Navigating the complex social, political and moral issues surrounding student diversity can be a daunting prospect for any instructor of any subject. *Transforming Classroom Culture: Inclusive Pedagogical Practices* is an enlightening collection of essays written by seasoned faculty members at various post-secondary institutions around Massachusetts which attempt to address some of these issues.

The book is divided into three sections, dealing respectively with transforming culture at an institutional level, making use of diverse faculty identity as a resource for teaching, and engaging diverse students in learning. This review focuses on two essays that fall under the third section: “Hearing Students’ Silence: Issues of Identity, Performance, and Recognition in College Classrooms” by Carolyn P. Panofsky and Lesley Bogad, and “Building Agency through Writing” by Marjorie Jones.

In “Hearing Students’ Silence”, Panofsky and Bogad discuss the gap that may exist between instructors’ perceptions of student silence (as an indication of boredom, shyness, unpreparedness or hostility) and students' self-reported reasons for remaining silent in class (fear, embarrassment, uncertainty, marginalization). They present the idea that a college class is “a site of cultural practices and values that may be [...] opaque, unintelligible, and disorienting to cultural outsiders” (183). The authors discuss how this silence can be tied both to the habitual silencing of minority groups within our wider society, and to students’ fear of misspeaking when discussing culturally or politically sensitive topics. They put forth the argument that as instructors, our responsibilities include “bringing into the foreground the unspoken expectations we have, and guiding students into a more comfortable place to be able to recognize the cultural practices of power in teaching and learning” (194). Bogad achieves this aim by incorporating explicit discussions of privilege and power into her undergraduate courses, building student dialogue around such texts as Alan Johnson’s *Privilege, Power and Difference* and Lisa Delpit’s *Other People’s Children*.

Jones, in her essay “Building Agency through Writing”, also discusses students’ self-reported feelings of apprehension and inadequacy when returning to institutions of higher education, sometimes after a lengthy suspension of studies. In her adult upgrading program at Lesley University, two writing courses have been developed “to help students transition back into the academic setting” (217). In these courses, she has students define the term “learning community” as a first step towards creating one. She invites student input into the course syllabus by asking them to identify their expectations and concerns, and then discusses how the syllabus will address these. Students are introduced to the concept that writing can be a collaborative process, and that their feelings of inadequacy may stem from common myths surrounding writing as a solitary act of spontaneous, fully-formed expression. By demystifying the writing process, Jones helps students build confidence in their ability to assert themselves, and thus take ownership of their learning experiences.
The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life (A Review)

By Patty Toma, ILT Fellow for Service Staff

The Courage to Teach does not read like a book written exclusively for those in the teaching profession. It is a philosophy of teaching and learning that can affect the outcome of many aspects of all of our lives.

Palmer encourages us as teachers and learners to explore what he describes as self-knowledge. He proposes that if we are sensitive to our reactions to our teaching experiences, then the reward of growth through this self-awareness sustains us in any teaching environment. Through this heightened awareness, we, in turn, become the learner.

The author continues to expand the need for self-knowledge in order to enlighten the reader about the importance of maintaining trueness to oneself. We have gained this enlightenment through the revelations that we encounter in our life experiences, and specifically through teaching. He illustrates the fragmentation that can happen within a person when there is a dissonance between what we practice and what we believe. Self-awareness closes the gap between how we teach and what we believe.

Palmer believes (and so do I) that when we teach what we believe, we are, in fact, teaching from the heart. We are rewarded through teaching from the heart by experiencing a true sense of pleasure in the work that we do. This focus in teaching from the heart also creates an atmosphere of trust between the student and the teacher which sets the stage for learning.

Ultimately, working from the heart allows for satisfaction and longevity in the chosen environment that Palmer has spent his lifetime doing.


Spring 2012 page 2
Creating Significant Learning Experiences (A Review)

By David Williams, ILT Fellow for Technology

The title of this book was what drew me in, but what kept me reading was the way Fink honed in on precisely what a significant learning experience is, while at the same time keeping the definitions broad enough to encompass any subject matter. He creates an important taxonomy for significant learning experiences and presents a detailed roadmap for creating these experiences. This book is worth the time if you want the learning experiences in your class to be significant too.


I love the title of L. Dee Fink’s book Creating Significant Learning Experiences. The title drew me to the book because it made me think of so many different and important ways to interpret this idea of a significant learning experience. Such an experience is one that is deep and meaningful; it could also be one that is challenging and involving. It could simply be one that is important to the learner or it could even be important to the whole world.

The term has so many possible definitions and, to its credit, instead of narrowing the definition to one or two specifics, the book creates a taxonomy of significant learning experiences. This taxonomy is a “relational and even interactive” (32) set of categories that make up significant learning. It includes the following six points:

1. Foundational knowledge – “The basic understanding that is necessary for other kinds of learning” (31);
2. Application – The development of critical, creative and practical thinking skills;
3. Integration – Making “connections between specific ideas…realms of ideas… people or between different realms of life” (31);
4. Human Dimension – Obtaining a better understanding of yourself or others;
5. Caring – Creating “new feelings, interests, or values” in the subject being taught;

Immediately, I could relate to these categories and see how important each one is, but at the same time I could see how I was failing to adequately address at least half of the categories in my classes. To me, these categories are important because each speaks to a different area of learning that, when put together, creates an experience of meaning, an experience of substance and an experience that will last. In other words they do exactly what they are meant to do—create a significant learning experience.

