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A Note From Your Coordinator

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Welcome to *Communitas*, the official journal of Maryland's Association of Faculty for Advancement of Community College Teaching (AFACCT). During its 25 years of existence, AFACCT has provided opportunities to faculty throughout the state, both full-time and adjunct, for professional development. At the start of every new year and before we return to our campuses to teach our spring semester classes, AFACCT's state-wide conference is held. For hundreds of faculty members throughout Maryland, the annual AFACCT conference gives us an opportunity to develop professional skills and knowledge, to share research and expertise, and to network with others in their teaching disciplines.

Our most recent conference, held at Anne Arundel Community College in January 2009, focused on the theme of "Living and Learning: The Dynamic Interplay between Life Experience and Learning." Over 120 presenters explored topics on teaching and learning at Maryland's community colleges. You are invited to read the [2009 Conference Proceedings](#) for abstracts and PowerPoint slideshows of many excellent articles from January's conference. These selections demonstrate just how varied, comprehensive, and engaging the topics are from AFACCT members.

And now it's on to AFACCT's 20th Annual Conference set for January 7 and 8, 2010, at the College of Southern Maryland, in La Plata, Maryland. The theme could not be any bigger: "The Role of Community College



Richard Siciliano

Faculty in Achieving the Goals of the Maryland Plan for Higher Education." The topic is a challenging one and different from any previous conference theme because of its broad scope. However, the conference will provide an opportunity for Maryland's public officials to come together with faculty members to discuss the roles we play in making the community college sector of higher education such a vital resource for Maryland. More details about the keynote speakers, as well as the entire conference, will be provided on the AFACCT 2010 Conference web site.

[The Call for Proposals](#) for the AFACCT 2010 Conference is now available online. The proposal deadline is September 30, 2009. You are invited to submit a proposal on any topic related to the role community college faculty play. Submit your proposal today.

So, mark your calendars for January 7 and 8, 2010. Plan on giving a presentation, and join us at the College of Southern Maryland, La Plata, for the 20th Annual AFACCT Conference.





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We invite you to submit articles on your classroom teaching/learning successes, current educational topics that you want to share, and your professional achievements. Send photos related to your article and one of yourself for publication. We invite articles from all disciplines.

CSM: The Host of This Year's Conference



AFACCT is pleased to announce that the College of Southern Maryland (CSM), La Plata Campus, will host the 2010 Conference. CSM is rich in history with a promising and exciting future ahead. The college's history dates to 1958 when the Charles County Community College was established as part of the continuing expansion of the community college within America. At its inception in 1958, the college was governed by the Charles County Board of Education, with the first classes being held at La Plata High School in the evenings. The Friendly Hall Campus, which is now the La Plata campus, was established in 1968. The college expanded its services to St. Mary's County in 1978 and Calvert County in 1980. On July 1, 2000 the college officially became the College of Southern Maryland (CSM), a regional college serving Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's counties.

Today, College of Southern Maryland is known as a progressive, innovative and technologically-advanced institution. As a regionally-accredited institution that prides itself on delivering high quality educational services, it also serves as a catalyst for business, industry and government to identify the resources needed to grow and maintain a healthy economy and community.



The Greatest Show on Earth is Education



Ronda Jacobs
College of Southern Maryland

This year's recipient of the College of Southern Maryland's Faculty Excellence Award honoring part-time faculty, Ronda Jacobs has been a member of the college's adjunct faculty since 2002. She utilizes technology and creativity to inspire her students. Constantly looking for creative ways to engage her classes, Jacobs said, "When you make learning entertaining you keep the students' attention and encourage them to take ownership of their learning, which is important because they are only going to get out of any class, lecture, etc. what they put into it."

Learning is not about rote memorization of facts and figures. Today's students are tuning in to what others have tuned out thanks to professors and instructors such as Ronda Jacobs, the most recent recipient of the College of Southern Maryland's Faculty Excellence Award which honors part-time faculty. Such instructors are utilizing their creativity and technology to engage students' different modes of learning.

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The Greatest Show on Earth

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An adjunct instructor since 2002, Jacobs also works as a curriculum development coordinator/instructional designer for the Division of Distance Learning and Faculty Development. She has also helped the college develop its robotics and Kid's College offerings. She holds a master's in online instruction for adult learners from the University of Phoenix and a bachelor's from the University of Maryland.

