may work magic, but they are not magic at all. They are collaborations based on respect, openness and trust. Both students and mentors need an understanding of the many issues being confronted. Metacognitive conversations foster these connections and are catalysts of positive change. Institutions can support students by facilitating such relationships.

Final Thoughts

It has not been an easy road, but Jose has recently graduated from Curry College and is currently working in the health care field. Jose knows that, ultimately, he was the sole driver on his road to a college degree; but he also knows it was the partnership, collaboration, and mutual respect that he and his learning support navigator developed that empowered him to take control of his journey. Once Jose saw that I

was willing to get to know him; to learn about his culture; to see beyond his disabilities to his capabilities; in short, to believe in him, he began to believe in himself.

Jose wasn't the only one who was changed through our connection. As his PAL professor, I, too, was transformed and have learned to look beyond the obvious when a student is reluctant to show me his work, either arrives late or doesn't show up for class at all, or doesn't pass in homework. Often the real reasons are small pieces in a much larger picture, and it takes time and trust for the whole image to unfold.

Each of our students comes with a complex, unique, individual script. As educators, our job is to set the stage so that the script can be revealed and to be prepared to listen when the story is ready to be told. When students are able to build a mentoring relationship with one person on campus who can help them be recognized and heard, transformative learning can occur on many levels. Postsecondary institutions should recognize and facilitate these relationships which could benefit all students, not just those who are multilingual and learning disabled. The difference for ESOL students with LDs, however, is that their success depends on these connections.

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PAL for Multilingual Students with Learning Disabilities

For Parents or Guardians
Have I been hesitant - in some way - to publicly acknowledge my child's LD or ADHD?

How are learning disabilities viewed in my culture?

What kind of impact might that hesitation have on a child?

For Educators or Other Professionals
What incorrect assumptions may I have had about a non-native English-speaking student?

What might I do differently in the future having read this chapter?

For Students
Has my life as a learner been complicated by any of these (in addition to LD/ADHD):

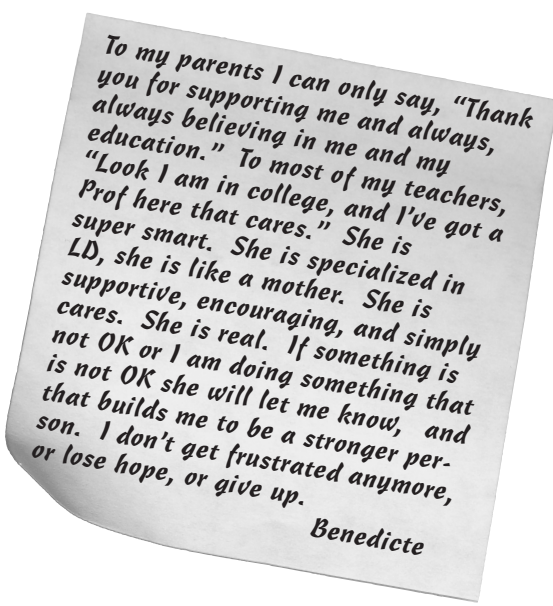Cultural differences

Frustration

Financial struggles

Shame

Language differences

Few people who know or care about me personally

What difference might a mentoring relationship make?

To my parents I can only say, "Thank you for supporting me and always, always believing in me and my education." To most of my teachers, "Look I am in college, and I've got a Prof here that cares." She is super smart. She is specialized in LD, she is like a mother. She is supportive, encouraging, and simply cares. She is real. If something is not OK or I am doing something that is not OK she will let me know, and that builds me to be a stronger person. I don't get frustrated anymore, or lose hope, or give up.

Benedicte

Metacognition and Mandarin
元认知和普通话

Jeannette Landrie, M.Ed. and Sanne Dinkel, M. Ed.

An Opportunity

Jeannette

Since I struggle with a learning disability, I found it paralyzing to study a foreign language. After adopting my daughter from China, however, everything changed. When you are willing to fly halfway around the world in search of your family, it is easier to put one's fears in perspective. As a way of connecting to my daughter's culture, I found the strength to attempt learning Chinese. I signed up for a "Parent and Child" Chinese class with my four year old daughter. So when the opportunity arose to also study Chinese at the college level, I couldn't pass it up. If I moved ahead of my daughter in the acquisition of Chinese, I would be in a better position to help her acquire her native language and create a path toward her culture of origin. Additionally, learning Mandarin Chinese at Curry College was a great opportunity to further understand my daughter's native language and culture, as well as share this learning experience with my colleague, Sanne Dinkel, who had traveled to China.

When I was in graduate school, my professor, Diane Goss, emphasized the importance of teachers putting themselves in the role of the learner. Her professor at Columbia University, Stephen Brookfield (1995), suggested that teachers become more empathetic to the role of the student if they periodically take a class that is a real challenge. Humorously, he recalled learning to swim for the first time as an adult and how humbling it was to step out of the teacher role and into the student role.

Sanne

Although I knew that we learned a foreign language easier before the fifth grade, I was not concerned because I had had five years of French and two years of Spanish. My motivation for taking Chinese was much different. I was planning a trip to China and wanted to know a few words to survive. My first endeavor with the language was through an adult center language class. The teacher ran the class primarily

in "Pinyin" which is an alphabetic system based on the sound of the characters. It was devised for learners studying Chinese for the first time.

At the end of the course I flew to Beijing expecting to be able to say a few words because I had always managed to get by with a foreign language. It was a rude awakening to discover that I could not hear the four tones required. There were so many different Chinese dialects! *I could not* understand anyone, and they could not understand me at all. That summer I resorted to pointing to maps with both pinyin and Chinese characters, but my voice was silent.

Jeannette

I think it is also helpful to have an ear for music. Although I don't play an instrument, I did play piano as a child and my family was exceptionally melodic. Playing music and singing were also part of our daily life. Perhaps having a musical aptitude is also helpful when it comes to hearing the subtle differences in the four tones of the Chinese language.

Sanne

In grade school I played the piano. In middle school I played the cello and viola. In addition to this, my mother was an opera singer, so we had a lot of classical music exposure. While I had an excellent ear for music I could not carry a tune. Both my mother and I also painted with watercolors and oils. These were some of the activities that helped to foster my right brain skills. As far as being able to hear the tones; age might be playing a part in my inability to distinguish them easily.

Jeannette

All languages take immense patience and a willingness to tolerate the awkward learning process. Most difficult was making the tremendous time commitment; however, since Chinese plays to my learning style it felt more natural so the process seemed more gratifying. I am right-hemisphere dominant, and my background is deeply rooted in the fine arts. As a visual, tactile and kinesthetic learner, Chinese taps my learning strengths. This perspective was validated in *Proust and the Squid:* The "Chinese writing system is a mixed logo

syllabary that incorporates much of its past in its characters. As a result, it requires new readers to develop a prodigious amount of visual spatial memory, which is enhanced by the act of writing these characters over and over" (Wolf, 2007, p.48). Although I do not presume to ever be fluent in Chinese, I've noticed it feels more complementary to my learning style than French or Spanish ever did.

Metacognitive Efforts

Sanne

I drew upon my fascination for China and decided to try one more time with a new teacher. In addition to our textbook, having a CD to listen to was great. You could hear the words over and over. This was the same way we had studied foreign language in high school. All I had to do was memorize. It wasn't until we had to listen to a conversation that I realized I still had a problem.

During class, I remember leaning over to ask Jeannette if she had understood all of the conversation. To my surprise she was also experiencing some difficulties, but they didn't seem to be the same as mine. It was necessary to rethink old study habits. My first line of defense was to study more, but that didn't seem to be working. I started thinking about how I used to learn, and what strategies I offered my students when they were having difficulty with material. My old strategies had been to repeat the words and listen to CD's. Now for the first time in my life, I had to re-evaluate my methods of learning. I was spending hours with the material, and couldn't seem to remember anything when the teacher started talking.

Jeannette

My weakest channel is receiving auditory information. Additionally, I have a slight processing delay in English, so it is exaggerated in another language. During our class I had difficulty processing large amounts of Chinese text as our professor read it. When she moved swiftly through the characters I was lost. Even using an index card to block out the extraneous characters, I struggled to visually track the characters while attempting to delineate the individual sounds. A sentence in Chinese sounded as if the characters were running together. I can relate to how new immigrants must have felt when they first arrived in America and heard English spoken quickly.

Sanne

Even though I was not taking the class for credit, I was putting a great deal of time into studying. By the end of the first semester, I was very uncomfortable with my progress. I had even considered not taking Chinese II. I agonized over the decision, and realized that it was silly not to take this opportunity to continue studying. Unfortunately, my difficulty with Chinese grew exponentially the second semester when we started learning the characters. While I had no trouble associating pinyin words with English, I became frustrated when we had to pair strange symbols with strange sounds and then remember what they were in English. On the other hand, Jeannette appeared to be thriving.

Jeannette

In contrast, I thought Sanne had a greater understanding of the vocabulary. Because I found the reading comprehension and writing process difficult in my native language of English, it was liberating studying a language not based on the alphabet. This freed me from the multitude of rules and grammatical terms in English. What I did not expect was to develop such a passion for China, through the study of Chinese.

When our Chinese language professor Yang Yi Ching (Yang Lao Shi) introduced a new character, she not only explained what the character depicted, but also what pictograph it was originally based on. Because Chinese is thousands of years old, there are pictographic elements that remain in the modern characters. Additionally every character had an interesting story behind it which our Lao Shi continually shared with us. As she explained each character, I was captivated by this amazing culture. The explanations also made so much sense. For example, the character for "ask" is composed of a pictograph of a door with the character for mouth in it, suggesting knocking on a neighbor's door to ask them a question (Y. Yang, personal communication, 2008). The pinyin for "ask" is "wen," (see Image 1). Through the further association of the question "When (wen) to ask?" I was able to remember this character.

Image 1

| Door (Men) | 门 | + | Mouth (Kou) | 口 | = | Ask (Wen) | 问 |

Because pork is a major staple of Chinese cooking and at the time of the character's original design a *house was not a home without pigs*. The character for "home" is composed of the character for "pig" under the character for "roof," (Image 2). This made it very easy to remember. Additionally this character for "home" is the same character used to denote "family."

Image 2

Home   家   (Jia)

Although the acquisition of Chinese played to my learning style, I still struggled. When I heard our professor occasionally reference English grammatical terms, I was immediately lost. As the anxiety in me grew I fought to keep from shutting down.

Discovering Strategies

Learning any language requires a massive time commitment which, as any working parent knows, is difficult to come by. To make the most of my time I played Chinese music CD's (Hu, 2003a; Xiong, 2004) in the car while my daughter and I were en route. At home we sometimes danced and sang with Chinese language DVD's (Hu, 2003b). Additionally, we made use of rhyming to help us remember. The pinyin for cat is "Miao," for bird it is "Niao," (Image 3). The symbol for bird is also heavily pictographic so it still looks like a bird. The stroke used on the top of the character looks like a feather.

Image 3

Bird   鸟   (Niao)

Unfortunately, when it came to keeping up with the college version of Chinese, I struggled to find enough time to complete the textbook and workbook lessons in addition to completing additional assignments. It was while reading *Proust and the Squid* I realized that creating worksheets to practice repeatedly
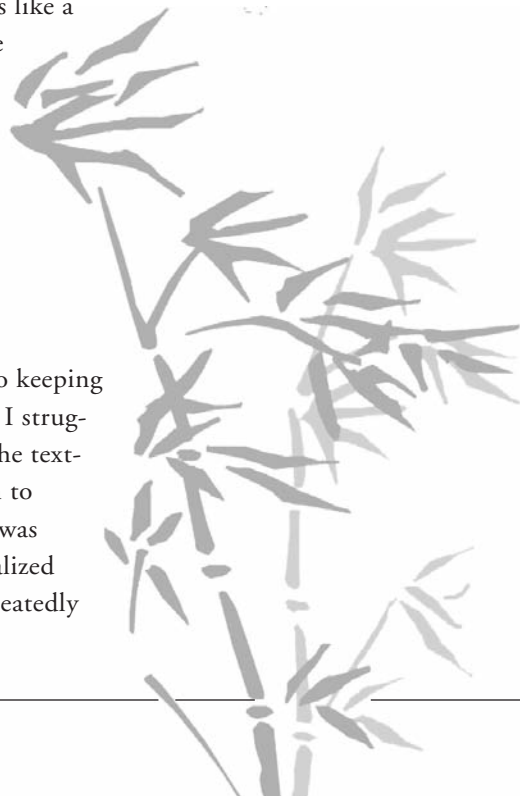
writing the characters might make the most of my limited time. In addition to a few stolen moments at night, I often brought the worksheets to faculty meetings. Like listening to music, it engaged my right hemisphere so I could focus on the discussion with my left hemisphere.

Sanne

When it came time to learning the Chinese characters, the first thing I did was make flash cards with the characters and their English meaning on one side and the Pinyin on the other. The more I continued to use this method the more agitated I became. It was just too difficult to isolate the symbols into words because the symbols seemed to run together. When I heard someone read the words, it was difficult to isolate the individual sounds of the words, because what I heard *seemed to be* like one continuous sound. My eyes couldn't visually separate the symbols into words, and my ears could not distinguish the tones.

Jeannette

Since I am a visual, tactile and kinesthetic learner, I need to see, touch and move to learn best. To facilitate the learning process I scanned the textbook and workbook so I could enlarge the text and create flashcards and worksheets. The process of creating these study aids, which is visual and hands-on, played more to my strengths than actually sitting and reviewing the material over and over. This strategy also integrated many of my senses.
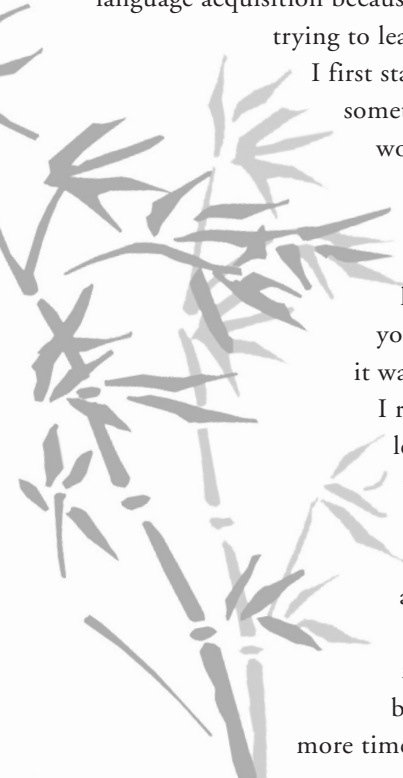
Sanne

Jeannette suggested a more visual strategy that she was using. Her method worked. I also started to integrate more multi-sensory strategies. By looking at the textbook while playing the CD, I was able to tie the isolated visual symbols with the sounds. Then I copied the characters over and over, while repeating the English equivalency.

