# PRACTITIONER TO PRACTITIONER

## NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

## NOSS Executive Board 2021–2022

**Dr. Denise Lujan**. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . President

**Dr. Meredith Sides** . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . President Elect

**Mary Monroe-Ellis** . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Vice President

**Dr. John Craig** . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Treasurer

**Glynis Mullins** . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Secretary

**Annette Cook** . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Conference Manager

The NOSS *Practitioner to Practitioner* publishes articles of interest for developmental education professionals including administrators, faculty, learning assistance personnel, academic counselors, and tutors who are interested in the discussion of practical issues in post-secondary developmental education. *Practitioner to Practitioner* is published electronically twice each academic year. Articles in *Practitioner to Practitioner* are indexed in ERIC.

### NOSS *Practitioner to Practitioner* Submissions

Articles should relate to issues that inform and broaden our understanding and practice of teaching and learning in developmental education. The subject of the article may emphasize innovative approaches, best practices, how meaningful research affects teaching and learning, or techniques to enhance student performance. Review the "Call for Manuscripts" on page 2 for more information.

## IN THIS ISSUE

## MISSION

NOSS exists to assist education professionals in making a positive difference in the lives of students.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

# PRACTITIONER TO PRACTITIONER

*"Promoting Communication among Education Professionals Who Care About Student Success"*

# Call for Manuscripts

*Practitioner to Practitioner* is a biannual publication of the National Organization for Student Success (NOSS). NOSS invites articles of interest to professionals in higher education that relate to issues which inform and broaden members' understanding and practice. The subject of the article may emphasize innovative approaches, best practices, or techniques to enhance student access, performance, and/or retention. Researched or non-researched articles are accepted.

Submissions are accepted for review at any time. NOSS will acknowledge receipt of articles via email within ten days. Articles are **not** refereed. Issues are published electronically on the NOSS website.

Please read and follow these guidelines when submitting your article:

- Articles should be written for faculty, counselors, support service professionals, and academic administrators. The subject matter must be relevant to the journal's audience.

- *Practitioner to Practitioner* articles are generally between 1200 and 1500 words and should conform to current APA Style.

- Articles must be proofread and edited. Hyperlinks/URLs **must** be verified. Authors are responsible for content and accuracy of their work.

- References, citations in the text, tables, figures or a bibliographic section are only necessary with researched articles.

- The article must include:
  1. Title of the article
  2. The name, credentials, job title, and employer of each author
  3. Name, address, and email of author responsible for correspondence. All communication will be with the lead author, who is responsible for communication with other author(s).

- The article should be set in a common typeface such as Times New Roman, Arial, etc.

- The article must not have been published previously nor be scheduled for publication in any other publication.

- Articles must be submitted electronically as **.doc** or **.docx** files. Do not send PDFs. Attach the file to an email addressed to practitioner@thenoss.org

# Using Games in Mathematics Courses With First-Year College Students

**Dr. Christana Cobb,**
Assistant Professor

**Dr. MA Higgs,**
Associate Professor
Middle Tennessee State University

## Introduction

In higher education institutions across the country, collegiate mathematics classrooms are often courses where students tend to sit in lectures rather than actively participate in the content. While mundanely sitting through tedious lectures, students may, consequently, be more likely to develop a negative perception about mathematics as a discipline. It is our goal to employ more active and engaging activities, specifically through the use of games, to boost the outlook of students' perceptions of mathematics. Specifically, it is our hope that gamification of mathematics content can enhance student perceptions and engagement so that the retention and success rates of all mathematics courses will improve. With the use of games, classroom teaching styles may be also enhanced, and classrooms may be transformed into engaging courses. Further, through the use of game play, it is also hoped that students will develop greater transfer skills to apply mathematics content knowledge from initial courses to consequential mathematics courses. The students will then be able to explore real-life applications through games that are fun and engaging and can create unique pathways to answers. In sum, it is our hope that gaming strategies and activities will have a significant impact on student engagement, retention, course completion, and content transfer for first-year college students.

## Gamification

Gamification is defined as "applying the elements of game design in a non-game setting, such as instruction and training" (Blass & Tolnai, 2019, p. 17). According to Fulks and Lord (2016), "Gamification is a research-based teaching strategy that involves incorporating traditional gaming elements in the classroom" (p.43). Taking these ideas together, gaming strategies can utilize the best aspects of a constructivist classroom to give students opportunities to interact and to get involved with educational activities on a deeper level. This deeper interaction may be most needed in on-line and remote environments where students can have a disconnect from the classroom and each other; gaming strategies that force students to work together toward a common goal may enhance the student experience and student outcomes. In short, gaming strategies are especially applicable to on-line and remote environments and may be able to build collaboration in an otherwise isolating environment.

## Benefits of Gameplay

The main goal and benefit of gameplay in the classroom is student engagement. Gaming, or gamification, engages students so that they learn while they play. Gaming strategies can create or enhance an engaged classroom. Students in courses that are engaged are more likely to perform at a higher rate. For example, McCarthy and Anderson (2000) completed a study that compared active learning to traditional teaching and found evidence that suggested "using active learning techniques in the classroom can enhance student performance on standard measures relative to traditional teaching approaches" (p.289). Smart and Csapo (2007) indicated classroom activity will "hold the promise of more engaged students, with deeper learning and a greater ability to solve problems and think critically" (p. 457-458). Finally, gaming projects and activities may foster student engagement and participation,

integrative thinking, and the High impact practice (HIP) of "Collaborative Assignments and Projects" (Kuh & AAC&U, 2008). All of these benefits through gamification are attainable and readily available.