Learning is a life-long pursuit for Jacobs, and she is constantly attending seminars and courses to increase her technology skills so she can help her students stay on the cutting edge of their fields. "We utilize a broad range of technology. While Smart Podiums have built-in cameras and projectors, you still need to teach the students how to use microscopes and slides—the basics—so they understand that what they are seeing on the projector screen or computer monitor (at home online or via the classroom) is the same as what they would see using a real microscope," said Jacobs, who is constantly looking for creative ways to engage her classes. "When you make learning entertaining you keep the students' attention and encourage them to take ownership of their learning, which is important because they are only going to get out of any class or lecture what they put into it," she said.

Creativity takes lots of forms in Jacobs' classes, whether it is a Sherlock Holmes scavenger hunt midterm or earning rewards for a daily quiz. Even mundane biology topics such as classification can become more interesting if it's classifying Pokémon. "We not only talk about the history of classification but also the historical problems with the system of classifying objects and entities. What does living mean and how do you

classify it? Is a virus alive? It has characteristics of both living organisms and non-living objects. Is a donkey a species even though it can't reproduce, is sterile? Classifying real animals isn't much of a challenge since students can look up a frog, etc., but you can't look up a Pokémon. So I send students to an online Pokédex to select a Pokémon. Does it have lungs, what is its shape, how are you going to classify it? You have to post your classification and rationale for the class to respond to, so you have to really think and be willing to back up your answer," said Jacobs, who encourages her students to think critically and to challenge the status quo.

"Don't just accept facts. If you disagree with me or another student's Pokémon classification, and so on, tell me why and back it up. Science changes because our understanding of it changes. It is not always black and white. As you know more, you can ask more critical questions. Learn to challenge an answer or question, but challenge it in a respectful way. There are no points rewarded in life for saying you agree or disagree; you have to provide the proof. It's hard for new students to do this; they are afraid of questioning an instructor or what they have always thought as accurate. Once they get used to it though, students learn from each other and they are not just counting on the teacher to tell them what is true. They are building off of each other's experience and knowledge," she said.

Jacobs sees the same creative and interactive learning approaches working even in her Kid's College students. "The robotics courses fill up quickly, and one of the things I see each semester is how willing these kids are to think outside the box. Adults would look at the same tasks and try to come up with ways to go around the obstacle on the course, but

the kids don't limit themselves. They talk to one another and will come up with ways to push the object out of way or go over it with their vehicles. It is really a joy to see," she said.

Jacobs is currently excited about an American Sign Language course she is teaching for homeschoolers. "I've been signing for the last 15 years because I have a slight hearing loss, and I wanted to see if there was an interest. The course is context-based just like any other foreign language, but the order really matters when you are eliminating all the little filler words. We have a class of four, two boys and two girls, and it has been nice because the kids can relate and accept a new language easier than adults who have a hard time accepting anything that doesn't follow a strict order. The kids are actively playing off of each other and what they are learning, even converting slang into sign, which we have had to put some limits on since one of the parents knows some 'colorful' sign language," Jacobs said with a laugh.

More than 20 CSM faculty members have been recognized by their peers since 1989 for making outstanding contributions to teaching, curriculum, and professional development with the college and the community at-large. "This award is wonderful. You put so much into these courses every semester, and people don't really see the work involved, so it's nice to be recognized for doing this work and showing other teachers how you apply the information that is important to you. When you make education entertaining you keep the student's attention and make them want to be a part of learning," said Jacobs.



Teaching as Art: Some Crucial Implications



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One of the primary aims of aesthetics, or the philosophy of art, is to answer the question, “What is art?” Though defining art, like defining beauty, is notoriously difficult, it is aided by the aesthetic *via negativa*, that is, by approaching a definition of what art is via an articulation of what it is not.

According to the philosopher of art, R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943), for example, art is not craft. This negative definition is more helpful to teachers than it first appears because it enables us to further articulate what we do not mean when, as the title of our conference suggests, we conceive of teaching as art. Why this conception? The sub–title provides a clue: good teaching involves creating a learning environment and such creation, no less than art, requires creativity.

Like art, however, craft requires creativity, and Collingwood for one believes that distinguishing art from craft

helps us to better understand art. I believe we can similarly better understand what it means to conceive of teaching as art if, following Collingwood, we maintain that the art of teaching, though surely related, is not equivalent, to craft. Such is my aim in what follows, as is noting some crucial implications doing so holds for teaching and learning in the community college setting.