Writing the characters repeatedly seemed to work. This was the same way I learned to write when I was a young child. I copied the alphabet over and over in large letters, and each new letter or word had a space between it. Unfortunately, I was not thinking about how I had first learned English; I was recalling how I had
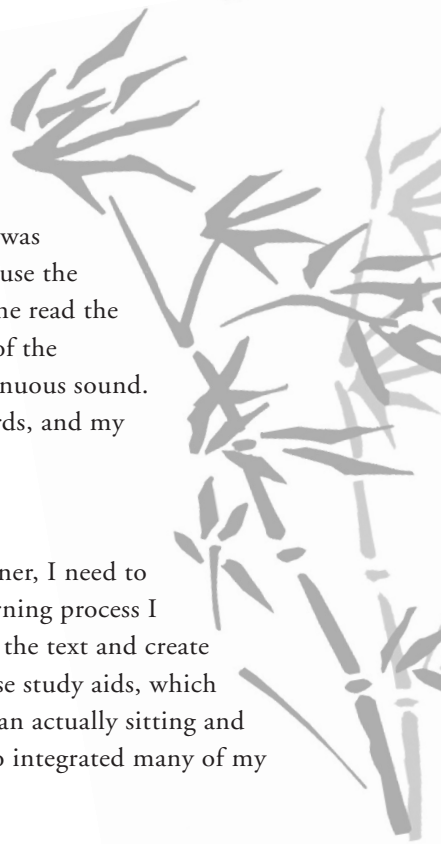
learned French. With French I memorized the vocabulary, and then memorized a short paragraph.

How did I know if my method was working? I am not certain; however, I do know that when I am studying Chinese it is stimulating an area that is related to language acquisition because I am remembering the French word for the word I am trying to learn in Chinese. It happens less frequently now than when I first started to learn Chinese. What is occurring now is that sometimes when the teacher shows us a character, the Chinese word will pop into my brain.

It was not until writing this piece that I started reflecting on my initial experience with learning English. My parents read many simple books to me as a young child. It wasn't just seeing and writing the words - it was also hearing them! I also had an "ah ha" moment when I recalled attending a language lab once a month while learning French for the first time. What I needed to do was pair the sounds with the character while looking at the character. Once I had learned this step, I could pair the symbol with the definition. Had I known that the alphabet writing system relied heavily on the posterior of our brain's left hemisphere, and the Chinese system used many areas for specialized autonomic processing across both hemispheres, I would have realized that it would take more time to develop new pathways for Chinese.

Mandarin and the Brain

Jeannette

I found it particularly helpful in language acquisition and character recognition that meaning can still be associated with the original pictograph. For example, the character for rain actually looks like rain (Image 4). The reading brain

> requires far more surface area in visual and visual association regions, and in both hemispheres. Unlike other writing systems (such as alphabets), Sumerian and Chinese show considerable involvement of the right hemisphere areas, known to contribute to the many spatial analysis requirements in logographic symbols and also to more global types of processing. (Wolf, 2007, pp. 35-36).

Image 4

Rain　　雨　　(Yu)

　　　　Conversely, when Chinese individuals learn English and make and initial attempt to read, Wolf states that "…their brains attempt to use Chinese-based neuronal pathways" (2007, p. 5). They could be trying to read English letters and words as pictographs because their brains have become hardwired to read Chinese characters. One Chinese American recently shared with me her technique for learning to read English. When she read the word "eye," she visualized the "e's" as actual eyes and the letter "y" as a nose (Xin Lao Shi, personal communication, September, 2008). "The act of learning to read Chinese characters has literally shaped the Chinese reading brain" (Wolf, 2007, p. 5).

　　　　Hedden and Gabrieli at MIT supported this in their recent brain research, where they compared brain scans measuring neural activity of Asians with those of European and Americans. When it came to visual perception, Asians took in a more global and panoramic perspective, as compared to Westerners where less is noticed, but in greater detail (Goldberg, 2008). Perhaps learning the Chinese language is more dependent on the contextual meaning of the characters than pure memorization.

Sanne

　　　　In separate studies at the University of Michigan, researchers also found that North American students of European descent look more at objects in the foreground and Chinese students tended to look at backgrounds and take in a global perspective (Schmid, 2008). We know through medical scans of the brain that the ability for visual specialization increases when we use both hemispheres in reading Chinese (Tan, et al., 2000; Siok, 2008). Therefore, in order to remember and to read Chinese, we have to tap the right hemisphere as well as the left. Jeannette drew on her strengths when she utilized her right hemisphere dominance to help her young daughter practice Chinese through singing, rhyming, and writing the
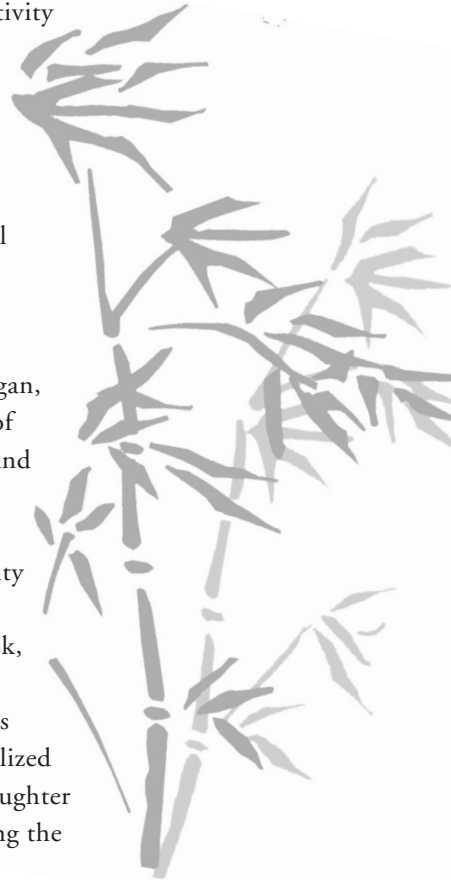
characters. These are all techniques we used when we were young, but as adult learners we tend to discard them. When a young child learns to read, there is much more activity in both hemispheres. As the skill becomes practiced, the neuronal paths become more efficient.

The works of Tan, et al. (2000) and Feng, et al. (2003) suggest that each writing system uses unique structural connections. The brain may use different networks of neurons for different languages (Schmid, 2008). Different writing systems make their own networks in the brain when developing reading (Eden, 2000). When learning Chinese, it is necessary for our brains to create new or different networks. The brain wired to read Chinese characters activates areas never used to read English and vice versa (Wolf, 2007). Also, the Chinese mixed logo-syllabic system requires new readers to develop visual spatial and motor memory. One way to do this is by writing the characters over and over.

Research on dyslexia is showing that, "Dyslexia affects different parts of a child's brain depending on whether they are raised reading English or Chinese" (Schmid, 2008). These findings have implications for the treatment of reading problems depending upon the writing system. For those who had dyslexia and learned English, it was thought to be a dysfunction in the left temporo-parietal areas, the left middle superior temporal cortex and/or the left inferior temporal occipital gyrus. The English dyslexic demonstrated smaller volume in the posterior region. For those who had dyslexia and learned Chinese, the disruption was in the middle frontal gyrus region.   In the Chinese dyslexic this area is smaller than in a normal Chinese. Effective educational intervention for Chinese dyslexics may involve working memory and sensory-motor tasks; whereas those interventions for English dyslexics may involve the left posterior brain which is close to the auditory cortex (Siok, Zhendong, Zhen, Perfetti, & Tan, 2008).

As we learn more about how the brain functions and how its structures are affected when learning to read and write in different languages, we will be able to develop curriculum that is user friendly no matter what your style or language of origin. As Wolf (2007) stated, "the new circuit and pathways that the brain fashions in order to read become the foundation of being able to think in different innovative ways" (p. 217).

The Learning Relationship

Sanne

What is amazing about this class is Professor Yang Yi Ching's understanding of the difficulty some of the students are experiencing. As much as it has been difficult for me, it has also been a relief that Professor Yang has created a non-threatening atmosphere in the classroom and was very supportive. She provided us with many opportunities to do well. She had a multi-faceted approach which was wonderful for those with different learning styles. She seemed to remember how difficult it was for her when she first learned English. This made a tremendous difference.

Jeannette

This experience helped us understand what it takes for some people to learn. After completing two semesters of study, Sanne and I realized we could provide a unique perspective discussing the roles that learning styles and metacognition play in our ease or difficulty learning a new language, especially one so different from English.

Sanne

While I cannot say that Chinese will ever come easily to me, it has taught me a lot about my own learning patterns. I have to adapt the strategies to fit my learning style. Studying Chinese has shown me that I can make new connections using more right hemisphere, but when I venture into this type of learning I am more anxious. Students suffer learning anxiety, too. I have a new appreciation for how that feels now.

Jeannette and Sanne

This experience has also given us a new respect for students who have struggled to find understanding in their educational lives in a very left-brain auditory educational world. One of our vivid memories was the first time we were paired together to write a dialogue. We were amazed at what the other remembered. We both came to the realization that if we could combine our two dominant hemispheres, we would be one dynamite student.
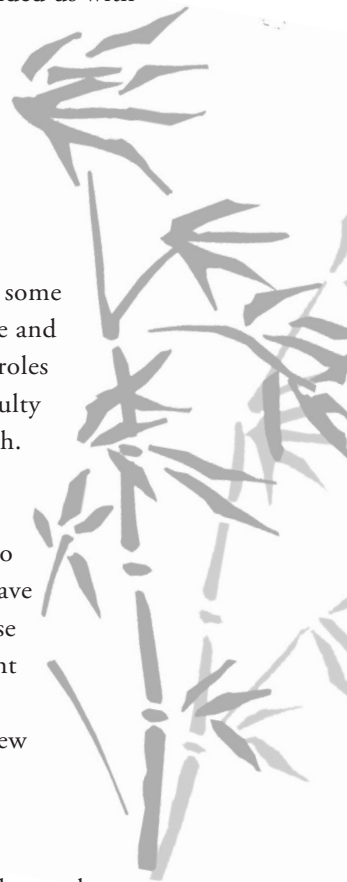
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Metacognition and Mandarin

For Educators and Other Professionals

"Stephen Brookfield suggests that teachers become more empathetic to the role of the student if they periodically learn something new that is a real challenge."

How have I experienced that?

How has it enhanced my teaching?

For Students

As I remember something that was hard to learn, which of these skills might have been tapped:
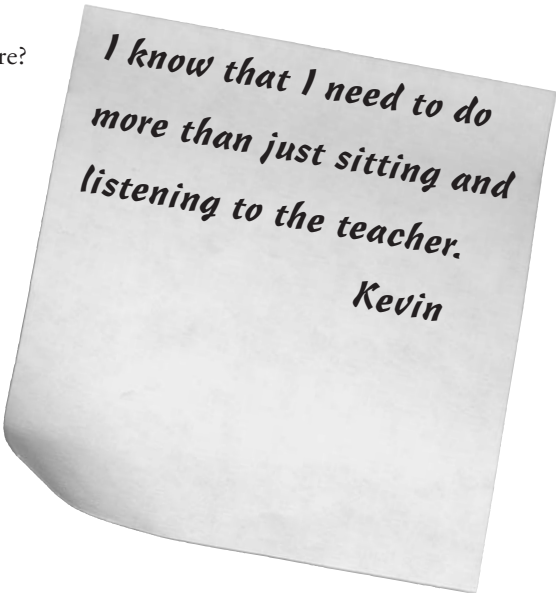
Visual
Verbal
Auditory
Written

Which are strengths and which are a struggle for me?

How might I have used my strengths more?

For Parents or Guardians

How alike are my child and I in learning languages?

What might that suggest about how each of us learns?

I know that I need to do more than just sitting and listening to the teacher.

Kevin

ACCOMMODATIONS & TRANSITIONS

Changing Lives with Assistive Technology

Marie Saulnier, M.Ed.

Although the Program for Advancement of Learning has been in existence since 1970, the introduction of assistive technology into our program is relatively new. While the basic strategies of our program are still in place and have served us well, the digital age has enhanced our ability to supplement the needs of students' individual learning styles. Beginning with the ability to dictate into a computer, which is known as speech recognition or "speech to text," and continuing through the development of software that can read text to you or "text to speech," students can now employ new tools to enhance their learning.

We have incorporated several software programs into our PAL curriculum. The first is *Dragon Naturally Speaking* (Dragon, n.d.), which allows students to speak into a computer and have the computer type what it hears the student dictate. Many prospective students respond to the question asked during interviews, *"What is your learning strength?"* with comments like, *"I'm very good in discussion."* During the course of the interview it is quite obvious that they are articulate and engaged in our dialogue. However, when asked, *"What do you struggle with?"* they often say, *"I have trouble getting it down on paper."*

This common frustration has discouraged many learning disabled students. Struggling to spell difficult words can inhibit their writing. For example, instead of saying, *"This was the most exhilarating and inspirational experience of my life,"* they may write, *"It was fun."* Some students express the frustration they experience while trying to remember the spelling of a word. They report that they actually forget the content of the sentence they are writing. One can only imagine how frustrating this must be for them. Bright, articulate, and enthusiastic students can be
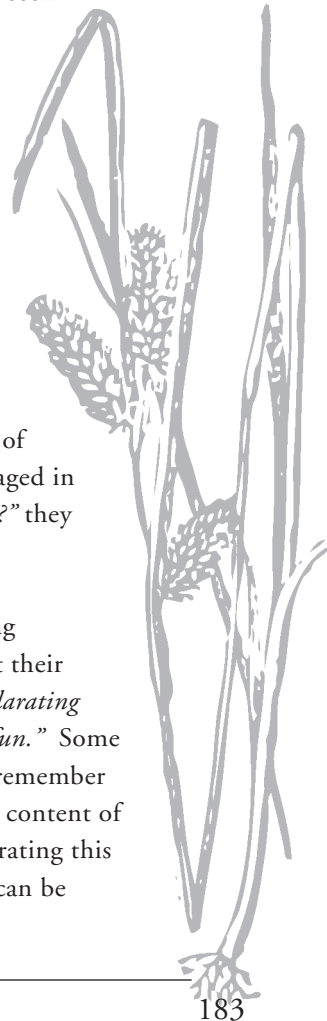
stopped in their tracks because they cannot spell a word that they are clearly capable of using in conversation.