## Examples

### One-Step Equations BINGO

**Step 1.** Create a selection of one-step equations to call and BINGO cards. Provide each student with a BINGO card. (Can be created in a Word document.)

**Step 2.** Read the one-step equations aloud to the class using your caller cards. Once a caller card is used, place it in a discard pile.

**Step 3.** Students write and solve each question that is read out loud. If they find their solution on their BINGO card, they mark the space.

**Step 4.** The first student to cover five spaces that result in a horizontal, vertical, or diagonal arrangement, calls out BINGO!

### Math "Escape" Game

**Step 1.** Create a series of questions for 4 tasks, an answer key, and a code to be deciphered.

**Step 2.** Create a Google doc where students can post their answers or assign a student recorder for each group who will show the instructor the answers if used in class.

**Step 3.** Assign students to groups or breakout rooms.

**Step 4.** The first group to complete all 4 tasks will receive code and successfully escape.

Also check out the link for a breakout room template from OneNote. https://education.microsoft.com/en-us/resource/8dfa4f0d

### Fishing for Factoring

**Step 1.** Create a set of index (playing) cards with common polynomial terms used in factoring for each group of 4-6 players. Also create a corresponding list of polynomials to be factored.

**Step 2.** To begin, distribute 7 cards to each player. Roll dice to see who begins.

**Step 3.** Call out polynomials to be factored. Beginning with the initial player, students use

cards from their hands to factor the called polynomial. Students will use as many cards as possible to "fill-in" terms in the factored polynomial. Plus, minus, and parenthesis are free cards available to reuse round-after-round. If a student does not have a card that can be used in factoring the given polynomial with the remaining empty spaces (no duplicates!), then a card must be drawn from the deck.

**Step 4.** The first student to use all of the cards in-hand wins.

## Conclusion

Gamification of classroom content may open an avenue to enhance student engagement, retention, success, and transfer. As demonstrated in our samples, providing gaming activities is inexpensive and easy. The samples utilize readily available supplies and can be completed in-person or online with modification. By challenging oneself to "level-up" (Blass & Tolnai, 2019), enhanced classroom engagement is just a few activities away.

## References

Blass, L. & Tolnai, C. (2019). *Power up your classroom: Reimagine learning through gameplay.* Portland, Oregon: International Society for Technology in Education.

Fulks, A. & Lord, B. (2016). Leveling up in a gamified classroom. *AMLE Magazine, 3*(6), 41-43.

Kuh, G. D. & AAC&U. (2008). *High-impact practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter.* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips

McCarthy, J. P., & Anderson, L. (2000). Active learning techniques versus traditional teaching styles: Two experiments from history and political science. *Innovative Higher Education*, *24*(4), 279–294. https://doi-org.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/10.1023/B:IHIE.0000047415.48495.05

Smart, K. L., & Csapo, N. (2007). Learning by doing: Engaging students through learner-centered activities. *Business Communication Quarterly*, *70*(4), 451-457.

# Embracing Diversity to Build Community

**Wes Anthony, Ph.D.**
Professor of Educational Leadership Studies American College of Education

**Carol Leah Mueller, Ph.D.**
Assistant Professor Mathematics and Earth Science Harford Community College (Ret.)

**Betty Stack, M.A.**
English Faculty Tri-County Technical College

**Ashley Strong-Green, Ph.D.**
Distance Education Coordinator Augusta Technical College

"We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color," said poet Maya Angelou (https://www. goodreads.com/quotes/67256-we-all-should-know-that-diversity-makes- for-a-rich). In the post-pandemic landscape of higher education, this statement rings truer than ever. Across the United States, institutions of higher education must now reinvent the ways that they conduct business after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, it is more crucial than ever to celebrate the diversity on college campuses and use this celebration of diversity to build campus community. Bridging campus culture is a paramount step in creating a positive learning environment for all college students. This involves constructing a new paradigm where both sides, academic and student support, of the academic house work together for a common goal. An architectural approach invites consideration of initiatives for building campus community in relation to the systems within which they operate, the structures that shape their actions, the design that creates the structures, and the spaces within which they work (Sturm, 2006, 2007, 2011b).

## Higher Education Moving Forward

As higher education institutions rebound from the pandemic at different rates, it is vital that institution administrators look at ways to use the lessons learned from the immediate onset of COVID-19 protocols in building a more strategic and systematic method for supporting student success, retention, and persistence. At both the four-year and community college levels, administrators must deal with a deficit in funding, both from federal and state sources, while also embracing new educational technology to support student success. To celebrate the diversity on campus, faculty and staff need to embrace the composition of the student population.

This raises another aspect of the architectural metaphor, that of design. Architecture connotes intentional design choices. Some practices or ways of interacting, which are taken as given, are the result of choices that carry consequences, such as what counts for tenure and promotion or who participates in setting research agendas. The architectural metaphor makes those choices visible and thus amenable to change. An architectural approach is essential for constructing the conditions and practices enabling institutional mindfulness—careful attention to decisions that accumulate to determine whether women and men of all races, identities, and backgrounds will have the opportunity to succeed and advance (Strum et. al., 2011).