I could have stopped reading at this point, only one tenth of the way through the book, and armed with this taxonomy I would go forth and forge new significant learning experiences. My classes would be full of activities to learn new ideas, tie them to well-known concepts, and apply them in interesting ways that the students felt deeply about, and when my students were finished the class, they would know how to continue learning into the future.

But wait—at this point I only have a set of terms; I do not have any specific tools or even a general plan to make my classes full of significant learning experiences. I was going to have to keep reading, and what I found was that the rest of the book was well worth reading too. A significant portion of the book provides a set of steps for designing a course. The general design principal is that courses should be designed with the end in mind. In other words, the course designer should start by asking, “What is it I hope that students will have learned, that will still be there and have value, several years after the course is over?” (63) I love this question, and now I always use it when I am designing a new course or even a section of a course. It is such an important question because it forces the course designer to think about ways to get students to think beyond the final exam.

The title of this book was what drew me in, but what kept me reading was the way Fink honed in on precisely what a significant learning experience is, while at the same time keeping the definitions broad enough to encompass any subject matter. He creates an important taxonomy for significant learning experiences and presents a detailed roadmap for creating these experiences. This book is worth the time if you want the learning experiences in your class to be significant too.

http://illt.okanagan.bc.ca/
Brookfield, ends with a section entitled, “Don’t trust what you have just read” (278). This is not simply an attempt by Professor Brookfield to pacify his critics, but rather is an important reminder of a message which permeates the book. College teaching is an inherently messy pursuit in which best practices cannot be summarized, for example, by a universal list of seven most effective habits. Rather, this craft requires ongoing self-reflection, persistent classroom research into how and what students are learning, an attention to the stresses and emotions of learning, and a delicate balance between being a credible content expert and an authentic, empathetic human being. Ultimately, Brookfield argues that through careful and open attention to our classroom experience, we must grow into our own truth of teaching—a truth, of course, which is in dynamic flux as we glean more information about our practice.

While there are many sections of this book that would be worthy of further comment, I wish to address the chapter entitled “Lecturing Creatively”. Over the past few decades, a substantial body of evidence has emerged from educational research circles which clearly demonstrates that learners generally do not learn well when they are simply talked at. Rather, meaningful learning requires an active cognitive engagement, when students are intentionally connecting new information to their mental frameworks, perhaps with the goal to solve a problem or make an informed judgment. Although “uninterrupted, mind-numbing teacher-talk delivered in a sleep-inducing monotone” (97) is not conducive to learning, Brookfield argues that a false dichotomy has been created where group work, problem-based learning, and other forms of active learning have been universally labelled as “good” and lecturing as “bad” in the same way as the myopic dualism of the mantra in Orwell’s Animal Farm (“Four Legs Good, Two Legs Bad”). Indeed, Brookfield proposes that judicious use of lectures be included as part of the toolbox of the skillful teacher. He suggests that lectures can be effective to:

- Establish the broad outline of a body of material;
- Explain, with frequent examples, concepts that are hard for learners to understand;
- Introduce alternative perspectives and interpretations;
- Model intellectual attitudes and behaviours one wishes to encourage in students;
- Encourage learners’ interest in a topic (100-101).

Brookfield also outlines a number of characteristics of lectures which students have claimed are conducive to learning:

- Deliberately introduce periods of silence for students to process and reflect on material;
- Introduce time for “buzz” groups to discuss questions and clarify learning;
- Physically move around the classroom so as to lecture from all corners of the room;
- Break lectures into ten-to-fifteen-minute chunks;
- Organize lectures so that the train of thought is easily followed (use printed scaffolding notes);
- Give clear verbal (and body) signals as to section changes, key points and illustrative examples (102-109).

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The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom  
(A Review)  
By Carl Doige, ILT Fellow for Sciences

“The Skillful Teacher, by Stephen D. Brookfield, ends with a section entitled, “Don’t trust what you have just read” (278). This is not simply an attempt by Professor Brookfield to pacify his critics, but rather is an important reminder of a message which permeates the book. College teaching is an inherently messy pursuit in which best practices cannot be summarized, for example, by a universal list of seven most effective habits. Rather, this craft requires ongoing self-reflection, persistent classroom research into how and what students are learning, an attention to the stresses and emotions of learning, and a delicate balance between being a credible content expert and an authentic, empathetic human being. Ultimately, Brookfield argues that through careful and open attention to our classroom experience, we must grow into our own truth of teaching—a truth, of course, which is in dynamic flux as we glean more information about our practice.

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The books reviewed in this issue are held in the Okanagan College Library collection with individual copies available on most campuses. Search the OC Library Voyager Catalogue to request any of these titles. While this issue is devoted to book reviews, future issues will also feature some reviews. If you are interested in reading a book about learning and teaching and submitting a review, please consult the list of available texts at: http://illt.okanagan.bc.ca/?page_id=1009. Try searching the Library’s new search engine Octopus on the OC Library Webpage for books, media and articles related to learning and teaching materials using keywords such as: college teaching / effective teaching / learning / critical thinking / student-centered learning / cognitive styles.

As part of its mandate to support dialogue among peers and to enhance the practice of learning and teaching, The Institute for Learning and Teaching will publish three yearly issues (Winter, Spring, and Fall) of Enhancing the Practice of Learning and Teaching. All employees of Okanagan College are encouraged to contribute. Please see the ILT website for more information: http://illt.okanagan.bc.ca/

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