Other features of *Dragon Naturally Speaking* have proven invaluable, too. The program reads the text back to you in your own voice and corrections can be made instantaneously. Students can do their own proofreading and not depend on others for help. Some use this technology for their essay exams. Besides using this program to write papers and reports, students can speed up routine tasks, such as entering data, launching applications, sending e-mails and working on the Web, and it is great for students who have trouble with keyboarding.

Many of our students struggle with reading. We are able to order books on CD from RFB&D, Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D, n.d.), a wonderful organization that provides recorded material for students with documented learning disabilities. Once students join that organization, they can order their texts on CD every semester. Some listen in the AT Center; others buy their own small, portable CD player from RFB&D and listen wherever they like. Besides CDs, RFB&D now offers texts in a downloadable format.

Another source, *Kurzweil 3000* (Kurzweil3000, n.d.), is a software program that allows the user to view a scanned page of text on the computer screen while listening to the text being read aloud. In addition, the Kurzweil 3000 provides study skills, editing and file management tools and dictionary definitions. The student can regulate the speed at which it reads (words per minute), the volume and the voice.

Many students use *AlphaSmarts* (AlphaSmart Direct, n.d.). These portable word processing machines allow students to type wherever they wish since they are battery operated. Work can be saved as a word document and then transferred to a computer via cable. Students like having something so light and relatively sturdy to carry with them. They are more affordable than laptop computers.

Because we are so proud of the accomplishments of our students, I have asked three of our graduating seniors and two of our juniors to relate their experiences. The following have had great success using the
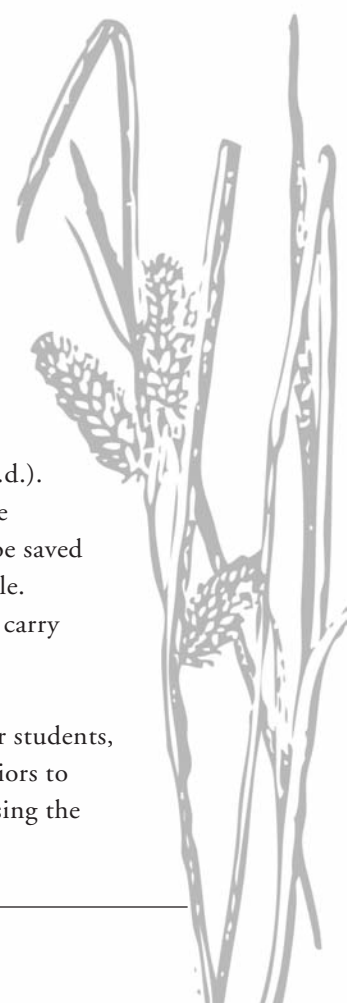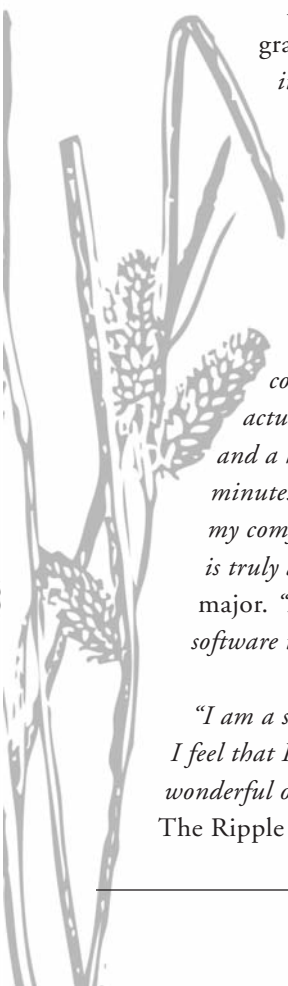
assistive technology that was just described and have incorporated it into their own daily study programs. They are all comfortable now with who they are, how they learn and the technology that helps them succeed.

Greg

Greg is from Brooklyn, New York, and speaks both English and Spanish.

At the age of 12 he was diagnosed with dyslexia and attended a series of schools that did not meet his learning needs. Fellow students called him "stupid" and life was pretty unbearable. He said it was no shock when he was diagnosed in the seventh grade because he knew something was wrong when he could not memorize the alphabet. He was fortunate enough to have been given a scholarship to a private school where he learned to read and was exposed to assistive technology for the first time. "Here I learned that I was not stupid. I just had to look at it as a different way of life."

After high school, he chose Curry College because of the PAL program and the assistive technology support that was offered. "*Basically, it was Curry College or the Marines.*" Freshman year he was shy and unsure of himself. College requires a lot of reading and writing. Greg was challenged. "*I am not a very fast reader and, due to my dyslexia, I do not enjoy reading.*" Assistive technology makes it easier and less stressful.

He uses *Dragon Naturally Speaking* and says it has improved his writing. "*I didn't have to think about spelling words because I could speak them into the computer. I didn't lose my thoughts during the actual sentence construction. It used to take me a whole day to write a one and a half page paper. With Dragon, I can write an opinion paper in 15 minutes, plus the proofread, because I know what I want to say. It improved my comfort level in reading and writing.*" He also states, "*Kurzweil software is truly a blessing for me.*" He says it allowed him to stay in his psychology major. "*I wasn't afraid of the large words and their meanings. I could use the software to look up instant definitions and create study notes.*"

"*I am a senior now, but without assistive technology, I would not be here today. I feel that I am a success story. I came from the slums of Brooklyn to all of these wonderful opportunities.*" Greg went so far as to start a support group called The Ripple Effect. This is a drop-in group for dyslexic students to meet once a

week, share their experiences, offer solutions and encourage each other to continue on the path to success.

"My self-esteem has improved dramatically. I love myself and I love this school. I am not afraid to tell anyone I have a learning disability because I am articulate and can explain myself. My self-esteem has gone through the roof. Some peers even think I am a teacher."

He came into our AT Center the other day with some exciting news. His psychology professor asked a few seniors to preview a new psychology textbook that is being written by three Harvard professors. Greg is one of the students she chose. He is now reading the first three chapters with our Kurzweil software and making constructive comments which will be forwarded to them. In Greg's own words, *"Can you believe I have been asked to do this?"* My answer was…. *"Yes, I can."* He plans to join the New York City police force, continue on to get a master's degree in psychology and be an advocate for learning disabled students.

Alex

Alex is a transfer student who states, "*I should have come to Curry College sooner."*

He knew something was wrong in elementary school. *"I couldn't write the number nine in kindergarten. I still reverse letters in 'from' and 'form' all the time."* Alex was diagnosed at the age of seven with dyslexia and ADHD. He was in the lowest reading groups in Special Education classes from grades one through eight. He took Ritalin but says, " *It screwed up my head."* Second grade was his last happy year. He was mocked and teased in grade three. By fourth grade he was faking illness and going to the nurse's office so he could be sent home. To quote Alex, *"Sixth grade was hell."* He was belittled and ostracized. He made his first friend in middle school. It was at this time that he nicknamed himself "LD" and used the name until he came to Curry College. By seventh grade, he had "salvaged" himself because he played football and he had some friends. One teacher in the eighth grade helped by encouraging him to write stories and lending him films based on novels to watch. This is when Alex knew he was going to be a writer. By ninth grade, however, he was skipping school, had become depressed and was ready to give up. In 10th grade, a teacher got him into an acting class. Alex admits he cannot read a script but he can memorize anything. He learned that he can memorize four pages of dia-

logue in less than an hour. Before finding Curry College, he had attended another college without much success.

"This sounds like a contradiction, but I love words! Dragon Naturally Speaking was my salvation. It brought out the inner artist and writer in me. One of the best ways I've learned to use Dragon Naturally Speaking has been the proofread feature. I can play back my essay, test questions or my papers and have it read to me from the Dragon software. This has been a wonderful support for my writing and test taking. Last summer I wrote two screenplays using Dragon Naturally Speaking.

I have changed so much since I have been at Curry College. Here I am comfortable with people who understand me and my learning difference. You need sometimes just to be able to relate to other human beings. I have my own radio show and love my WMLN family. I want to go into TV and radio production as a career but my real dreams are to produce independent films and write a novel. My self-esteem is high. I have lots of friends and I know that I am very intelligent. I am confident but still relate with those wounded people. As an actor I can bring out my many personalities. I feel the sky is the limit. When I go for a job interview, I even admit I have spelling issues but with assistive technology, this is not a problem for me anymore.

Life is a struggle, but you have to figure it out. I take one day at a time. That's Alex in a nutshell."

Josh

Josh is a senior Education major and a peer tutor for the Assistive Technology Center in PAL.

"My parents knew that I had a learning disability because I had trouble learning the alphabet in the first grade. The teacher always seemed to be talking too fast and I had trouble following her directions. This was later diagnosed as a processing problem. My parents tried to get all the help they could for me in elementary school. They spent a lot of money and got me speech therapy, too. This helped me more than my public school. In public school I was sent to a resource room. It was a waste of time…one time we actually spent three weeks on the calendar. Can you believe it?

My parents sent me to a private school in Manhattan for grades two through eight. I spent hours each day going between Brooklyn and Manhattan. They really saved me and never gave up. They drove me long distances so that I could play sports and be with my classmates.

I chose Curry College because of the support that was offered by the PAL program but I didn't realize how much assistive technology could help me. My high school didn't have any. The Kurzweil was a great help to me when I couldn't get some textbooks from RFB&D. I could use it when I was doing research on line for my term papers and essays. I'm glad that I attend a college where the majority of the enrollment is non-PAL students. I now know that I can keep up with and even surpass non-PAL students academically. My confidence level and self-esteem are very high. I look forward to working with young students and hope to encourage them to understand themselves and learn to be proud of who they are just the way I have."

He cannot believe how much he has grown and accomplished in his four years at Curry College. Josh has become a peer tutor and now trains other college students on how to use assistive technology to support their LD. His dream is to get a master's degree and become a special education teacher. *"PAL has helped me so much!"* Josh is currently applying to graduate school.

Jon

Jon is a senior Criminal Justice major and manager of Curry's WMLM Radio.

He was diagnosed with dyslexia in the second grade. He attended three elementary schools in three months and was placed in special education classrooms. He remembers that there was foam on the floor so that students wouldn't hurt themselves if they fell or banged their heads on the floor. He recalls one substitute teacher getting her high heel shoes caught in that foam. He remembers never being challenged or having any interaction with the other students in the school. In seventh grade, he was very self-conscious about his dyslexia. One student told Jon that he thought LD was a disease and was afraid he would catch it from him.

By high school, Jon and his family became proactive in dealing with his learning disability. His mother purchased a reading program and donated it to the school. He finished the program by 12th grade. His middle school teacher made a positive impression on him. She encouraged him more than any other teacher had and stayed in touch all the way through his high school years.

Jon attended a junior college for one and one-half semesters. It was called the Horizon Program and he says it was really just an extension of a special ed program. Then he found the PAL Program at Curry College. "I know that my dyslexia is not my fault. I love to help people understand dyslexia because of my experiences. When I found the PAL Program at Curry College, I knew I had found the college

that was going to open my mind and make it work the way it was supposed to." Being able to have success in higher education was his dream. "*I was scared at first, and almost quit. But I don't want to fail at life.*" Freshman year was a challenge, so he purchased his own copy of *Dragon Naturally Speaking*. The *Kurzweil Reader* helped him to take his tests and prepare assignments.

"*I use my disability as a tool, not as an excuse. My self-esteem is very high even though I still hate reading out loud. I am excited about my future. I know I can accomplish anything. Technology has become a major part of my experience on campus. My PDA keeps me straight and helps me plan every day. I am such a 'techie' that I was even hired by the Technology Center as my student job. This program is not like any other. It gave me hope and a future. I now 'own' my disability, and I am proud of all that I have become.*"

Jess

Jess is a 30-year-old transfer student.

She has a twin brother and one older brother. All three siblings have ADHD and dyslexia. They grew up in a small town in the New Hampshire mountains where their elementary school had no idea about dyslexia and just thought the three children had "issues." "*We stood out. We were embarrassed. I went to the resource room one hour a day while the other students were in English. I have been described with written expressive disorder, math disorder and a reading disorder, my decoding skills are zero. I remember being bored and that I was always behind. I couldn't read and I felt stupid. My mother said, 'Keep the twins together; both will go forward and not be held back.' She said the school's job was to make sure we progress. We went to summer school each year.*

My mother told me that F is for fantastic. ' It's not you; it's the school that doesn't get it.' My mother didn't have rules; she thought all four of her kids were brilliant. She never punished us for poor performance. My father was dyslexic and only went to the eighth grade but got his GED. We were known in town as aggressive and athletic and pegged as problems from the beginning.

We each found teachers that were instrumental in helping us to graduate. I wanted to go to college but high school guidance counselors said military or vocational schools were for us. We were not allowed in the college courses. We were fighters. I fought to get in a regular English class when I was denied access in grade 11. They did let me in after I

went to the school board. In advocating for myself, I got an A. I had never been asked to read a book before. We watched the movie in Special Ed classes instead. I remember my spelling was atrocious but I told a teacher, 'You can't grade me on spelling.' I was graded on the content only, and I got an A.

My older brother was in the Navy. My twin brother tried college but couldn't do it and went into the military, also. I almost joined, but they offered menial type positions. I thought they would send me to college. I applied to a community college. These were all failed attempts.