## Building Community

Building campus community is key to helping all students, regardless of their background, to be successful in attaining a college degree or certificate. Though the employment goals of the Obama administration were not met by 2020, institutions of higher education can learn from this short fall by embracing the new trend in micro-credentialing and supporting vocational certificate programs. Campus leaders may need to redeploy human, financial, and physical capital in alignment with their new operating models (TIAA, 2020). Other ways to build campus community are

to provide for the basic needs of students through food banks, clothing banks, emergency fund reserves, and offices, such as TRIO programs, which connect students with financial and other local resources. Research and experience suggest that public engagement encourages and enables full participation of diverse groups and communities. Full participation of various communities is a critical attribute of successful and legitimate public engagement. The systems that take account of these synergies are likely to enable the successful pursuit of both public engagement and full participation/diversity, and to enhance the legitimacy, levels of engagement, and robustness of higher education institutions.

## Anticipate Change

Change is one aspect of campus life that continues year in and year out. With the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting changes to campus culture and funding measures, college administrators have had to adapt to constant changes to the ways in which business is conducted at universities and community colleges. The move to more synchronous and asynchronous online education has been embraced across the higher education landscape with various levels of success.

With the advent of more artificial intelligence (AI) in supplemental educational software, a major change that has been developing since March of 2020 is the use of more advanced technology to support student success. This can be seen at all educational levels from K-12 to the community college to four-year universities. This change was inevitable, but some colleges were resistant to allow this level of control over student learning. Other institutions have embraced this fully and have used AI to expand the institution's online offerings.

## Consider Social Trends

The growth of social media has been exponential over the past decade. Almost all students have a smartphone and actively social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Snap Chat, Facebook Messenger to communicate with their peers. Social media platforms are being used to support student success in many college classrooms. By using social media

responsibly, college faculty and staff can help students to find their niche on campus. Extracurricular activities and campus programs, such as First-Year Experience (FYE) programs and learning communities, can support new student transition by using social media posts with program schedules and showing positive social media posts with program schedules and to show positive aspects of campus culture through pictures, videos, and live postings. Sturm (2006) explained that participation in the academy requires a process of institutional attentiveness across the spectrum of campus divisions. This also effects decisions that ultimately determine whether women and men of all races will have the opportunity to thrive, succeed, and advance (p. 251).

## Administrators, Faculty and Staff Can All Support Change

Currently, institutions such as Greenville Technical College are embracing Steven Covey's concept of Wildly Important Goals (WIG). acknowledging the benefit of "focusing on the wildly important requires you to go against your basic wiring as a leader to do more, and instead, focus on less so that your team can achieve more." Covey is the co-author of *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*. Covey discussed how by focusing on academic, professional, and personal WIGS leadership teams give others an opportunity to expand mindsets, encourage self- expression and promote new educational endeavors. Since the pandemic, individuals view higher education in a different light; this can be seen in the financial constraints, changes in curriculum, and addition of technology. This concept is catching on by asking faculty, staff, and administration to share their "Wildly Important Goals." Goals take institutions to new horizons and foster opportunities that may have not been possible before. The four major points of discussion from *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* are (see also Table 1 next page):

Discipline 1 emphasizes the importance of achieving the most important goals. The authors conclude that the more a person tries to do, the less he or she will actually accomplish. In today's competitive society, instructors and administrators are expected to multi-task and accomplish many goals on a daily

basis. This explains why job performance levels and organizational commitment levels have declined over the years. Teachers across the board feel a need to add one more paper, one more assignment, and the content will all be covered; when in reality it should be the quality of work valued. It is better to have a student with a skills deficit successfully complete three solid essays and outside assignments in a given term, rather than four or five essays. "The fundamental principle at work is that human beings are genetically hardwired to do one thing at a time with excellence" (McChesney, et. al., 2012, p. 25). Steve Jobs of Apple had a big company to run; he could have brought many more products to market than he did, but he chose to focus on a handful of "wildly important" products. His focus and results were legendary (McChesney, et. al., 2012, p. 25).

Discipline 2 focuses on leverage. This one is based on the simple principle that all actions are not created equal. Some actions have more impact than others when obtaining a goal. The principles that are easily identified represent the ones to act on in reaching that specific goal.

One practical example listed is that one cannot control how often a car breaks down on the road (a lag measure), but can certainly control how often a car receives routine maintenance (a lead measure). The more one acts on the lead measure, the more likely one is to avoid that roadside breakdown (McChesney, et. al., 2012, p. 45). Therefore, if an instructor focuses on material that can be learned, instead of formulating on more, the educational goal can be attained.

Classroom learning, whether virtual or traditional, needs to conform to the environment of the students.

This is the same with administration; if an administrator wants to positively lead and initiate buy- in from staff and faculty for the benefit of students, they need to facilitate opportunities for discipline and college wide specific goals to be shared.

Discipline 3 involves keeping score. Great teams know at every moment whether or not they are winning. They know what they have to do to win the game. A compelling scoreboard tells information that is essential to team problem solving and decision making (McChesney, et.al., 2012, p. 66). Instructors know if a lesson is working by student interactions and assessment. Conversely, administrators know if a program or goal is effective by staff and faculty feedback and analytic data.