Far from disparaging craft Collingwood seeks to authenticate it and art alike, precisely by distinguishing the two. His real concern is not craft alone, but rather what he calls the ‘technical theory of art’—the view that works of art function instrumentally, as means to various other ends. According to this theory an artist uses her skill to evoke psychological reactions in her audience. “Where an emotion is aroused, as an enjoyable experience, the craft of arousing it is amusement. . . . Where intellectual faculties are stimulated for the mere sake of their exercise, the work designed to stimulate them is a puzzle; where for the sake of knowing this or that thing, it is instruction.”^[1] No less than artists whose works, conceived of according to the technical theory, are means to ends apart from themselves, teachers amuse, puzzle, and otherwise instruct our students, and do so as means to the end of learning. Our doing so further explains why teaching is conceived of as an art and the resulting tendency to approach teaching in the same technical manner as many do art.

Because Collingwood does not believe that art is what the technical theory claims it is, he distinguishes art from craft, however. He sees craft as fitting the technical theory but believes that art does not, and so distinguishes art from craft, leaving the technical theory to apply more properly to craft. Art does not fit the technical theory for several reasons,



R. G. Collingwood
(1889–1943)

the most salient of which are (1) that craft unlike art necessarily requires some distinction between means and ends and (2) that craft equally involves some distinction between planning and execution.

First, the means by which a horse-shoe is forged are clearly distinct from the finished shoe. As such, the process whereby it is made is secondary to the end product such that the two are clearly distinguishable from each other. Such is not always the case with art because the medium in which a feeling is expressed may be inseparable from its expression. “Of a poem, for example, one might say that it is really as much about words as it is about what these particular words are being used to say; or, of a statue, that its real subject is as much the stone as the figure that has been carved out from it.”^[2] Process and product are not always as clearly distinguishable in art as in craft, therefore, since the means of expression may itself be the artist’s end. Second, although art may involve some degree of planning, its execution is not as dependent on it as craft, in which the two can thus be more clearly distinguished. If a carpenter intends to make a table

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Teaching as Art

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but does not plan its dimensions before cutting the wood, what he executes is not craft. Where the craftsman specifies a plan before executing it, and as such has a preconceived end for the sake of which he uses the best means to realize it, the artist often lacks such precise foreknowledge, sometimes intentionally so. If a sculptor were “simply playing about with clay, and found the clay under his fingers turning into a little dancing man: is this not a work of art because it was done without being planned in advance?”^[3] We must answer in the negative because art does not require planning to the degree craft does, and so may culminate in works whose execution was not planned.

Though there are additional reasons why Collingwood does not believe that art fits the technical theory whereas craft does, what warrants further discussion are the crucial implications that follow from his two initial reasons. Before beginning such a discussion, however, it is important to make Collingwood’s position clear. He is not claiming that art never involves distinctions between means and ends or planning and execution, but rather that art need not involve these distinctions whereas craft always does, at least to some degree. As such craft fits the technical theory better than art since this theory claims that artworks function instrumentally as means to ends, the distinction which has been shown to be indispensable to craft rather than to art. The first of Collingwood’s reasons why art is not craft makes it clear that art, because it need not involve the distinction between means and ends, does not fit the technical theory, whose primary claim is that art is a means to ends other than itself. Although works of art indeed amuse, puzzle, instruct, or otherwise edify, their doing so is not what makes



them art, since unlike craft and the technical theory that best defines it, art is not solely instrumental.^[4]

Because art is not solely instrumental, it is a mistake to conceive of education, no less than art, according to the technical theory. When we conceive of teaching as art, it is tempting to not simply adopt the technical theory of art, but to accordingly adopt what we might call the ‘technical theory of education.’ No less than art, education is commonly seen as a means to ends other than itself. Just as art functions instrumentally so too may education. Art is a means to the end of popularity, for example, whereas education is a means to the end of financial gain. Neither art nor education is an end in itself, when thus conceived technically, for both are means to ends other than themselves. Doing so is common enough, but is all the more likely when teaching is conceived of as art, since this conception, when understood according to the technical theory, encourages education and art to each be viewed as instrumentally as the other.

Doing so with regard to education is as much a mistake as with art, however, and is such for the same reasons given for art: education need not involve the distinction between means and ends any more than that between planning and execution.