I wanted to be a nurse because I had worked in high school in a nursing home. I wanted to go to nursing school. I couldn't read the textbooks and I flunked but I kept taking the course over again so I could figure it out. I am not stupid. 'There has to be a way around this', I thought. I was 28 years old and running a DBT (Dialectical Behavior Therapy) program for people with Borderline Personality Disorders. I didn't have the education or training for this job. I had only a high school education but ended up being the Program Director. Most program directors have a master's degree in social work. I knew my stuff but had no education to back it up. This held me back so I packed up and went to Landmark College, a two-year program, with the hope of transferring to a four year college to study nursing. My testing proved that I was very smart. We used assistive technology there. This was my first experience. It opened a new world to me. I got all A's. I became a member of the International Honor Society, shedding my identity of being stupid…shedding the old me.

Then I found Curry College. Curry is the best feeling, like I belong here.   They get it here and if they don't get it, they are willing to try to understand it. This is the first time I felt at home. The technology here is all good for me. Assistive technology is still my avenue to learning and handling course work. At Curry, the professors listen to me. Classes are small; the professors are open and respect me and my learning style. I learn best when I teach to someone else. Curry allows me to teach others what I know. I'm older and I spend long hard hours studying. I am going to be a nurse someday. I don't know how long it will take.

When Diane Goss interviewed me, she said, 'You are really smart.' She gets it. I couldn't believe it. When she left the room for a minute, I burst out crying. When you find a place that understands your LD, you know, you have to be there. I don't feel there is a ceiling here.

My education is really important to me. I learned that I couldn't do it like everybody else. I have dyslexia and ADHD. I am a woman with this. I am loud and active, and that is just me. I won't medicate who I am to be someone else. I know I need the technology that the PAL program offers. I stopped trying to do it the normal way. Not fitting in or belonging doesn't
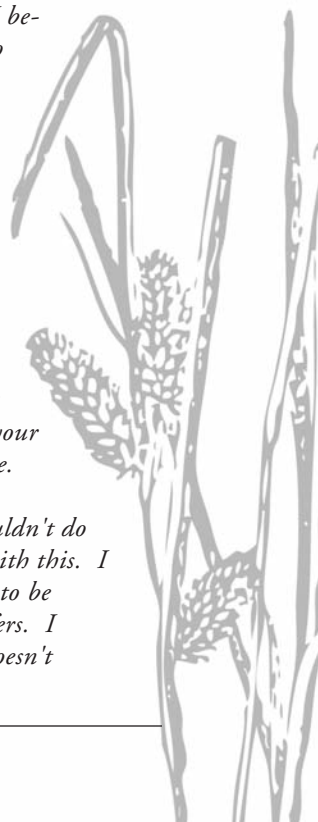
bother me. But I belong here. I don't fit in and belong anywhere else, but that is okay. I don't beat myself up anymore. I work out my route with my PAL professor. My brain works faster and I have to step back or slow down. It's not a problem for me. But sometimes I wish I could 'just read the damn book.' I have to advocate for myself. I have to identify not being able to read. I ask people to provide it in a form I can use.

I am going to be a nurse for sure, however I can get it. It may be a bachelor's degree in psychology or health first. I have amazing drive. Curry College fosters metacognition. 'Fail Until You Succeed' is my bumper sticker."

Common Threads

Several common threads can be seen in these stories of success. All of the students had someone who intervened on their behalf, who inspired them or would not let them quit.   Each student bought into the PAL program and took full advantage of all the support that we offer. They all worked harder and longer than their friends and have accepted their learning styles. They have become what Robert Brooks (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001) describes as "resilient," learning to set realistic goals and learning from their mistakes even through the most difficult moments. They all now have confidence. Most importantly, they all have learned to love themselves.

On a personal note, it has been my privilege to witness and be part of the journey that these hardworking and dedicated students have taken. It has been an honor to observe their determination and growth over their college years as they approach graduation. They are truly my heroes.

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Changing Lives with Assistive Technology

For Students

Which assistive technology might be a good match for me?

How can I try it out?

What are possible hesitations and possible benefits?
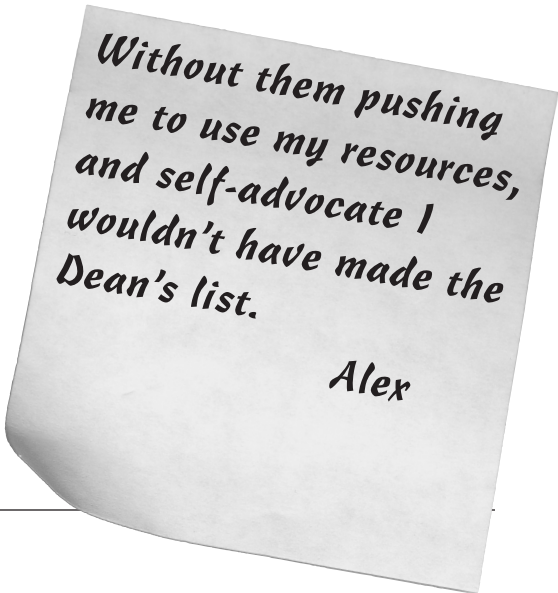
For Parents or Guardians

How might I help locate assistive technology?

What are my thoughts about this as part of transitioning services?

For Educators and Other Professionals

What role might I play in helping student's access assistive technology that could help them?
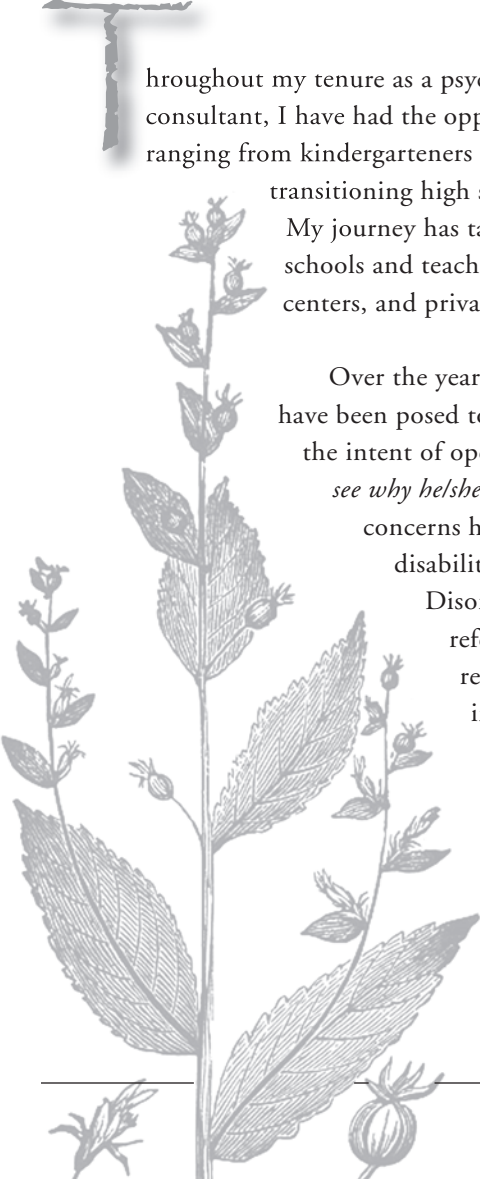
Without them pushing me to use my resources, and self-advocate I wouldn't have made the Dean's list.

Alex

Testing for Accommodations –
Not a "Done Deal":
An Exploration of Testing and Accommodations for Post-Secondary Level Education

Nancy E. Winbury, Ph.D.

Throughout my tenure as a psycho-educational evaluator and educational consultant, I have had the opportunity to evaluate hundreds of students, ranging from kindergarteners and early readers to budding adolescents, transitioning high school seniors, and struggling college students. My journey has taken me from public schools to medical schools and teaching hospitals, college diagnostic assessment centers, and private evaluation services.

Over the years, requests for a variety of diagnostic services have been posed to me. Most often, the request is simple, with the intent of open-ended exploration: *"Please test my child to see why he/she is having difficulty in school."* Other testing concerns have questioned the presence of a learning disability (LD) or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Parents and teachers often refer students for testing in order to receive recommendations and support for remedial interventions and program placement. Often, however, parents contact me, requesting that their son or daughter get "extended timed testing" or a "waiver" in a specific required curricular area, such as math or foreign language.

What is driving this trend in requesting specific recommendations as the primary

reason for pursuing testing? In the past, evaluations were requested to better understand the student's learning needs and to develop instructional interventions. Today, the primary focus of many testing requests has shifted instead to the end result, with many individuals now seeking accommodations for standardized testing, waivers for a required academic courses, or specific types of technology, equipment, or programs. A major factor that has influenced this trend is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

Passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 invited many individuals to seek accommodations to better meet their needs. ADA was developed to preclude discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The ADA law was designed to provide equal access to educational or employment opportunities for individuals with a physical or mental impairment as is available for those without disabilities (reference to ADA). The law purports to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access to an individual who is otherwise qualified.

In clarifying the issue of reasonable accommodations, Peter Latham and Patricia Latham, attorneys and founders of the National Center for Law and Learning Disabilities, underline that reasonable accommodations apply to non-essential alterations in testing requirements, instruction, or job requirements that would enable the individual with a disability to perform the fundamental tasks. Non-essential alterations might include: extended time or a separate setting for test-taking, oral and written instructions, access to assistive technology, and a reduced academic course load. They emphasize that this does not mean modifications that would alter the essential nature of the activity or would pose unnecessary hardship (Latham & Latham, 1999; Latham, 2007).

Accommodations are provided to "level the playing the field," with the intent to give each individual equal opportunity to perform to the best of his or her ability, without restrictions or obstacles imposed by a disability. Ramps are available to individuals with motor problems; large print books or taped texts are available to persons with vision problems; and selected educational accommodations are now available to some individuals with learning problems.
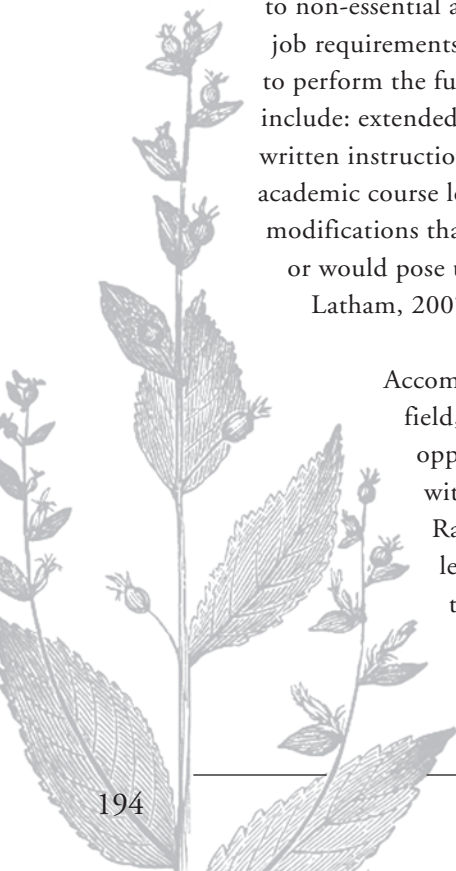
Jeanne Kincaid, another highly recognized legal expert on disability law, emphasizes the importance of the assessment report in providing evidence of a need and supporting the appropriateness of an accommodation request. In seeking accommodations, the student must disclose the presence of a disability, which is documented in a diagnostic report. Additionally, and equally important, the report must demonstrate that without specific assistance, the student is substantially restricted in the ability to perform in the academic setting. Most important, however, is that the accommodation requested must meet the requirement of being reasonable, and not causing unnecessary hardship to the institution. Furthermore, the institution is not required to fundamentally alter programs or lower standards (Kincaid, 2008).

At the post-secondary level a disability is covered under ADA laws provided it is significant, substantial, and handicapping. Most often the requested accommodation is one for which there is already demonstrated evidence from instructional intervention and/or testing results. Furthermore, the designated accommodation must make an observable difference in the individual's performance. In general, classroom accommodations fit into three categories: 1) alternative instructional methods (e.g., use of Power Point slides to augment a lecture), 2) auxiliary aids (e.g., notetaker, recorded texts, assistive technology), and 3) alternative methods for test-taking (e.g., extended time, separate room, oral administration of a written test) (Pratt & Byrne, 2004).

More frequently now, individuals engage the services of an evaluator to request specific educational accommodations: *I want my daughter to get extra time on the SATs." … "My son needs a waiver for his foreign language requirement." … "I'd like a note-taker in all of my lecture classes."* While many, or possibly all, of these accommodations may be appropriate for the specific learner, it is not guaranteed simply because the individual pursues an educational evaluation or has a previously diagnosed learning disability. A faulty assumption can be that testing produces a diagnosis, and, in turn, this diagnostic label guarantees an accommodation.

In a 2002 article, The New York Times reported that "diagnosis-shopping" had become more common in the wake of the College Board's policy decision to drop the asterisk indicating SAT accommodations used by special needs students (Gross, 2002). In some wealthy, competitive communities of New York's Westchester County, for example, some families contacted educational psychologists requesting quick diagnoses to receive extended time or other accommodations for the SATs. Knowing that there would be no indication of a special education diagnosis or ac-

commodation provision accompanying a student's SAT scores, many families agreed to lengthy and expensive evaluations for the purpose of getting extra time on an exam to potentially improve scores for college applications. High school special education coordinators began reporting "suspicious" service and accommodations requests from 11th and 12th graders who had never sought services before. While this abuse of disabilities legislation in a small segment of the population is regrettable, there remains a need for accommodating those individuals who otherwise truly would not be able to perform as well.

Parents and students need to know their rights so that they may seek appropriate accommodations for their learning needs. This is not enough, however, as they must provide documentation that adequately supports the existence of a disability along with the recommended need for each intervention in order to justify the request for any accommodation.

It may be helpful to review some instances of specific requests for accommodations in order to better understand these important issues. The following case studies illustrate three different situations where the individual and/or family sought educational accommodations to meet a presumed need. The learning profiles of the individuals vary considerably, as do the specific goals in seeking educational testing or educational interventions. In each instance, diagnostic test information was provided to support the request. Additional information detailing the student's educational history and previously attempted interventions was critical in seeking accommodations. Furthermore, in all three instances it was necessary to demonstrate how the disability impacted the student's performance and in what way the accommodation would enhance each individual's ability to perform.