Discipline 4 is based on the principle of accountability; unless one consistently holds others accountable, the goal naturally goes by the wayside. Accountability is important in organizations and starts from the top. By creating a culture of accountability, organizations thrive and employees embrace this change in the organizational dynamic. It is critical to hold oneself accountable before expecting others to be accountable.

Administrators need to be working alongside staff and faculty by taking on and delegating tasks. It is amazing what one can accomplish by the simple discipline of striving for a goal on a weekly basis over an extended period. Therefore, how can an institution address the broad spectrum of social media, and

**Table 1.** *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*

| | Focus | Action Step | Impact On Campus Community |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Discipline 1** | Focus on wildly important goal | | Decreases the burden to arbitrarily assign work |
| **Discipline 2** | Act on lead measures | | Builds buy-in from campus community. |
| **Discipline 3** | Keep a compelling scoreboard | | Builds morale |
| **Discipline 4** | Create a cadence of accountability | | Organization and employees thrive |

Note: This table informs about *The 4 Disciplines of Execution.*

student usage, while empowering teams of individuals to develop wildly important goals towards overall success? Questions to consider when implementing wildly important goals may be as follows:

- Is this the right thing for the institution? The key to this is breaking down the problem and allowing time to effectively address the issues. Solutions cannot come from one individual alone, but must be based on input from others with varying perspectives. The synergy gained from a team effort offers a positive advantage in determining which course of action is right for any higher educational institution. Once adequately addressed it should be full speed ahead.

- If the institution is successful in implementing change, what will the end result look like? Begin with the end in mind. There must be a shared vision within an institution for the overall theme of success to happen. In simple terms, if institutions do the right thing, should it anticipate will happen? This is where regular meetings and team work on all levels are critical with showing the level of commitment an institution has towards change.

- Will an institution be successful? Once a decision has been made to do what is best for the institution (the decision making step) and a solid understanding of how this will best benefit the institution (the decision step), leadership needs to instill in everyone a high level of confidence towards successful completion, before even beginning. In order for any of this to be attainable, the team needs to determine and communicate what must be done (the planning and delegating process). There has to be "buy in" from all participants to achieve success.

## Social Justice for Social Responsibility

With more diverse student populations than ever before, today's college administrators must find new methods for supporting social justice while also keeping social responsibility a common campus goal. By supporting Social Justice through socially responsible programs, college staff members can build campus community where students from many different cultural backgrounds can feel a part of the college. This

can be the difference in success or failure for many students.

At Augusta Technical College, one way the institution explored the balance between social justice and social responsibility is through pioneering teaching and learning series.

Utilizing CARES funding, the college offered a year-long series on Hosting Inclusive Virtual Environments (HIVE). The series is part of an institutional commitment to value inclusiveness and focused on providing "[building] a more diverse and equitable workforce." The HIVE Series focuses on providing instructor support for implementing techniques in the classroom. Participation in the HIVE Series was voluntary for instructors. Part of the application process asked instructors to identify to what degree they felt their online and hybrid courses meet the needs of a diverse student population. One a scale of 0-10 with 0 indicating a poor performance and 10 a near perfect score, the mean score was 8 followed by 5. Using a standard academic grading scale, this essentially equates to participants assigning themselves poor or good preparation scores, with very participants indicating their course was average at assessing the needs of diverse students.

Table 2 (next page) identifies the participants by gender and academic schools. Also of note, when asked about their expectations from the teaching series most were interested in improving upon course design followed by understanding the needs of a more diverse student body. This indicates that a commitment to social justice and responsibility already exists within the campus community and that the next steps include a systemic analysis of how to support these goals.

## Funding and Administrative Support

While the rapid transition to virtual education resulted in many advancements in how colleges and universities approach technology in education, diversity is an avenue where there is still an enormous need for improvement. Unfortunately, diversity advancements as they relate to technology are treading a difficult path between the budgetary constraints faced throughout higher education and evolving social and

cultural standards. Prior to the pandemic, there were limited opportunities for higher education institutions to acquire technology outside of federal Perkins grant money. Even non-federal grants and partnerships provided little opportunity for higher education institutions to acquire technology. The disparity of technology funding allocated specifically to higher education institutions was prevalent even in technology driven fields. Conway et. al. (2018) noted, tech companies concentrate sixty-six percent of their philanthropic funding on K–12 programs, compared to three percent on college-level programs. Although many invest in recruiting efforts to support specific programs, few invest philanthropically earlier in higher education to build the cohort from which they will ultimately recruit (para. 15).

In many ways, CARES Funding has helped to close this gap providing the opportunity for institutions to upgrade outdated technology infrastructure, supply broadband access to the internet in rural communities, and acquire software licenses and subscriptions to support new technology and instructional delivery models. Addressing these needs is important to close the achievement and access gap which has created performance gaps for many economically and racially diverse groups and impeded their participation in higher education. Franklin-Davis and Gosha (2021) explained donations are useless if faculty members lack the basic essentials...to learn to use the product and integrate it into a curriculum. What might make more sense are investments like endowed professorships. Then an institution could hire a faculty member who will have the time to make the most of product donations (para. 11).

This training is vital in the post-COVID world, where professors are juggling the challenges of new schedules, new technologies, and new instructional delivery formats. They must master these technologies in order to continue creating a highly competitive graduate population. It is incumbent upon administration to find the funding to acquire technologies and of equal importance to make space for instructors to properly learn to integrate these technologies into the curriculum through professional development. This may require reduced teaching loads to prepare courses, non-traditional schedules, and outside trainers.