First, education is an end in itself, not solely a means to ends other than

itself, and so need not involve the distinction between means and ends. Although it may be a means to ends other than itself, when learning is engaged in by students and teachers alike as an end in itself, the means/end distinction the technical theory of education involves is no longer required. When teachers create a learning environment in which learning is regarded as an end in itself learning occurs for its own sake, regardless of whatever else it might be used for, whether by students or by teachers. And so creating a learning environment is as much a matter of promoting learning as an end in itself as it is of doing so creatively, although both are necessary. Doing either, much less both, is as daunting as the attempt to express emotions in a way that is inseparable from their expression. For any such attempt to combine process and product in this manner requires the passion of the teacher for whom education is an end in itself and the creativity of the artist for whom profound emotions, such as love, must themselves be expressed in ways inseparable from their expression, lest they be diminished, or perhaps even forgotten.

Second, precisely because education is an end in itself, neatly distinguishing its execution from its planning is not necessary in order for it to occur. Learning can just as easily be precluded as aided by a precisely articulated lesson plan and very often occurs when we least expect it, that is, exactly when it is least planned. The more we attempt to ‘fit’ learning into the neatly articulated plan we have for a semester, the less learning is often executed. Our exact planning often enables us to ‘cover’ the material by the end of the semester, but we often do so at the cost of the learning environment we had hoped to create so that

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Teaching as Art

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covering would yield to learning, which usually has a calendar and syllabus all its own. Because such yielding requires students and teachers to be flexible, it enables the genesis of a creative learning environment in which foreknowledge must take a backseat to spontaneity and the play of imagination, both of which are required of the artist who often lacks the plan whereby she might more precisely execute a work. The serendipity that animates such environments does not permit learning to be as planned as it is when it is clearly distinguished from its execution.

Conceiving of teaching as art thus need not entail adopting the technical theory of education, nor that of art. The implications of not doing so while at the same time conceiving of teaching as art by creating a learning environment are as numerous as they are crucial, the most significant of which is that education and art can be practiced as ends in themselves in whom process and product need not be clearly distinguished. The process whereby teachers teach students is our product, provided we create an environment in which learning is sought for its own sake, an environment the creation of which is rightly conceived as art. Although the art of teaching is no less daunting once we thus conceive of it properly, examples help further inspire it. I can think of no better example than jazz. As teachers, we are leaders of a jazz group all of whose members have instruments, or books, with which to play and who usually need only a few bars of music to get into a groove which, because it is not exactly planned will develop as it goes, but the improvisational spirit of which will enable it to collectively respond to the rigors of learning in a way



Sophie Aizelin, née Berger (1882)
by Andreas Praefcke

that we, no less than they, may regard as a work of art.

By way of concluding I would like to mention that the technical theory of education is understandably prevalent in the community college setting, particularly within vocational circles. “There used to be a reasonably widespread grasp of the difference between education and vocational training, the difference being that vocational training, unlike education, is technical. The trainee is taught skills and techniques useful for realizing preconceived ends of various kinds. The trainee is taught crafts; and, of course, this is valuable. No one doubts that.”^[5] No one should doubt or otherwise diminish the value of vocational training and the technical skills it imparts to its trainees, from which we all benefit in critical ways. Because it is often offered alongside academic education in many community colleges, though, the relationship between vocational and academic education is only as collaborative as the differences between them are recognized and respected. Doing so has been a key aim of this presentation because the differences between the two often go unrecognized and are then disrespected, ironically enough, within the very setting wherein vocational and academic learning often occur in adjacent classrooms.

One beauty of community colleges is that such proximity itself fosters the exchanges in which the distinction between academic and vocational education, no less than that between art and craft, is recognized and thereby respected. Unlike the traditional college setting in which the vocational dimension of education is minimal or absent, community colleges are crucibles for the collaboration whereby academic and vocational learning are rightly integrated.

Thus, the art of teaching need not be limited to the classroom but is rather authentically practiced when, in addition to creating a learning environment in our individual classrooms, we each make the time to recognize the key differences between academic and vocational education, and so appreciate the crucial implications of their sharing in a relationship that is as beneficial to our students as it is collegial. Doing so creates community college campuses that are true learning environments.

Notes

[1] R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938) 32.

[2] Aaron Ridley, *R.G. Collingwood* (London: Phoenix, 1998) 28.

[3] Collingwood, *Principles*, 22.