Case Studies Illustrating Different Learning Profiles and Accommodation Requests

Case study #1: Request for Extended Time on Tests

At the time I met him, Greg was a bright and energetic 16-year-old sophomore at a highly competitive private preparatory school in the Boston area. In seeking an evaluation, his mother mentioned ongoing problems with procrastination, processing, and completion of tests within the allotted time. In discussing her son's struggles with time management and task completion, she noted that he usually did quite well on all the test items he completed within the time limits; he simply was unable to finish the test within the designated time. Further interviewing revealed

that time constraints challenged Greg on a daily basis, where he had difficulty completing homework assignments within a reasonable amount of time. Essay writing was especially problematic due to his tendency to constantly revise as he wrote, thus finding it difficult to reach completion. Greg had never sought testing before because "he has always been so bright." His mother also raised the question as to whether he might benefit from extended time on the SATs.

After the completion of a full battery of psycho-educational and neuropsychological tests, results revealed a significant discrepancy in cognitive abilities, with considerably stronger WAIS-III (Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, 1997) performance in Verbal Comprehension (VCI 140) and Working Memory (WMI 124), and somewhat weaker performance in Perceptual Organization (POI 116). In contrast to all of these cognitive indices, where Greg's scores ranged from high average to very superior, his Processing Speed (PSI 99) was significantly lower than all other cognitive scores. Other measures of processing speed and work rate yielded similar results, with consistently lower scores on tasks where time impacted the overall rating. Especially noteworthy was the contrast of his Nelson-Denny (Brown, Fishco, & Hanna, 1993) reading comprehension scores when taking the test under standard time conditions and extended time conditions. When able to utilize an additional 12 minutes for test completion, not only did he complete 14 more test items, but he improved from a 62nd percentile rank to a 99th percentile rank. Obviously, this is an example of a student who, with additional time, was able to complete more of the test questions and with greater accuracy. In Greg's case, the test data and evaluative report provided sufficient evidence of a processing speed disability that greatly compromised his performance. With the accommodation of extended time granted in school and for the College Board SAT's, his school and standardized test performances improved dramatically, at the same time that his frustration decreased. Greg is now a highly successful college freshman at a competitive institution in the Boston area. He continues to make use of extended

time accommodations for most of his college tests and exams. He also has learned to better manage his time for completion of assignments by starting tasks earlier and planning for extra time for each task.

### Case Study #2: Foreign Language Waiver Request

Katie, a college junior, presented with a long history of academic struggles throughout elementary, middle, and high school, as well as previously diagnosed ADHD. Now majoring in Psychology at a four-year college in Boston, she faced a two-semester foreign language requirement in order to graduate. Both Katie and her academic advisor seriously questioned whether she could meet this requirement, given her past struggles in high school with her study of Latin, as well as her long-standing learning difficulties with memorization, vocabulary learning, comprehension of complex information, conceptualization, processing speed, and long-term memory.

Katie was originally evaluated approximately four years earlier, after years of academic difficulties as a student in parochial schools. At the time of the first assessment, her family sought a better understanding of her strengths and weaknesses, as well as recommendations for educational interventions. Katie's perseverance and willingness to try new strategies helped improve her performance in high school, so that she graduated on a successful note and was able to move on to a competitive college.

Now more mature and sure of the importance of advocating for herself, Katie approached her academic advisor because of her past struggles in learning foreign language. Together, they hypothesized that a foreign language waiver might be appropriate, and her advisor then recommended testing in order to determine the appropriateness of such a waiver.

Katie sought out a comprehensive psycho-educational evaluation, explaining her specific purposes for the assessment. Already familiar with this student from the previous evaluation four years earlier, I recommended specific testing around the
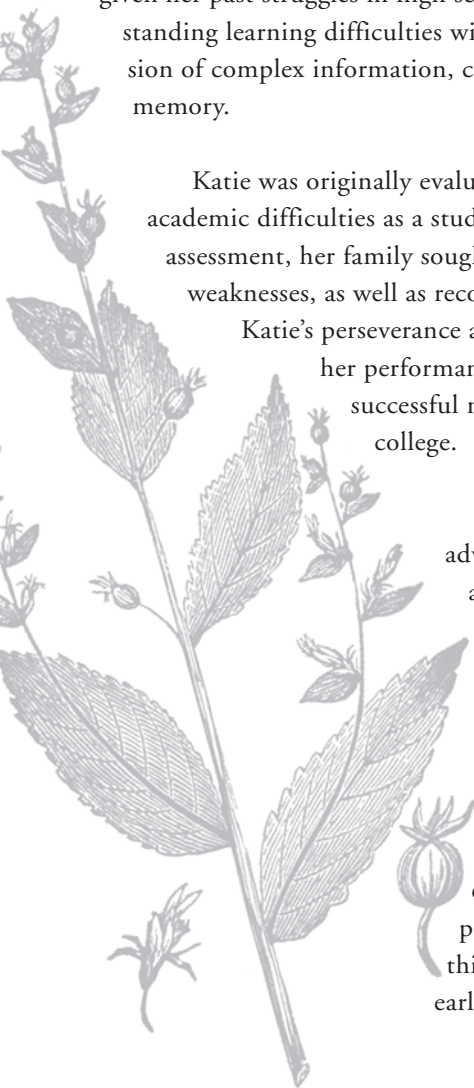
issues of foreign language learning. In addition to the more typical cognitive, achievement, and processing measures included in a comprehensive evaluation test battery, the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll & Sapon, 2002) was administered. The MLAT is a test requested by a number of college LD support programs as a means for determining foreign language waiver eligibility (Ofiesh & McAfee, 2000). The MLAT is recognized as a test instrument that is strongly associated with foreign language learning, as it evaluates students' skills in the areas of memory, sound-symbol associations, spelling, sensitivity to grammatical structure, and paired associate learning (Carroll & Sapon, 2002). It is often used to assess candidates for exemption or accommodation eligibility with regard to foreign language requirements. In Katie's case, the MLAT test results placed her at the 15th percentile, which is well below the suggested cut-off, thus indicating her eligibility for a waiver. Her depressed scores on this test of foreign language learning potential, along with her educational and diagnostic history of learning disabilities and ADHD, provided adequate documentation to qualify her for the foreign language waiver she sought.

Case study #3: Request for Use of Assistive Technology

Entering Curry College in the Fall of 2006 as a 21-year-old freshman, Jamie arrived with a well-documented history of academic struggles and previous post-secondary academic attempts. His most recent diagnostic testing, having been completed many years earlier with only a few evaluative test measures, presented the picture of a student with significant ADHD, as well as challenges with reading and written language throughout his school career.

Having just completed a structured one-year vocational/college program, Jamie was ready to launch himself as a full-time college student, hoping to eventually become a special education teacher. In applying to the Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL), Jamie went through an updated battery of diagnostic testing, which corroborated earlier findings of ADHD, along with a language-based learning disability that significantly impacted his reading comprehension and written language. He hoped that this academic support program for students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD would be a perfect fit for his learning needs and goals. On a weekly basis, Jamie worked with a learning specialist on study skills and learning strategies, such as time management, organizational skills, and writing.

As the year proceeded, his difficulties with written expression became more and more evident – especially when contrasted with his remarkable strengths with

oral language. While this friendly and enthusiastic young adult conversed in an artic-
ulate, analytical manner as he discussed his ideas, his written language did not reflect
this level of understanding or sophistication. On a regular basis, Jamie's written work
was plagued by the following difficulties:

- Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation in his written product
- Use of simple, unsophisticated vocabulary to avoid misspelling words
- Loss of focus mid-sentence
- Lack of structure or theme development in his paragraphs
- Compromise of complexity of ideas in order to shorten and simplify the
  arduous writing task

In this student's case, within the reflective teacher-student dyad, we raised
the question as to the usefulness of assistive technology as an accommodation to aid
the writing process. If Jamie could be relieved of the stressors of typing, spelling, and
attending to visual details, he might be better able to generate written work that more
accurately reflected his ideas and understanding. Voice recognition software, such as
Dragon Naturally Speaking (Nuance Communications, 2007), aids students with the
writing process by having the student dictate into a microphone, after which the
computer types what has been stated. While the student is responsible for the editing
and accuracy of the finished written product, this type of software greatly assists in
generating written text, without focusing on writing mechanics and spelling accuracy.

The assistive technology accommodation request was readily approved, as
both diagnostic testing and daily instructional experience provided strong evidence of
its appropriateness in helping this student more accurately demonstrate his actual
learning. Individuals responsible for disabilities services within the college deemed
this request as an appropriate and reasonable accommodation that would aid the
student in more accurately demonstrating his true learning and potential.
(Comprehensive diagnostic testing, along with a report of the functional impact of
this accommodation, would be required if requesting this type of accommodation
for a standardized testing situation, as well.)

This type of accommodation positively impacted Jamie's written products, as
he was now able to "compose" papers with richer vocabulary, more complex ideas,
and more sophisticated sentence structure. Although he still needed to edit and re-
vise his initial draft, the major obstacle of generating written work more accurately
reflecting his thinking and understanding was overcome. He employed this speech
recognition technology for all writing tasks – daily homework assignments, research
papers, and exams.

Guidelines for Acceptable Documentation of a Disability (LD or ADHD)

Brinkerhoff and Banerjee (2005) offer detailed guidelines regarding what constitutes adequate documentation of a learning disability or ADHD in order to grant an accommodation. One such set of guidelines published by Educational Testing Service, *Policy Statement for Documentation of a Learning Disability in Adolescents and Adults* (ETS, 1999, 2007), addresses such factors as: recency of the evaluation; credentials of the evaluator; types of background information, tests and scores that must be included in the diagnostic report; and a need for a diagnosis and rationale for accommodations. It is essential that both the evaluator and the examinee be familiar with these guidelines in order to provide an acceptable request for an accommodation. While these standards were specifically developed for the College Board SAT examinations, the principles hold for most accommodations requests, whether they be for test accommodations, instructional assistance, or curriculum waivers. Most important is that any recommendations made by the examiner closely relate to specifically identified disabilities that impact the individual's performance. Hence, a recommendation for extended time, for example, must relate to documented difficulties associated with attention and speed of processing, work rate, and/or academic fluency.

AHEAD, the Association on Higher Education and Disability, also offers guidelines specifically focused on college-level requests. There is great similarity in their *Seven Essential Elements of Quality Disability Documentation* (AHEAD, 2004) to those presented by ETS. This organization also emphasizes the following critical points for providing adequate documentation: credentials of the evaluator, a diagnostic statement describing the disability, a description of the diagnostic methodology, details of current functional limitations, expected changes in the impact of the disability over time, a description of both current and past interventions and their impact on the disability, and specific recommendations related to the "functional limitations." These recommendations might include accommodations, strategies, assistive services or technologies, instructional techniques, and/or support services. AHEAD emphasizes that "while the post-secondary institution has no obligation to provide or adopt recommendations made by outside entities, those that are congruent with the programs,

services, and benefits offered by the college or program may be appropriate."
At the same time, they caution that when recommendations go beyond equitable
and inclusive services and benefits, the institution is not obligated to meet
recommendations that go beyond what is considered reasonable (AHEAD, 2004).

Programs and Accommodations at the Post-Secondary Level

Ofiesh and Gregg (2005) also report a dramatic increase in the number of
requests for accommodations amongst the late high school and post-secondary level
population. Why is this so? As mentioned earlier, students and their parents are
more aware of the laws for individuals with disabilities through their previous
experience in procuring public school services via an Individualized Educational Plan
(IEP) or accommodations through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
Now, more students with LDs and/or ADHD are pursuing college after high school,
in part because of the laws mandating reasonable accommodations for
disabilities. These students are better assured that they can succeed in a
college environment because of academic support programs, assistive
technology, and college disabilities officers' readiness to provide necessary
accommodations.

Given that the federally mandated special education laws
(Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 or IDEA) no longer
apply once a student graduates from high school, students must disclose
their educational needs in order to make requests for services or accom-
modations. Thus, at the post-secondary level, evaluations of students
with learning issues serve two main purposes: 1) determination of
eligibility, and 2) decision-making about services (Ofiesh & McAfee,
2000). Most often, approval for any special services is provided only
after careful review of diagnostic information in the form of a medical
report or psycho-educational/neuropsychological evaluation. As clearly
outlined by AHEAD (2004) and other organizations, it is expected that a
diagnosis accompany a thorough description of how the disability impacts
the student's performance. Additionally, the report must recommend
specific services and/or accommodations that directly address the identified
problem. This information may be reviewed by a disabilities services officer
or a learning specialist with an expertise in diagnosis of LD/ADHD.

Colleges are not obliged by law to provide special education services. They
must, however, accommodate the needs of any individual student with a diagnosed

disability, if the disabling condition interferes with the student's ability to perform and/or demonstrate his/her learning. The critical step for this to happen, however, is that students must disclose their diagnoses and disability needs in order to receive consideration for any accommodations requests. After high school graduation, responsibility for identification of a need falls entirely on the student. The post-secondary institution is not obliged to find the needy individual in order to provide services. Therefore, a student must be ready to take several necessary steps: 1) disclose the diagnosed disability; 2) present evidence of the disability through adequate documentation; and finally, 3) advocate for his or her specific needs.

Ofiesh and McAfee (2000) present an exhaustive examination of the use of psycho-educational evaluations for service delivery decisions at the college level. In their study, they surveyed 168 directors or providers of post-secondary services for LD students at community colleges, vocational-technical colleges, and four-year colleges and universities. With the purpose of determining what information from psycho-educational evaluation reports is most useful in making service delivery decisions, they reported that service delivery decisions are based on the same type of diagnostic and test information used to determine the presence of a learning disability. While this finding is not especially surprising, the authors suggest that this information is not as useful at the post-secondary level because daily remedial or compensatory educational interventions are not as likely to be provided. Priorities have shifted from basic skills remediation to service delivery options emphasizing in-dependence and self-advocacy, as well as accommodations. Although testing and evaluation reports have not changed, the focus is significantly different. When reviewing test reports, disabilities coordinators and learning specialists are now looking for information that supports the need for specific strategy-based services and/or accommodations that will aid the student's performance. No longer is there an emphasis on specific remedial programs or instructional techniques; rather, priorities now relate to more general provisions in supporting the student's independ-ent progress and success.