This training is vital to develop instructional support skills. Valverde-Berroscoso et. al. (2021) encouraged the training of teachers in information and communication technologies because the discovery of educational reality (initial diagnosis and definition of challenges) and the interpretation of the context (identification of teaching practices and feasibility analysis) in a proactive manner by teachers (results in the implementation of) experimentation and where appropriate, reformulation, within a cyclical, iterative and continuous improvement process (p.18). This continuous process of improvement must be implemented by faculty and supported by administration to support the diverse needs of students. A major strength of meeting social justice goals is to foster classrooms which enable students to not only attend, but where students feel validated and valued. Developmental classrooms often serve as the "gateway" to attending college at institutions. This assignment is often a result of Placement testing or English as a second language. Those students who achieve successful passing rates in these assigned sections have the ability to progress, as long as the instructor/s are highly motivating, patient and compassionate about subject matter. This represents social equality and justice for students across the board, regardless of economic background, culture, gender or age.

## Earlier Interventions

One of the ways in which technology can help recruit and retain a more diverse student population is through early intervention systems. An abundance of research has indicated that poor men from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities are less likely to graduate. Trends also indicate that first generation students struggle with persisting in college more than the children of degree holders, and that a rise in mental health struggles such as anxiety and depression negatively impact persistence rates (Princiotta et. al., 2014; NCES, 2019). Early alert systems (EAS) have the potential to support a more diverse student population, but they are dependent upon the participation of an already thinly stretched faculty as well as the accurate interpretation of data by administrators and the institutional capacity to provide support services to students. These systems

cannot meet the challenge of students who leave due to a lack of support, the small number of visible role models, the absence of a sense of belonging, and other factors, such as workplace cultures that do not match their own backgrounds and experiences (Franklin-Davis and Gosha, 2021, para. 13).

Technology must be used for its true purpose to make addressing challenges easier not as a catch all solution. EAS technology must still supplement a holistic approach to student support that encourages students to develop soft skills. As Franklin-Davis and Gosha (2021) addressed, the solution must include investing in programs that provide soft skills that help students cope with the non-technical challenges of being underrepresented members. The development of soft skills can present unexpected barriers to people trying to succeed in the workforce, especially when these behaviors are rarely formally taught but learned through exposure (para. 14).

## A New Financial Reality

If the goal is to create diverse communities at institutions of higher learning, then the issues involved with financing an education need to be examined. There are several different areas where the financial realities of a college or technical education are different for various racial and ethnic groups and different in the recovery from the pandemic. Students when generally grouped by race experience a different financial burden while attending college and a different income outcome achieved from attending college. While one would hope that by now there would be a level playing field for students of all races, that goal has yet to be achieved.

The cost of a college education has only been going up, but how to pay for that education can be affected by where one lives, socioeconomic status, family values, and prior knowledge.

Where a person lives makes a difference in the cost of tuition in a community college or a state university. It can also make a difference in community support, such as employment or community service that allows for payback of student loans. Because communities have different views about the need for an institution of higher education, they may make larger or smaller investments into their schools. The ability levels of students coming out of the public schools may cause students to take more developmental courses, increasing their total cost of education.

"Scientists, economists, and sociologists agree that racial and ethnic variations in student loan debt and repayment are the result of socioeconomic factors, rather than physical or inborn characteristics" (Hansen, 2021, p.1). Family attitudes and perceptions during the pandemic increased the educational disparities between different races. While the world pivoted to virtual education, many poorer families and families living in rural areas suffered the most. Internet access was not available or affordable for some students. Because of racial differences in the comorbidities and severity of COVID-19, families had differences in their desire to send students to school and in their attitudes towards mitigation strategies (Gilbert et.al., 2020).

The cost and the need to borrow money to achieve a college education varies by the institution attended, the degree attained, ability level when starting at an institute of higher education and family or community support. In most cases, the most cost-effective education starts at the community college. Many students can live at home, eat at home, and hold down a part-time or fulltime job. Campus housing increases the cost of an education; according to CollegeBoard, average room and board fees total $13,889 for the 2021-22 school year (https://professionals.college-board.org/higher-ed/financial-aid/independent-college). A rough breakdown of costs: Housing: 54%; Transportation: 11%; Miscellaneous: 36% (https://professionals.collegeboard.org/higher-ed/financial-aid/living-expense-budget-2021).

When the students enrolling in college are first generation college students, financial problems can become enhanced as they have no family knowledge of applying for grants, scholarships, and loans. Secondary schools in areas where few students have attended college may not have the professionals available to assist in finding financial aid for the students, so it becomes paramount that these school employ professionals who receive the training needed to best assist their students. Financial literacy education should be provided at all schools to assist these

students in understanding ways to manage their money and the differences in private,

public, subsidized and unsubsidized loans when they do need to borrow to attend classes. Scouring the community resources to find untapped money that is available but not always advertised provided by organizations both government and private can assist in defraying costs.

In a report from September 2021 in USA Today, there are seventeen four-year institutions offering free college, many in exchange for working on campus or providing service upon graduation (Hopkins, 2021). States around the country are offering free community college for residents who qualify, by grades and/or income. Currently there is a bill in congress,

America's College Promise, that would provide tuition free community college to low-income students. This bill still has issues to resolve before it can be passed, but it is a way to allow all students an affordable path to an education and would go a long way to providing an equitable route to a college degree (Startz, 2021).