[4] Collingwood recognizes that overlap between art and craft exists: “The distinction between planning and executing certainly exists in some works of art, namely those which are also works of craft; for there is, of course, an overlap between these two things, as may be seen by the example of a building or a jar, which is made to order for the satisfaction of a specific demand, to serve useful purposes, but may none the less be a work of art.” *Principles*, 21.

[5] Ridley, *R.G. Collingwood*, 50. Ridley notes that education is often called ‘academic’ education so as to distinguish it from vocational training.



CSM's Innovative Teaching Center Focuses on Learning and Teaching



Professor Bruce Fried, as “Bruce the Accounting Guy,” introducing his on-line Accounting course (Click on photo.)

The scene has undoubtedly been repeated dozens of times for many community college faculty members, as it had for Bruce Fried, Professor of Accounting at the College of Southern Maryland for the past 20 years. You encounter someone while you’re shopping who is either in your class now or who took your class once upon a time. As Bruce recalls, “I was doing some shopping in a local store, and a young man came up to me. ‘You may not know me,’ he said, ‘but I know who you are. You’re Bruce, the Accounting guy. Right? I’m a student in your online class, and I recognize you from those micro-lectures in your online course. You look different in person,’ the student said.”

Of course, the student was referring to what Bruce had done in his web-based Principles of Accounting class—to enhance his predominantly text-based

online content with micro lecture videos. Professor Fried just knew that to explain accounting procedures in a clearer, more effective way he would need a different modality for teaching some ideas, and video was the answer. Soon after, Bruce enrolled in a video workshop that was part of a “Choose Your Own Adventure” series of short workshops to help faculty incorporate technology into their teaching. The workshops are a service of CSM’s Innovative Teaching Center, part of the Division of Distance Learning and Faculty Development (DLF). Following the workshop, Bruce worked with Joel Kinison, the college’s Coordinator of Instructional Technology, to edit those video lectures and to attach them to his Blackboard CE online course in Principles of Accounting. “Once I saw how easy it was to get the videos into my course, I was hooked,” Bruce recalled.



Joel Kinison, Instructional Technology Coordinator, working with Prof. Barbara Stephanic at the digital video editing station.

Many other faculty members who teach for the College of Southern Maryland have also taken advantage of the resources and services of the DLF, which represents the evolution of what once was the Faculty Resource Center, and that later became the Innovative Teaching Center in 2003.

According to Dr. Sue Subocz, the Director of the DLF, “We try to support



The Innovative Teaching Center (ITC) lab offers the tools for faculty to work on their face-to-face and online courses.

both full-time and adjunct faculty who want to enhance their teaching skills. We offer them training at all levels, and for all learning contexts—on-campus classes, as well as web-based or web-enhanced courses. Our staff help faculty members develop high quality, accessible, and effective teaching and learning environments for their students. Ultimately, our goal is to affect student achievement and retention.”

“The way we do this,” Dr. Subocz said, is “to provide one-on-one assistance, and since CSM has multiple campuses, we even make campus house calls. We try to help faculty reach their goals, whether they teach in a traditional classroom or on the web, and whether they’re full-time or adjunct.” One of the ways faculty can enhance their classes, for example, is what Bruce Fried did, namely, develop high-quality video lectures and add them to their courses.

If there’s a hub of activity for the DLF, it’s the Innovative Teaching Center Lab in room LR 202, on the La Plata Campus.

The 10-station ITC computer lab is used by full-time and adjunct faculty, continuing education instructors, and staff. The lab is staffed during the day Monday—Friday (8 a.m.—4:30 p.m.), but many faculty can be seen using the ITC lab at night and on weekends during

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CSM's Teaching Center

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The Adjunct Faculty Dinner, held at the Regency Furniture "Blue Crabs" baseball team's stadium, hosted by the Division of Distance Learning and Faculty Development, May 2009

normal Library operating hours. According to Dr. Subocz, "We have recently opened an ITC office at the Leonardtown campus and have regular ITC staff hours at the Prince Frederick Campus also. The services available at Leonardtown and Prince Frederick will continue to expand."

Production services are among the other resources available to faculty. In addition to its computer work stations, the ITC is equipped with laptop docking stations and offers faculty the use of a color printer, Scantron access, self-service copy binding, self-service laminating, scanners, and a wide array of instructional software. Faculty members are provided with the many tools and technical expertise to enable them to enhance their classes. "We'll do the technical work. We will leave you with a finished product ready for use," according to Joel Kinison, IT Coordinator.