At Curry College, where the LD/ADHD student popula-tion represents approximately 25% of the student body, we review over 1000 individual psycho-educational and neuro-psychological reports each year from LD and ADHD students who are applying to the Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL). In reviewing the information presented, we consider certain significant questions:

- Is the student "college-able?" That is, does the student have the cognitive abilities, academic skills, and social reasoning necessary for success in the classroom and dormitory?
- Can the college provide the necessary "reasonable" accommodations to meet the student's needs?
- Is the student mature enough to handle independent living and to be able to self-advocate?
- Is the student motivated enough to maintain consistent focus on his/her studies in order to progress academically?
- Can the PAL service delivery model meet the needs of the student? Will this student be adequately served through our typical model of two one-to-one and/or small-group instructional sessions each week?

Ultimately, it is a partnership between the educational institution and the individual seeking services. If a student can provide evidence of a learning disability or ADHD, along with a reason that he or she is requesting an accommodation for a specific need that is documented by testing, it is likely that the institution will cooperate. Most often these services or accommodations are best requested through a disabilities services office. At an institution like Curry College, that is quite familiar with learning differences and appropriate accommodations, a collaborative effort is made to meet most reasonable requests made by the student. While students learn to self-advocate for their specific needs, the College provides a great deal of support and collaboration to streamline the process for seeking appropriate accommodations. It is important for each student seeking accommodations to clearly understand the process, however. Just as the College Board, AHEAD, and other institutions of higher learning spell out specific requirements for testing and accommodations requests, Curry College maintains the same expectation of current documentation of a diagnosed learning need that clearly warrants the specific recommended services or accommodations. This policy applies to all students with disabilities, whether in PAL (Program for Advancement of Learning) or seeking ADA accommodations via Curry's disabilities services coordinator.

Accommodations and services for students with disabilities are not automatic, especially after high school when the student has moved beyond the special education IDEA laws. While many educational institutions willingly provide reasonable accommodations for students to better demonstrate their learning, these institutions are only required to do so under specific conditions. Therefore, it is imperative that the student present any request for disability services or accommodations. These

must be accompanied by adequate documentation of the diagnosed disability and appropriate rationale for the benefit of such services.

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Testing for Accommodations - Not a "Done Deal":
An Exploration of Testing and Accommodations for Post-Secondary Level Education

For Parents or Guardians

How might I find out more about differences in educational laws after high school?

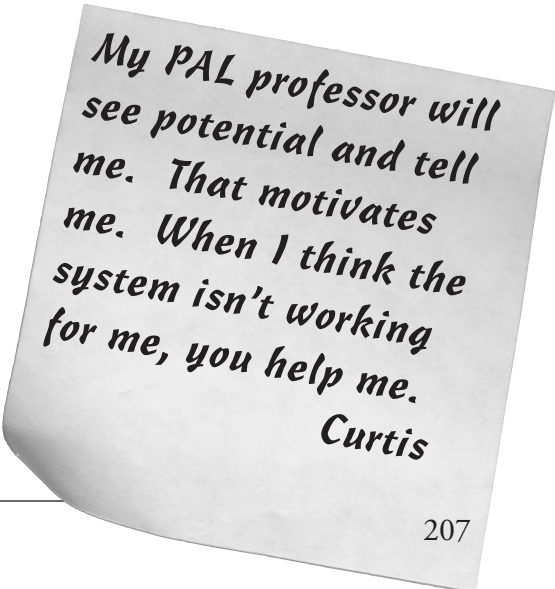**For Educators and Other Professionals**

When will I review the realities of evaluation, diagnosis, and accommodations with my students and their families

What other information would be helpful?

For Students

What kind of self-advocating might I need to do in college?

My PAL professor will see potential and tell me. That motivates me. When I think the system isn't working for me, you help me.

Curtis

Adults Transforming Their Lives:
## *The Adult Center at the Program for the Advancement of Learning*

Jane Utley Adelizzi, Ph.D., ATR, BCET

The Early Years

I n 1989 I began receiving calls from adults in their thirties, forties, and fifties, most of whom were women searching for a deeper understanding of their learning and functioning. They were on the cusp of the flood of information that belatedly, yet thankfully, hit the literary market. The first of these books was *Driven to Distraction* (1995) written by Ned Hallowell and John Ratey, the former having been a welcome visitor to the support group, WILL (Women Involved In Life-long Learning) in the early 1990's. He talked about his ideas for the bestselling book that would be available the following year, and kindly left me a copy of one of his drafts. Thank you, Ned!

WILL evolved as a result of these early phone calls that often had a desperate quality about them. Most of these women were experiencing the re-visitation of unpleasant feelings related to their troubled educational histories, especially the fear and humiliation they experienced in the classroom. These experiences, and the subsequent reporting of the emotional fallout as a result of those histories, was a substantial contribution to my doctoral research which dealt with the phenomenon I still refer to as *classroom trauma*.

When Ned Hallowell spoke to the members of WILL, they were enthralled with his presence and the attention he lavished on them. But, most of all they were impressed and moved by the respect he demonstrated in his acknowledgment of their arduous journeys in life. He told them how brave he thought they were to begin yet another challenging undertaking by considering a return to the classroom. With his encouraging words and passion for his work, my mission became less of an uphill climb and more like a metaphorical
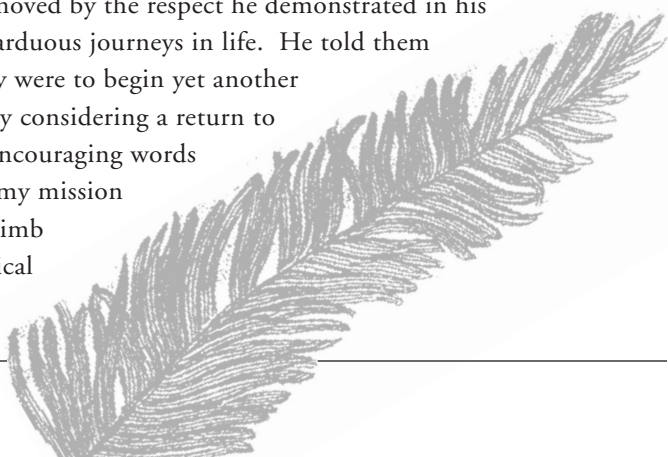
midwifery experience with these women.

Through the regular meetings of WILL which were held in the Gertrude M. Webb Learning Center at Curry College, these women were able to reach out to one another as they told the stories about their experiences in private, parochial and public school systems during the 1950's, 60's and 70's. What stood out as a common theme from my perspective was the sense of grief and loss they repeatedly returned to in their sessions; the loss of an aspect of self they felt they never knew as a result of a sense of deprivation. Their resentment and contempt for those they perceived as being inhibiting players in their school experiences were consistently aired, like a ritual that needed to be played and re-played with some frequency before we could move on to another, more positive topic.

These women, for whom I have the deepest respect, helped one another in a remarkable transformative period in their lives. These women laid the groundwork for the Adult Center at PAL.

Birth of A Program

During the early 1990's I felt as if my experience in WILL evolved into yet another phase of my role as a program developer. As the plans unfolded for integrating the services of WILL, which had become a nonprofit organization by that time, into PAL at Curry College, I realized that the tenor of the group sessions changed as we welcomed men to the program, and eventually younger adults who chose to enter college part-time as a result of a hiatus from the classroom experience, or because of much more practical issues in their lives, such as finances. These adults were drawn to the ACP because of its association with a college that was nationally recognized as a school that respected individuality in learning. The admissions process began to look more like an intake process as the criteria, the boundaries and structure of the program took shape, demanding changes and tweaking with each new growth spurt.

The Model

The structure of the ACP was developed several years prior to its actual integration into the college, and today remains basically the same. The overall design, consisting of several methods of teaching and mentoring in both one-to-one and group sessions, addresses most of the diverse needs of the students: the cognitive, social, emotional, and neurobiological aspects of self. The following components of the program and its internal structure and procedures are written in the present tense in order to acknowledge the incremental positioning of the multi-tiered services as they

exist today. The ACP is an operation constantly in motion, providing a safe setting and structure for adults with LD/ADHD to assist one another in a transformative experience.

The Inquiry Process

The first inquiry a student makes about the program usually occurs as a result of a telephone call, less frequently by email, and occasionally as a result of a spur of the moment person-to-person visit. Throughout the program's development it has been important to examine the routes and methods of communication each individual chooses in order to anticipate how the program might be more effectively marketed. The inquiry process has become an effective means of informal assessment on a variety of levels, allowing the interviewer an opportunity to observe the potential student within the context of a new relationship in an academic environment.

The Telephone Inquiry

Telephone inquiries are relatively safe for most individuals, even for those who have trouble articulating their thoughts. They can prepare and rehearse what they'd like to say, and decide how long they would like to be engaged in a conversation. It may take more than one conversation, possibly several, in order for the student to glean the amount of information needed in order to move on to the next step of the inquiry process. Some adults disclose that they are less embarrassed about crying over the phone because they can't be seen, a protective measure that has been learned for the purpose of self-preservation.

The telephone inquiry allows the interviewer to listen to the quality of language, organization of thought, and depth of the questions posed by the caller. It allows callers to decide whether or not the interviewer sounds trustworthy, leading them to judge how much they should disclose during the first call. This, in turn, provides the interviewer with yet further knowledge regarding the individual's ability to engage and disengage in conversation, to assess the caller's ability to censor the content of information they disclose, and very importantly, the level and degree of expectations they have for the program. The goal of the first call is to instill a sense of trust in the conversation so that the individual feels confident about either calling again or making an appointment to come in for a face-to-face interview. In order for the caller to avoid unnecessary anxiety, he or she may choose to call at a time when no one will pick up the phone (e.g., early morning, later in the evening, or on weekends).

Some phone calls sound like the following:

"Thank you for being there. You're an angel!" Of course no one is an angel, but in retrospect, people who work in programs of this nature may temporarily seem like a ray of hope, offering unconditional positive regard, the epitome of Carl Rogers' philosophy (Rogers & Freiberg, 1983). Or, a potential student may say, *"Where have you been? I have been dragging this around for so many years, and didn't think there was a program or a group that I could feel safe with!"* sometimes delivered in an indignant tone. Cutting through the anger and frustration that bubbles on the surface takes some time, but once the individual is engaged in the process of discussing past educational experiences, more opportunities to address fears and wishes present themselves. In my experience it's helpful to end each conversation with a simple to-do list for callers who seem interested in further pursuing the admissions process. If they have received a formal diagnosis of LD/ADHD, a copy of the assessment should be mailed to the program's coordinator prior to the face-to-face interview. If there is not a formal diagnosis of LD/ADHD then the inquirer is referred to the appropriate professionals.

The Email Inquiry

Over the years with the eventual simplification of email communication, inquiries from potential students are more frequent in this mode. Individuals who are not afraid to express their thoughts in writing favor this method and often try to make the inquiry an ongoing email relationship. Email is also used by individuals who feel less pressured by writing a note rather than by expressing themselves face-to-face. This method of communication provides the interviewer with an opportunity to write out the usual to-do list for the inquirer, providing a concrete and tangible report of the exchange.

If an emotionally-charged disclosure is made via email it is less threatening for most individuals than it might be face-to-face. However, it is more difficult for the interviewer to establish boundaries for the protection of the inquirer in this mode of communication.

The Person-to-Person Inquiry

It has been my experience that some adults think about calling or visiting a program such as the ACP for a long period of time before they actually feel courageous enough to make the trip. This is what we affectionately refer to as

the "Circling the Parking Lot Syndrome." Calls are made, emails are sent, or an individual may literally drive into the parking lot, circle a few times and then leave. People have reported just sitting in their cars and looking at the building for a while. But then there are the brave souls who make it to the front door, approach the administrative assistant, and ask to speak to someone in the ACP.

It is important to note in the case of a spontaneous person-to-person inquiry whether it occurs to the individual to call or email the program before arriving unannounced, an indication of one's ability to plan ahead. Some of these individuals are grateful that someone can find a few minutes between scheduled appointments to speak with them, and are eager to take a to-do list home to ponder. Others impatiently wait for someone to speak with, and seem to expect that their mere presence, unannounced as it is, will be met with a hustling of staff and faculty in order to meet their immediate needs, much like retail shopping. This may indicate one's ability to regard others' needs and obligations outside the self.

It's a common occurrence for people to cry during their first face-to-face interview, often a cathartic experience, and an indication of the depth and duration of pain. During an initial visit with one of my applicants she discussed her embarrassment with not being able to fill out a job application form in front of other people without having a panic attack. She complained that her writing was labored, and although she was able to adequately articulate her thoughts it took her an inordinate amount of time to read and re-read the questions, organize her responses, and then write legibly, worrying all the while that her answers were incorrect.

"I've gone on many, many interviews, and tried lots of ways to avoid filling out the application form in front of the person in the human resources office. I can't do it. If I take it home, which most of them won't let you do because they think you'll cheat and have someone else do it, then I can relax and use a dictionary to double-check myself. It feels as if I'm being judged . . . which I am, just like when I was a kid in school. Then my stomach starts to churn worse than it did when I walked in, my heart beats fast, and I feel really sick. I just want to escape, just like when I was in the fourth grade and the teacher told me I had to write sentences on the board for everyone to see. I felt so visible. So vulnerable."

Interviews provide opportunities for the professor or educational therapist (ET) to listen to the stories, powerful vehicles that convey a great deal

about the depth of emotional trauma that is being carried. Through stories, the students reveal how they use language, how and if they can communicate with clarity, with succinctness, or with a sense of ease and flow.   The variety of approaches utilized by students, and the ways in which they present themselves offer opportunities for informal assessment. For the trained observer of human behavior there is much to be learned from the inquiry process regarding an applicant's ability to respond to nonverbal cues and the ability to gauge responses. In other words, the range of executive functioning skills that each individual demonstrates becomes integrated into the learning profile, apparent in each phase of the inquiry process, and is a contributing factor in potential educational or treatment planning.

Admissions Criteria & Process

The program requires that a formal diagnosis of LD/ADHD be submitted to the ACP coordinator by a qualified professional (M.D./psychiatrist, psychologist, or graduate level ET who has a comprehensive background in educational diagnostic assessment). This needs to indicate the potential and eligibility (high school diploma or GED) for postsecondary coursework.