## Summing It Up

In summary, the pandemic not only caused higher educational institutions to grasp for solutions in regard to student recruitment and retention, but to seek innovative ways to provide greater financial and coaching support for the changing student population. This changing population is representative of a greater percentage of minority students being served, as well as more first -generation college students. The open-door policy of technical and community colleges is building bridges between academic faculty, administration, and student services in order to retain enrollments and raise persistence rates. Four-year institutions, both private and public, are seeking innovative partnerships within local communities, and with state and federal monies to enhance enrollments and provide quality education for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, culture, gender or background. Higher education is seen as the way to higher standards of living, for not only local communities and individuals, but as an economic driving force to prosperity, knowledge, and lifestyle.

The answers to these deficits require a multi-pronged approach to meet the needs of a variety of learners. Economic deficits for institutions must be considered; the expansion of AI and other software, as well a growth in online education, is a partial answer. Embracing diversity through campus programs for various groups and building campus community through these innovations is key to engaging all students and helping them to be successful in persisting to graduation.

## References

Angelou, M. quote https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/67256-we-all-should-know-that-diversity-makes-for-a-rich

Chaneski, W.S. (2014). Commit to success. Modern Machine Shop, vol. 87, no. 6, Gardner Business Media Inc, p. 40-43

Conway, M. Ellingrund, K. Nowski, T. & Wittenmyer, R. (2018 September). Closing the tech gender gap through philanthropy and corporate social responsibility. Mckinsey and Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/closing-the-tech-gender-gap-through-philanthropy-and-corporate-social-responsibility

Education Professionals. (2021). https://professionals.collegeboard.org/higher-ed/financial-aid/living-expense-budget-2021

Franklin-Davis, D. & Gosha, K. (2021 July 28). Improving diversity in tech with smarter investments in higher education. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/improving_diversity_in_tech_with_smarter_investments_in_higher_education#

Gilbert, L.K., Strine, T.W., Szucs, L.E., Crawford, T.N., Parks, S.E, Barradas, D.T., Njal, R., & Ko, J.Y. (2020). Racial and ethnic differences in parental attitudes and concerns about school reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic. Center for Disease Control & Prevention. 69(49);1848–1852. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6949a2.htm

Hanson, M. (2021). Student loan debt by race. https://educationdata.org/student-loan-debt-by-race

National Center for Education Statistics. (2019 February). Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_red.asp

Princiotta, D., Lippman, L., Ryberg, R., Schmitz, H., Murphey, D., Cooper, M. (2014) Social indicators prediction postsecondary success. ChildTrends. https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2014-21SocialIndicatorsLumina.pdf

Starz, D. (2021). Free community college: Progress is being made, but pitfalls remain. Brookings Institute. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/09/15/free-community-college-progress-is-being-made-but-pitfalls-remain/

Sturm, S. (2006). The architecture of inclusion: Advancing workplace equity in higher education. Harvard Journal of Law and Gender, 29, 247-334.

Sturm, S. (2007). The architecture of inclusion: Interdisciplinary insights on pursuing institutional citizenship. Harvard Journal of Law and Gender, 30, 409-424

Strum, S., Eatman, T., Saltmarch, J., & Bush, A. (2011). Full participation: Building the architecture for diversity and community engagement in higher education". Imagining America.

Sturm, S. (2011b). The architecture of inclusion—core concepts. August 30, 2011 at www.changecenter.org/coreconcept.

Valverde-Berrocoso, J., Fernández-Sánchez, M. R., Revuelta Dominguez, F. I., & Sosa-Díaz, M. J. (2021). The educational integration of digital technologies preCovid-19: Lessons for teacher education. PLoS ONE, 16(8), e0256283. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0256283

Warnke, A. (2018). A critical time for reform: Empowering interventions in a precarious landscape. Teaching English in the Two-Year College, vol. 45, no. 4, National Council of Teachers of English, 2018, pp. 361–84

# High Impact Practices and College Reading

**Dianne Aitken, Ed.D.**
Schoolcraft College

High Impact Practices (HIPs) are activities and strategies designed to increase student engagement and promote student success. Many of these are techniques that college instructors commonly include in their instruction throughout every course, like:

- Using structured lessons with appropriate scaffolding
- Providing multiple and varied examples
- Employing collaborative learning opportunities
- Including time for student reflection
- Utilizing effective questioning both during class discussions and in assessments
- Giving timely, positive, and explicit feedback

In addition to these long-term and over-arching instructional strategies, other small and quick activities can be integrated into any college course. These simple strategies can support student learning on many levels, including helping them to develop essential college reading and thinking skills. As college instructors, we cannot assume that all learners are critical thinkers, active readers, or that they have the necessary skills to read and comprehend the types of reading materials commonly used in college classes. The inclusion of a few simple activities, such as those outlined below, by any instructor in any discipline may have a dramatic impact on students' short- and long-term success in their courses by enhancing their reading abilities.