- Audio and Video Capturing/Editing
- Multimedia Streaming
- Digitizing and Scanning Services
- CD/DVD Burning and Labeling
- Faculty Web Page Creation
- Blackboard/WebCT "E-Packs"
- Software Application Support
- Digital Equipment Pool Inventory:

Faculty may check out laptops, digital cameras and video cameras, digital voice recorders, iPods, and a wide array of instructional technology equipment. Some laptops include special software for specific instructional technology needs.

For some time, the DLF has had keen interest in adjunct faculty development, even when the staff was small and the resources meager. With its newly elevated role in CSM's organizational structure, the focus on adjunct faculty has meant a deepened commitment to their professional development. "We began an Adjunct Faculty Academy before the fall semester 2008. It was modeled after our highly successful Faculty Academy (a semester-long workshop for new faculty) that we've run for the past three years for new permanent faculty," Dr. Subocz said. "Many adjunct faculty here at CSM appreciate what we try to do for them. The typical adjunct instructor is not teaching for the money, that's for sure, but many of our adjuncts are among the most dedicated teachers we have at the college. If we can help them in their teaching, support them as they become better at reaching their students and showing them how to learn, then we feel DLF is doing its job." To celebrate their successes and accomplishments, DLF sponsors an end-of-year dinner for adjunct faculty and their division chairs to share what they learned over the course of the academic year. Over 75 attended the dinner last year.

The Staff of DLF

Division Chair:	Sue Subocz, PhD
IT Coordinator:	Joel Kinison
DL Coordinator:	Paul Toscano
Instructional Designer:	Ronda Jacobs
Administrative Assistant:	Brenda Miller
Student Assistants:	Alex Cullen Stephanie Yoho



Why Grades Obstruct Learning— Things to Do About It



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The objective is learning; grades undermine the objective. They inspire students to be anxious and timid. They work against the courage, experimentation, mistakes, failures, questions and playfulness that characterize what good learners do. How do we as professors and institutions demote grades and promote selfish and playful learning?

Thomas Jefferson imagined and worked to create the first secular university. It would bestow no degrees and give no grades. Students would come when they wanted, study what they chose, and leave when they felt educated. Classically educated, Jefferson may have been conscious of Plato's assertion that "a free man ought not to learn anything under duress. Compulsory physical exercise does no harm to the body, but compulsory learning never sticks to the mind." Much more recently (2006) Harry R. Lewis, retired Dean of Harvard College, wrote that the keep-their-noses-to-the-grindstone rationale for grades is simply

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Why Grades Obstruct Learning

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anti-educational: “Reliance on grades to make students work hard is bad teaching” (130). Lewis also asserts that, “The greatest loss results when students avoid risky courses in any field because they opt to protect their grade-point average rather than to learn something new” (144). Independent curious synthetic thinking that takes risks with skills, information and ideas beyond the course are peripheral, silly, impractical. “Is it going to be on the test?” We and they know they have learned because they passed our test. They have learned. . . to pass our test. Much that passes for learning is just passing. “Knowledge prepared for others is not knowledge” (John Dewey).

Premise: Learning happens at the intersection of the known and the new. We take what we have been taught, set it in relation to something else, and make something for ourselves that we have not been taught. At that point learners are preparing their own knowledge, and so it is knowledge. How do we evaluate if grades discourage knowledge making and encourage teacher-pleasing and grade-grubbing?

Speaking as a teacher of literature, Robert Frost said it was hard for him to know if a man had come close to Keats:

I have lived with some boys a whole year over some of the poets and have not felt sure whether they have come near what it was all about. One remark sometimes told me. One remark was their mark for the year; had to be—it was all I got that told me what I wanted to know. And that is enough, if it was the right remark, if it came close enough. I think a man might make twenty fool remarks if he made one good one some time in the year. His mark would depend on that good remark. (Education by Poetry)

So much for objective equal application of grading standards. Actually, Frost’s description does not much exaggerate recommendations of some current research and thinking which asserts that grade curves and cumulative grading create an anti-educational academic environment.

In “Making the Grade: What Benefits Students,” Thomas Guskey surveyed “the multitude of studies—and their often incongruous results and found that researchers agree on 5 points.” One of those points is that, “Grading and reporting are not essential to instruction. Teachers do not need grades or reporting forms to teach well. Further, students don’t need them to learn.” (Frisbie and Waltman 1992).” Guskey offers a practical guideline: “Use grading and reporting methods to enhance, not hinder, teaching and learning.” Cumulative grading or averaging grades “falls far short of providing an accurate description of what students have learned” (17).