The program requires an interview session in person or by telephone if it is not possible to meet in person. A thorough intake/interview is vital to the admissions process, the development of the educational plan, and in matching a student with an ACP professor or educational therapist. It is also a way, in conjunction with the educational diagnostic assessment, to then assess the balance or imbalance of comorbid disorders; the LD/ADHD needs to be the more prominent diagnosis in order for the individual to be best served by the program.

Very often students offer responses to questions with a rush of emotionally-laden language. And, then there are students who surprise even themselves by claiming they don't remember a specific period in their educational careers. While some early traumatic events can cause difficulty with memory, it is

> important to also consider that the lack of recall is associated with the neglecting, rejecting, and emotionally disconnected pattern of relationships seen in avoidant attachments, rather than with some form of trauma-induced blockage as might be seen with physical or sexual abuse (Siegel, 1999, p. 96).

It is helpful for the ET and student to engage in a discussion about the expectations of the program: the proposed expectations of the program for the student as well as the student's expectations of the program are collabora-

tively crafted as part of the ACP Education Plan. This process provides yet another opportunity for informal assessment, establishing a baseline for the ability to conceptualize information, directly address a personal need, and then identify one's abilities.

Individualized Instruction and Mentoring

. . . mentoring makes me think of *being with* someone as he or she becomes acquainted with the world around them rather than telling them how they should experience or perceive what they are observing and ultimately learning about their environment and the people in their lives (Adelizzi, 2004, p. 6).

One-to-one sessions are offered for two contact hours per week with an ET or an ACP professor with the expertise to work with adults with LD/ADHD and other possible co-existing disorders (e.g., depression, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder).   The academic aspects of the one-to-one sessions are based in a carefully cultivated, trustful relationship, and consist of not only maintaining a daily and weekly vigilance of assignments, but of developing executive functioning skills that are foundational in working with students as they strive to gain a sense of mastery over a wide range of tasks.

The emotional aspects of the one-to-one sessions are rooted in the relationship:

In emotional relationships of many sorts – including student-teacher relationships – there may be aspects of attachment present in which there are the basic elements of seeking proximity, using the other person as a safe haven to help soothe oneself when upset, and internalizing the other person as a mental image providing a sense of a secure base. In therapist-patient and teacher-student relationships – which, like parent-child relationships, are 'asymmetric' – the sensitivity to signals is the primary responsibility of the former individual, who serves as the sole 'attachment figure' providing a safe haven and secure base for the other (Siegel, 1999, p. 88,89).

Many adults are not adept at judging when they have become overly dependent on the attachment figure, which means that the ET must assume the guardianship of this aspect of the working alliance. As a result of this kind of mutual meta-analysis, an ongoing reflection and assessment of the level of dependency and attachment in the relationship can be established and maintained, providing rich opportunities for ongoing discussion, relating and comparing the dynamics of the relationship to other experiences.

In the face-to-face meeting, the learning dynamic encourages the student to work harder to attend and concentrate, providing opportunities in the session to identify those moments when this is noticeably difficult. Working one-to-one places both participants in-the-moment, a situation where there is little opportunity to conceal emotion, lack of interest, or a self-perceived lack of ability.

> Just as you cannot hide from the learner, so the learner's knowledge, skills, and attitudes will become apparent to you. Provided that you have created a trusting relationship, you can discuss his or her personal and professional attitudes and values in a way that is seldom possible in a larger group. This is perhaps one of the key benefits of one-to-one teaching (Gordon, 2003, p. 2).

The Group Sessions

What makes the ACP different from most other support programs for adults with LD/ADHD in a postsecondary setting is the structure and balance of the services, specifically the required group sessions which may meet weekly for one hour, and once or twice each semester for a Saturday Seminar. The group sessions allow the participants the opportunity to share their experiences with others, or use respectful listening as a way to learn more about others. The opportunity to listen is helpful for those who are curious about how others interact and gauge how much they say in order to adequately express themselves. These are executive skills that come easily to some students, and are regarded by others as a skill to learn.

The Group Leader

Generally, it's preferable to have a group leader who does not see the participants privately. Like any therapeutic relationship, there is a certain amount of ownership and territorialism that comes from sharing what is perceived as one's helping professional with others. The unconscious process of transference may not remain an issue to be discussed during a one-to-one session, but may become a impediment in the relationship.

The group leader is most effective when there is a background knowledge of adult development (specifically adults with LD/ADHD) and group process. Facilitating a group of this nature, a psychoeducational and cognitive model (sometimes akin to Dialectical Behavioral Therapy), requires following basic guidelines for the composition of a group session and the techniques necessary in order to protect, educate, and provide a reciprocal and respectful experience for all members, including the group leader (Yalom, 1985).

A more open-ended discussion and/or psychoanalytic approach to groups of this nature creates opportunities for monopolists to establish a personal forum. Those who are more emotionally-vulnerable or less socially astute may feel threatened by the lack of structure. Clear guidelines in a group remove the guesswork from social interactions, expectations, and outcomes. However, there is ample opportunity in groups which favor a psychoanalytic approach to provide expressive therapy techniques, which not only act as release mechanisms for suppressed emotions, but also act as a means of revealing underlying and sometimes inhibiting thoughts and feelings which become obstacles in learning and in social behavior. Whichever format is used for group process, the interplay of executive functioning skills is present as a means of assessment within a relational context.

The Group Process

Students arrive at their first group session with a range of emotions, some of which are easily defined by some members. Those people who experience difficulty with nonverbal skills may have a more difficult time naming an emotion that matches the feelings they are experiencing. It can take a few sessions for the group to form a sense of cohesiveness, a respect for another's human foibles, and a level of comfort that can provide a safe and secure setting for everyone.

Following the initial ten to fifteen minutes of casual conversation, or a round-robin sharing of how the previous week unfolded, it's helpful to present the group with a theme or a task. This establishes a sense of structure, eliminating any pressure some may feel about what to say or do next. For those who are verbal monopolizers, the structure assists in drawing boundaries for the sake of those who are overshadowed or diminished by more dominant members. Everyone's attention, at least temporarily, is focused on the task. The last ten minutes is devoted to closure, again providing an opportunity for those who prefer to engage in casual conversation which is not structured for them.

On one occasion, the theme for the group was "Pressure In The Workplace." A thirty-five year old man talked about his recent promotion to middle management and the subsequent humiliation he experienced when asked to read aloud a portion of a report at his first staff meeting. Suddenly he became ill and left the room, a solution for the moment, but not for the long term if he hoped to keep his job.

Angrily, he related his experience to the group when he returned to the room. *"They hounded me for a long time and said I was so good at what I did that they wanted to make me a manager. I found excuse after excuse until finally I was out of them. I was flattered, but scared to death. I finally agreed to take the job because I have four mouths to feed and a mortgage to pay. People just seem to think I can do more than I really can . . . my smarts come in being able to visualize how things need to happen, not in how they're written on a piece of paper or read to an audience. I can make things happen, but not in the conventional ways other people use. This was how I felt in school. That first day in work being asked to read my report out loud put me in a time machine and sent me right back to middle school when it was my turn to read a passage."*

This is not an unusual story, and as group members become more familiar and comfortable with one another, they are apt to relate stories which reveal what was previously internalized as humiliation or shame. Group members often rush to the aid of the storyteller, offering compassion, empathy, and suggestions for how to handle what are perceived as crises or obstacles to overcome. It is usually at this point that the group leader takes a less active role and becomes the listener and observer, allowing the group to do its healing work.

The Saturday Seminar

The availability or option of group sessions on Saturday mornings offers the members a different setting and format, which in turn changes the group dynamic. Speakers may be invited, or topics of interest can be treated in a more formal and instructional way than in the weekly evening group sessions. The gestalt effect is akin to a mini-conference, demanding everyone's attention, input, feedback, and an opportunity to share brunch and conversation. The group process becomes a social and intellectual event!

Saturday Seminars have offered topics such as: *Interviewing Skills* (a favorite which has been facilitated by several people); *Social Skills; Depression in Adults with Learning Disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder;* and, *Expressive Therapy*. The group has benefited over the years from the kindness of professionals who have donated their time in assisting the development of necessary skills in order to obtain and maintain employment. We are humbly grateful to those people.

In Conclusion . . .

Simply an overview of the model for the ACP is not sufficient to provide readers with a sense of how the program evolved, and most im-

portantly, the role it plays in setting the stage for the students to be the driving force in their individual and collective dramas of transformative education.   More precisely, the program in all its intricacies, operations, and agendas, assists students in recognizing the transformation that has taken place, not only in their educations, but in their personal lives as contributors to a social microcosm which will hopefully transfer to the very complex world in which they must navigate, adjust, and survive as whole people. It is such a very profound experience to witness this magic that they have so lovingly created for themselves and others!

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Adults Transforming Their Lives:
The Adult Center at the Program for Advancement of Learning

For Educators and Other Professionals

How might I better help my students see the transformations that they have made over time?
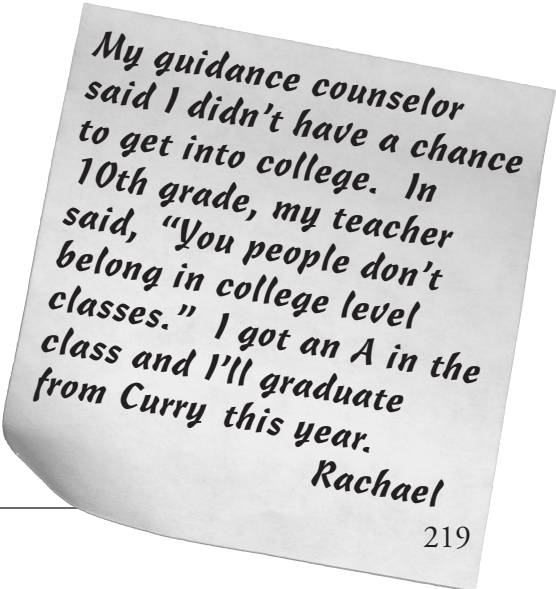
For Students

What was an educational experience that seemed transforming for me?

What was the "magic" that helped?

How do I know if I'm ready for help with my next academic step?

For Parents or Guardians

How might I cope with my fears and the letting go process as I let my child be "the driving force" in his education now?

My guidance counselor said I didn't have a chance to get into college. In 10th grade, my teacher said, "You people don't belong in college level classes." I got an A in the class and I'll graduate from Curry this year.

Rachael

From High School to College:
Preparing Students with LD/ADHD

Lori Lubeski, M.A. and Jeannette Landrie, M.Ed.

The transition from a high school classroom to the college campus is often a stressful step for students, but can be especially problematic for students with Learning Disabilities (LD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The typical high school day is highly structured with a teacher for each period. At the end of the school day, most students have their families to ensure that they rest, eat and study. Contrary to this is the typical college day. This can include classes that may start as early as 8:00 a.m. and classes that may end as late as 10:00 p.m. There may be days with no classes at all, and days when there is a five-hour gap between classes. The structure of the typical high school day is gone. There are no instructors to guide students during study periods, which are now replaced by large blocks of open time. This unstructured day can be an opportunity for failure, especially for students who are away from home for the first time without parental supervision.

It is natural for parents to want to take care of all of their children's needs. Unfortunately, this help may backfire for the student accustomed to external guidance who is thrown headfirst into an unknown realm of unstructured days and nights, attempting to meet academic, social, and physical demands. Therefore, it is essential that families begin well in advance of graduation to foster independence, self-advocacy, time management, and organizational and academic skills.

Clearly, it is no simple task to instill a sense of independence in a child, especially since many parents of children with LD/ADHD may have been in a state of hypervigilance for the past twelve years, making certain that their children received the necessary accommodations and were given the chance to succeed. From kindergarten through high school, parents have had to advocate for their children on a regular basis. In these situations, children naturally become dependent on their parents and school advocates. It is particularly difficult for students and families alike to shift the control and make the college transition simultaneously.

In our experience as learning specialists at Curry College's PAL Program, we have witnessed hundreds of students with LD/ADHD transition into their first year at college. It is clear that some students adapt much more easily than others. In addition, we have both been teaching for several years in Curry College's Learning Academy Program, a weeklong residential summer program for high school juniors with LD/ADHD. Our insight from working with these populations inspired us to share practical strategies that can launch a successful college journey.

High School Transition Plan Basics

High schools are legally required to provide LD/ADHD students with transition planning services to assist them with post-secondary options. There are specific academic preparations for college, which, if addressed early, are likely to increase first year college success. It will be helpful to add time management and organizational skills to a child's IEP. In addition, it is essential that an LD/ADHD student have strategies for research and writing, test preparation, note taking, and reading. The transition team should also introduce the student to assistive technology that may be used in high school and on into college. Students can be encouraged to initiate a planning meeting with the team as a way to practice and prepare for future self-advocacy.

Self-Advocacy

Parents of students with LD/ADHD often find it difficult to let go of advocating for their children. By senior year it is important to step back and encourage your child to advocate for himself. Having a conversation about the child's learning strengths and weaknesses is one way of opening up the door to this change in roles. Have your child explain the nature of his learning difference and what exactly it is he needs to succeed in school. Students with LD/ADHD should be encouraged to speak directly to their high school instructors, preferably by setting up an appointment ahead of time. If your daughter or son is reluctant, you might sit down and role-play how to approach teachers and ask for specific accommodations. Success in a college course depends partly on the student's ability to interact with his/her professor, which can be extremely intimidating, especially when this shift is from "teacher" to "Dr." or "Professor."

By senior year, students with LD/ADHD often have a thick pile of testing records and material. Your child may never have looked at this material, and it can provide useful information about her learning. Students often recall taking diagnostic testing, such as the WISC, WAIS, or Woodcock Johnson, but have little idea what it is for or what it means in terms of their academic strengths and weaknesses. It may be helpful for your child to have a meeting with the school psychologist, learning specialist, or special education advocate to break down and explain the information on the testing. If a student does not understand how she learns, she will not know what kind of help she needs or how to ask for it. For example, if a student has a slow processing speed, it is important that she requests extended time for exams. This information is also vital for college support services, especially those that expect students to initiate contacts.

We meet students who, in response to the query, *"Can you tell us about the nature of your learning disability?"* will answer, "*You'll have to ask my mom."*
A student who possesses self-knowledge and understanding is certain to be a stronger self-advocate.