Introduce the textbook or course readings. When discussing the types of reading materials to be used throughout the course, take a few minutes to provide some detail. Will students be expected to do deep reading of a textbook each week? Will they need to skim to find specific information? Will they need to reference these readings to complete other assignments? Also, spend some time introducing the textbook structure and organization. Point out text-based tools like headings and subheadings, visuals, pre- and post-chapter questions, embedded hyperlinks, and other components commonly found in a textbook. Describe how these tools can be used to aid their reading and demonstrate how to utilize these tools. Spend extra time demonstrating the tools which will be of the greatest benefit in your particular class. For example, if your course makes heavy use of visuals like charts, graphs, and diagrams, be sure students know how to read and extrapolate information from them.

Model textbook reading. Read aloud a few sections of the textbook. Use a think-aloud technique as you read. Be sure to point out new vocabulary, confusing statements, and main points. Remind learners that a chapter in a textbook is different from other genres – it is not meant to be read straight through without pausing. Demonstrate how to use headings as a place to pause and develop questions about the reading ahead. Also demonstrate stopping at the end of each section to reflect on the key points, new vocabulary, or confusing concepts just encountered. Remind students to not forge ahead if they are confused by the previous section, but to reread and note what is confusing so they can discuss it with their instructor or seek other support as appropriate.

Build connections through the use of previewing. As you might do a "picture walk" through a storybook with young readers, encourage college students to preview long readings before jumping into them. Suggest they look at the title of the reading as well as the headings and subheadings throughout the reading. Encourage them to make mental predictions about what they might learn from this reading and what they may already know about this topic. Doing this will help to stimulate their prior knowledge and promote the connection of new information to previously learned material.

Expand on out-of-class reading assignments during class time. When students come to class after

completing a reading assignment, it may be helpful to start the class session by asking questions about the assigned reading. Ask students to define new vocabulary or explain new concepts that may have been introduced in the reading. Questions can be simple, such as *Who can define 'dichotomy'* or more complex, such as *What is the over-arching theme of the three theories discussed in this chapter.* Use this kind of discussion as a way to launch your instruction for that session. Another way to bring out-of-class readings into the class is to do a quick (less than 5 minutes) in-class writing assignment with prompts like: *List what you read that was interesting or confusing* or *Write a brief summary of what you remember from the reading.* Low-stakes quizzes about the reading is a third way to bring the reading into the classroom. Although students may not be fond of multiple quizzes in a semester, frequent low-stakes assessments can have a positive impact on their learning and grades on exams.

Use stories. Hearing the phrase, "Let me tell you a story…" generally grabs anyone's attention. Using a story, myth, poem, current event article, comic strip, or other story-like reading can be an interesting and motivating way to begin a lesson. Further, stories may spark an emotional response which can aid long-term memory. Locate brief stories that can be used to support the content of your courses and integrate them into your instruction as appropriate. If possible, share printed copies of the story with learners. Be sure to point out how the stories are connected to the content as it may not be as obvious to novice learners as it is to you. You might also challenge your students to locate and share appropriate stories related to the course content.

Integrating these types of activities into your course throughout the semester can be an easy way to support the development of college students' reading and thinking skills. This can increase comprehension of the course content, develop study habits, build connections between new and old information, activate prior learning, and increase interest and motivation. These are a powerful and impactful way to spend a few minutes of instructional time. Give them a try. You'll be glad you did. So will your students.

# Mesa Community College's First Year Experience Program

**Melissa Carpenter**
Mesa Community College
MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
Director | Foundations for Student Success

## Program Overview

The First Year Experience (FYE) program at Mesa Community College (MCC), in Mesa, AZ, is a year-long program serving first-generation, underrepresented, and foundation-level college freshmen. MCC is a Hispanic Serving Institution and the majority of FYE program participants are students of color. The FYE program aims to enhance student access, performance, and retention through a "wraparound support" approach that includes presenting workshops tailored towards first year success strategies, learning facilitators providing one-on-one support, and providing outreach opportunities. Each semester FYE staff conducts student success workshops, meets individually with each student from their assigned caseload, and coordinates study-groups and tutoring attendance. Each caseload is established through MCC courses that are linked directly to the FYE program. Facilitators work with faculty of these and other courses to ensure success of the FYE students and to empower students for further opportunities. One of the opportunities of growth within the program for FYE students is to become a student ambassador once they have successfully completed their first year at the college. FYE students who display leadership skills are encouraged to become student ambassadors, which helps the FYE program create an even larger network of support for the upcoming cohort.

## Program Benefits

FYE students love the scholarships provided by private and community donors including a local credit union, TruWest. Scholarships are available for up to three semesters. Students enjoy the five-week summer bridge session and attending classes with similarly-aged peers who have recently graduated from six local high schools. They also appreciate the relationships they build with faculty and staff.

## Student Voices

*"This is an absolutely amazing program that helped me through my first year of college. I am a first-generation college student so starting this new chapter in my life was not an easy road, but with the help of FYE, I was able to succeed. This program helped me both financially and academically. I then had the opportunity to become an ambassador for the program and guide the new FYE students through their first year of college. Being a previous member of the program gave me the experience I needed to be a mentor but also develop the leadership skills to be successful in all engagements I do. Without this opportunity, I would not be where I am today nor possess the fundamental attributes of a leader. THANK YOU!"*
—Salma

More student voices are available via video on our webpage: https://www.mesacc.edu/students/foundations-student-success/first-year-experience

## Program Evolution

While the program initially started fully in-person during the 2018-2019 school year, FYE has since gone through many changes as the second year of the program coincided with the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. During year two, MCC was forced to move to virtual courses, which meant FYE adapted its model and is currently offering hybrid, in-person, and fully-online student support services. The future priorities of FYE include supporting the FYE cohort as they transition into their sophomore year, expanding outreach to charter schools and nearby districts, adding a program for returning students, and hiring a full-time FYE dedicated coordinator.