In this Guskey agrees with Ken Bain’s conclusions about grades after he surveys teaching practices in *What the Best College Teachers Do*. “Most extrinsic motivators damage intrinsic motivation” (Bain, 33; Kohn, 39). “People lose much of their motivation if they think they are being manipulated by the external reward . . . they lose. . . ‘the locus of causality. . .’” If a behavior “is a way to get a particular reward,” then people will behave that way only when they want those rewards. Remove the reward and it is human nature to “lose interest in that activity” (33). Bain says that the reward and punishment of grades encourages Strategic Learning instead of Intrinsic Learning. (See Charts A and B.)

Strategic Learners: May be motivated to get good grades, but they are “seldom willing to grapple deeply enough to change their own perceptions” (Bain, 34).

Strategic Learners

1. *Seek success in terms of grades*
2. *Avoid challenges*
3. *Fear mistakes*
4. *Feel smart when learning is easy*
5. *Seek “right” answers*
6. *Seek to please others*

Chart A

Intrinsic Learners

1. *Feel intelligent when they do not understand and then figure out something new*
2. *Seek to accomplish learning goals and to master skills and knowledge*

Chart B

Strategic learners “will not solve problems as effectively, they will not analyze as well, they will not synthesize with the same mental skill. . . They will not take on the same kinds of challenges. They will usually opt for the easier problems, while those who work from intrinsic motivations will pick up more ambitious tasks. The “strategic learner” focuses on doing well in school “avoiding challenges that will harm their academic record,” and so learns less (Bain, 34).

Here is a brief list of some of the pressures that enforce anti-educational grading practices:

- Biggest and most obvious: Student expectations and years of functioning in and being manipulated by a grade-centered learning environment.
- Course evaluation question: “Is grading system clear and fair?” Agree ↔ Disagree

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Why Grades Obstruct Learning

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- Professional evaluations that expect a point averaged grade
- Grade report requirements for averages and points that allow administrators to “justify” grades when students complain
- Unconsidered assumptions that competition is good and drives people to achieve
- Unconsidered assumption that the reward of good grades motivates learning
- Unconsidered assumption that it is professional and possible to represent learning in a set of averaged numbers assigned to prescribed activities.
- If it can’t be graded, why do it?
- If it will not add up to points on the test, why think about it?

What to Do

While there are seven or eight colleges and universities (two of them public) that allow students to opt out of grades or do not give them, we are not about to eliminate them at community colleges. So, as Ken Bain asks, can we evaluate with grades and “not cause students to feel they are being manipulated?” “What do the best teachers do to keep students from becoming grade-grubbers?” How do they “stimulate intrinsic interest in the subject?” Bain says that the best college teachers do the following:

- Orient the course toward “learning goals and mastery.”
- “Give students as much control over their education as possible.”
- Give non-judgmental responses stressing ways to improve.
- Stress student cooperation as opposed competition for grades on a curve.

- Avoid using grades to persuade students to study.
- Focus on the questions raised by and in the subject.
- Focus on the promises that the study makes to the learner (36).
- Grade student course work based “on the knowledge and abilities they have developed by the end of the class rather than on the average of accomplishments displayed throughout the term” (36).
- Give students multiple opportunities and venues to demonstrate mastery.
My adaptations include the following:
- Go through syllabi and handouts and eliminate or deemphasize all statements concerning grades.
- Rephrase many course goals and objectives in terms of course promises and regularly point out activities that are seeking to fulfill those.
- Start with efforts to learn and name what the learner knows.
- Ask students to assess their work and describe the learning they make.
- Portfolios and portfolio essays in which the student is responsible for describing the semester’s learning that the portfolio represents.

I like a take-home final exam followed by a colloquium in which I do not sit at the table or speak. I am the secretary. I am listening for that remark Frost listened for.

None of the above are quick or easy. They are part of a slow reorientation to teaching and learning that subverts many cherished assumptions. The effort earns the punishment that comes to all good deeds. These days I hear little of the old buzz-word, “student-centered learning.” Grades may well be a wet cold blanket on that sane pedagogy.

Final Thought

Robert K Greenleaf’s Servant Leadership principles have been adapted to curriculum theory.

“The best test is this: Do those served [by my courses] grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” Can grades pass this test? Can I pass it?

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