Organization

Organization is critical for college success, as students may not constantly be reminded of upcoming deadlines for assignments as they were in high school. Professors may mention a research project one time only, perhaps even during the first class, and the student is expected to follow the syllabus on her own for clarification. Students need to know what organizational style works for them. (Possible strategies should be reviewed as part of the transition plan). If a student is using a planner, she should enter her daily schedule in it, along with dates for exams and due dates for upcoming research papers. In addition to these dates, one and two week warnings for approaching exams should be entered, as well as three or four week warnings for papers. For instance, if a student has a seven page paper due, written deadline warnings such as, *"three weeks until Psychology paper due,"* should be carefully entered into her planner. Having students choose and buy planners, notebooks and folders that they like ahead of time gets them started out on the right organizational foot.

Time Management

If your child with LD/ADHD needs constant prodding to meet deadlines, she may need some organizational and time-management strategies. Does she make appointments and get there on her own? Is she often late? Does she complete tasks

around the house in a timely manner? If not, then academic challenges combined with practical matters such as getting up for class, meeting professors for appointments, finding the professor's office or turning papers in on time will be a struggle. Try to anticipate the possible roadblocks to success and address them BEFORE sending your child off on his own. If your child is dependent on structure for success, he may feel lost with the lack of it that comes with college life.

If your child is unable to wake up reliably by himself, now is the time to practice! Have your child set his own clock and get himself up in the morning. If it is a challenge for him to wake up and make it to school on time while living in a quiet and supportive setting, he will certainly struggle with getting to classes while living with a roommate in a noisy dormitory.

Academic Skills and Strategies for Transition Planning

Writing and Reading

It is always surprising to us when we encounter college freshmen who have not yet written a research paper. However, this does occur and these students are often at a loss when they must complete a ten-page research project with five sources listed in the appropriate format. If the high school has not yet required your son or daughter to complete a research project as part of the regular curriculum, it is necessary to make research skills part of the IEP. Students certainly feel more confident when given their first research paper in college if they have some awareness of what research is, including how to paraphrase and how to avoid plagiarism. There are also plenty of helpful websites for this task, including the Purdue Online Writing Lab (The purdue online, n.d.) and the Writing Center at University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill (Handouts and links, n.d.).

As academic essays are assigned frequently in many courses, each semester college students may be required to complete as many as ten papers. Students may also need to be working on two or three major assignments at the same time. Therefore, it is important that students with LD/ADHD are familiar with the basic structure of an academic essay. Again, if your son or daughter is overwhelmed by writing assignments, whether it be planning, organizing, outlining, developing ideas, or following through with an essay independently, this is another area that can be addressed in the transition plan. There is technology to assist students with writing concerns as well. Consider *Inspiration* (Discover inspiration, n.d.) mapping software

for creating outlines or *Dragon Naturally Speaking* (Dragon, n.d.) voice recognition technology. It will be beneficial for the student to become familiar with using these before he gets to college. Many families find it advantageous to purchase assistive technology for their children, so that it may be used regularly at home, and thus one less thing to worry about during the transition.

In college, students are frequently assigned substantial amounts of reading. They might be responsible for reading a hundred pages or more each week. A student who can preview a chapter, skim, use a chapter summary, table of contents text index, and glossary has an easier time managing the required reading material. Students who have challenges with reading comprehension or difficulty focusing should review shortcuts and strategies with a specialist at the high school. Are assistive technologies for reading, such as the *Kurzweil Reader* (Kurzweil, n.d.) or books on CD or online, available? Students can register prior to the first semester at college for textbooks on CD or online from Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D, n.d.). This type of technology can greatly support your child's efforts to be independent.

Expanding and Supporting Ideas

First year students are often shocked when they get their first grades back and have received a C or even a D on an assignment they thought they had done well. Perhaps the most consistent comment that we see on their papers and tests is, *"Explain more carefully/clearly; not enough detail."* In high school, students may just scratch the surface of an issue and can respond with short answers to a question. In college, they are expected to expand upon and support their ideas. If students do not provide enough information, they will lose credit. It is difficult for students with LD/ADHD to recognize when they haven't clarified their ideas properly. Often, in their eyes, they HAVE explained clearly. If their high school instructors have not provided them with models of well-developed essays, students should ask for examples.

By engaging in lively discussions about politics, religion, social problems, arts, science, or whatever the family enjoys, parents can encourage thinking that goes beyond the superficial. Ask your child to explain WHY he likes or dislikes something, WHY he agrees or disagrees, and get him in the habit of giving you an example after he makes a general comment. Participating in conversation that includes justification for his reasoning will be of immense help to your child both for class discussion and for writing.

Test Taking

Tests are also an important college challenge. Students with learning disabilities, ADHD or related anxiety may struggle with test taking. Transition services should include practical strategies to help students independently develop their own study guides before college. Students will need to advocate for themselves in terms of testing accommodations such as use of a computer, Franklin Speller (Franklin, n.d.), or extended time. *True/false* or *fill in the blank* exams require different preparation than essay exams. Will the test be open book or open notes?   Test anxiety can be reduced by advance knowledge of test style, as well as simple relaxation techniques. Freshmen may not realize that a college semester is only about 15 weeks long, so every test is critical.

Note Taking

There are two key issues often involved with note taking: the first is the ability to determine what is "important information" from the lecture, and the second is the ability to sit still and focus. Although many college professors now make use of web pages to supplement their class notes (websites such as Blackboard [Blackboard, n.d.], where lecture notes may be posted), it is still crucial for students to take effective notes in class. They are responsible for knowing what the professor says, for writing down the facts and details, and for being able to recognize, reproduce, or articulate that information on upcoming exams or papers.

While in high school, there may be very few times that the student is responsible for acquiring the material on his own. High school teachers are more likely to "feed" it to the students and expect them then to reiterate it back on a test. How will your child discern "important" from "unimportant" facts? Does your child have a language-based disability or dysgraphia and need a note taker? Should she tape-record the class? It is helpful to evaluate the student's ability to take notes. Can your child with ADHD focus for a 50 or 90 minute class? It is beneficial for your child to discuss note taking with his high school teachers and learning specialists to gain some strategies before being plunged into a college lecture where the professor simply says, *"Take notes. You will be responsible for this material on the first exam in three weeks."*

If staying focused is the issue, students with LD/ADHD can practice sitting in the front of the

class. Asking questions and staying engaged in the lesson increase attention. If they develop the habit of reading assigned material BEFORE the class, they can highlight the material as it is discussed. In college, textbooks are purchased by the students so they can make notes in the margins. Underlining or highlighting in a textbook may be new to them since marking books is usually not allowed in high school. If necessary, they can tape the lecture or take notes on a laptop or word processor such as an AlphaSmart (AlphaSmart, n.d.). Practicing these strategies in high school will help them focus in college.

Physical and Mental Health Preparation

The importance of regular sleep routines is often overlooked. In college, staying up late and functioning on minimal sleep is the norm for many. Sleep deprivation can mimic as well as exacerbate learning differences. Students may rely upon daytime napping and caffeine-filled power drinks. Unfortunately, these habits can disturb a healthy sleep cycle. Potential sleep problems should be discussed before college since sleep affects higher level functioning, mood, performance, memory, attitude, and well-being.

Eating habits also affect students' functioning. Since processed food is readily available, students often rely upon quick candy bars and soda for lunch. Parents may also want to consider discussing the benefits of eating well. Care packages with healthy snacks are still welcomed by today's college students. Drinking lots of water and taking vitamins are other good habits to instill as well.

If your son or daughter takes any medications, be sure to research who at the new college location can write necessary prescriptions. Sometimes health services can do it, sometimes a local physician or psychiatrist is needed, particularly with the controlled substances that are often prescribed for attention deficits. The director of college counseling services can be contacted for a recommendation.

If your child is planning on trying out a new medication or starting back on an old one, it is important that this occur well before starting college, so that any side effects, such as difficulty sleeping at night, will be worked out before September. There is always a transition period with
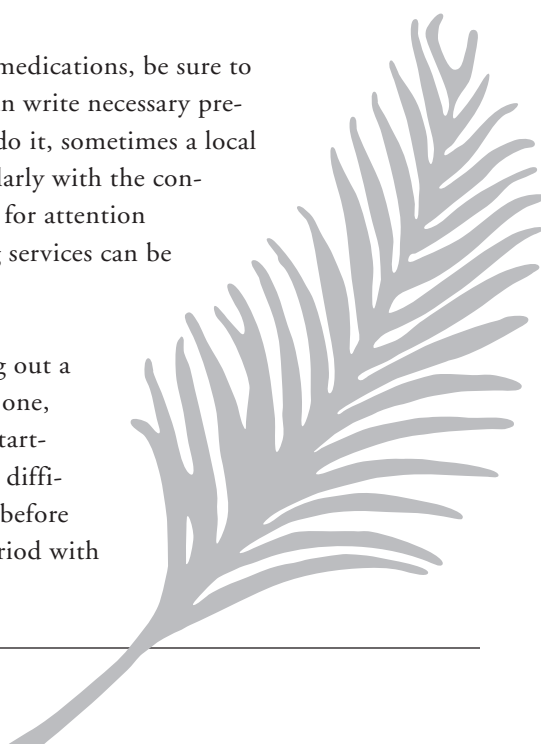
medications. It is generally not recommended that students combine medication adjustments with the stress of starting college.

Just as there are numerous opportunities to self-medicate in high school, there are many in college. Being far away from home, especially for the first time, will make these opportunities even more appealing. With the onset of homesickness and needing to feel a sense of belonging, there are many temptations. Although students may know of the dangers of combining alcohol and drugs, they may not realize the importance of avoiding these substances, especially in combination with prescription medications.

In addition, if students have had counseling or other support services at home, such services could be especially helpful during this major transition. College counseling centers offer support for varying lengths of time. It is important to know what is available and encourage students to seek out help if needed. Knowing who is the ADA (American Disabilities Act) coordinator for the college can be beneficial, too.

Students are often intimidated by an unfamiliar routine and may go weeks or months without doing laundry. In addition, basic hygiene skills, such as showering, using deodorant, changing dirty clothes and brushing teeth cannot be minimized since forgetting them can cause problems in the dorm. Nobody likes a roommate who is sloppy, dirty and smelly!

Transition Summer Programs

In order to help make the transition to college smoother, many schools provide summer programs, some geared particularly for students with LD/ADHD. At Curry College there are two transition programs offered: Learning Academy and Summer PAL. Both programs offer a preview of college routines and expectations. Learning Academy is for high school students who have completed their junior year. It is held over one week and allows students to live on campus, get a taste of college life, examine their learning styles, and prepare their college essay for admission purposes. Summer PAL is for incoming freshman who have been accepted into the PAL program. Students take college mini-courses taught by professors at Curry and experience life on campus for three weeks. They gain insight into their strengths and areas of need. When they return in the fall, they've earned credit, made many friends, learned their way around campus, and have a greater sense of what will be required for them to succeed in college.

AND is College the Right Place For Your Child Right Now?

It is understandable that parents want their children to attend college immediately after high school. Is your child socially and emotionally READY to attend college? Some high school seniors may not want to sign on for four more years of schooling right now. Be sure to listen to your child; does HE want to start college right away? Before you invest your savings, discuss all options. Perhaps a gap year is needed. Students progress at their own individual pace. It is important to respect your child's decision about when to attend college.

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From High School to College:
Preparing Students with LD/ADHD

For Parents or Guardians

How aware am I of the transition services my child is receiving?

Who can tell me more about that?

For Educators and Other Professionals

What more might I do to help my students feel confident and be ready to handle college challenges?

For Students

What are 5 things I can do now to help make the transition to college easier for me and for my family?

I wish I'd realized as I began college how important it was to make every class.

           Sean

The reason why PAL works for me is because it helps me in all of my various tasks. This works better than what I did in high school because PAL helps you in anything, even if you need to talk about something.

           Scott

The Change Process

Laurie Fox, Ed.D., ET/P

Change is like jazz improvisation
both begin with a thought
and then travel
to infinite horizons
with risk
fear
thrill

Old, familiar themes at first
clinging dearly
playing it safe
unaware of timeworn expressions
and comfortable habits
repetition

Searching for harmony's
instinctual sense of fit
discordant sounds
when it's different
experimenting

Careful listening with more than ears
for where to go next
listening, questioning, responding
solo ideas
yet
conversing
shared inspiration

A helix forms round and round
as patterns are repeated
but never quite the same
from a different altitude
fresh perspective
on mental tapes
rendered
over time
automatic

Each time around
we recognize more quickly
what's come before
and before that
and before that, too,
from the top
looking down through the spiral
familiarity

Eventually
working our way back
the gestalt is more clear
having been
on that
journey
resolution

The Change Process

For Students

How strongly do I cling to familiar ways?

How receptive am I to trying something new with the support of someone new?

What might help me open up to the change process?

For Educators and Other Professionals

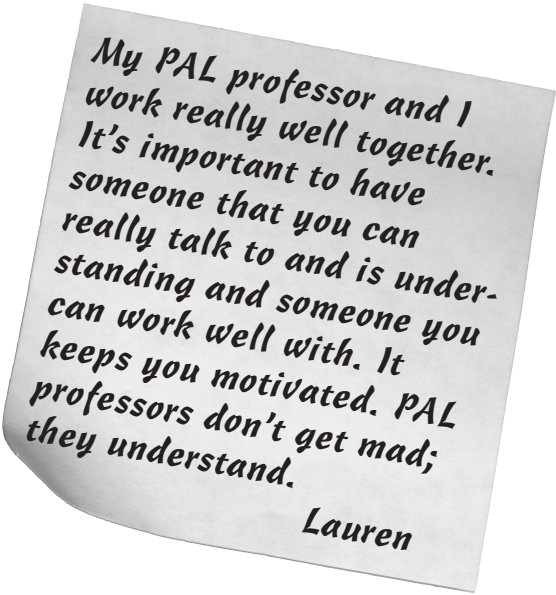What patterns have I seen that are helpful for each student to acknowledge?

Which would I encourage?

How might I do that in ways that are likely to resonate over time?

For Parents or Guardians

How willing am I to let my child work and *"improvise"* his own way?

What can I do to help make the change process easier for me and easier for my child?

My PAL professor and I work really well together. It's important to have someone that you can really talk to and is understanding and someone you can work well with. It keeps you motivated. PAL professors don't get mad; they understand.

Lauren