# The Sliders Initiative at Walsh University

**Professor Kathleen M. Buttermore,**
Director of Academic Achievement
Professional Associate Professor of English
Walsh University

The Sliders Initiative is an undergraduate student retention program at Walsh University. Its purpose is to identify students who are in good academic standing but close to academic probation status, or who are not meeting their GPA requirements in the courses for their major. Students who are in good academic standing fly under our radar, because of their status and are likely to be over-looked. The Sliders Initiative seeks to identify this student population, contact and work with them, so they do not slide into academic probation. Starting Fall 2016, the program has achieved an 89% success rate of keeping students in good academic standing. (See Appendix: A Four-Year Sliders Report)

As the Director of Academic Achievement at Walsh University, my focus is to work with the undergraduate Academic Probation students. I teach the FYE115, a one-credit, hybrid mandatory course required for all academic probation students. . Additionally, I assist undergraduate students with their federal financial aid appeals and also serve as a member of the Academic Standing Committee, which determines students' academic status: Academic Probation, Continued Probation. Suspension and Dismissal.

As with every academic institution, there are freshmen professional advisors, faculty academic advisors, the deans and department chairs for the majors, and other support systems, such as athletic study tables, counseling, and tutoring. What this Initiative does is focus on undergraduate students whose GPA is in good standing but close to academic probation status and whose GPA for the major is below the standards for the division or department.

In 2005, Br. Ernest Paquet was in charge of working with the undergraduate juniors and seniors on academic probation, and I worked with the freshmen and sophomores. As Br. Ernest examined the students'

transcripts, he noticed that many of them started in good academic standing and then slid toward and then into academic probation each semester. He coined the term Sliders. My husband, Daniel L. Buttermore, wrote a paper for one of his Master's in Education classes at Walsh, tracking Sliders and analyzing the factors that contributed to their academic decline. One or more of the reasons for sliding into academic probation is the students were trying to handle situations by themselves, did not tell anyone, and did not know of or did not seek support. The main factors include:

- Transitioning from high school to college
- Not knowing effective study strategies and learning styles, or problems with procrastination and time management
- Transfer students; for some Walsh was their fifth transfer school
- Choosing the wrong major
- Balancing school/work/home/family/children/-time management
- Becoming a caregiver for a relative
- Not knowing or taking advantage of services, such as Accessibility or Counseling
- Coping with Mental Health Issue(s) or with a traumatic event or grief
- Experiencing financial exigency
- Experiencing a personal health issue or Covid-19 symptoms or diagnosis, or the declining health of a loved one or friend
- Immaturity

At the beginning of each fall semester, I run a report on the undergraduate students the day after the drop/add deadline for classes. The first report identifies those students whose cumulative GPA is .50 above academic probation status. At Walsh University, freshmen are in good standing with a 1.75 GPA.

Therefore, I sort using a GPA range of 1.75 – 2.25. For sophomores and seniors, 2.0 GPA is good standing, so the sort is for 2.0 – 2.50 GPA.

Next, I run a third sort by major. While a 2.0 is the general requirement for undergraduate graduation, there are majors where the GPA requirements are higher. Licensure programs, such as Nursing, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Education, have higher GPA requirements for graduation. Walsh's DeVille School of Business also has a higher GPA graduation requirement. I look for those students whose GPA is at least .50 lower than the requirement for the major. Pre-Nursing majors must earn a 2.75 GPA in the prerequisite courses and labs to be accepted into the nursing program. Any Pre-Nursing major with a GPA below the 2.75 required GPA is a candidate for the Sliders Initiative.

I sort the lists alphabetically into one master list. Any student listed twice, I hide or delete the line. The other categories in the search include the student's ID number, first and last name, class status, campus or transfer student, major, cumulative GPA, advisor, campus email, personal email, and cell phone number.

Students are more apt to check their texts rather than emails. Using Google Voice, I contact the students individually, identifying who I am and why I am texting them. For example:

*Terry, Hi! This is Professor Kathy Buttermore at Walsh University. I see you are a Pre-Nursing major. Do you need someone to work with on study strategies, note taking, and time management? If you are not sure what office to go to for assistance, I can help. Text me back at this number or email me at* kbuttermore@walsh.edu. *I believe in you!*

Students arrange to meet with me through phone, ZOOM, or in office. The focus of the meeting is a discussion of what is interfering with their success. We work together to create an Action Plan. The students and I stay in regular contact throughout the semester, analyzing and adjusting what is and is not working for them.

For those students who do not contact me, I send a follow up email to their Walsh and personal email accounts. When midterm grades are posted, I again reach out to all the students on the Sliders Initiative. The students who choose to be proactive and work with me appreciate the support. I tell them I believe in them. My message to each student is that this situation is a bump in the road. It does not define who you are. You are smart. I am here to help. Walsh University is here to help.

I also network with the freshmen professional advisors, faculty advisors, tutors, the Academic Support Center Director, Academic Support Specialist, and the tutors, Accessibility office, Athletics, Multicultural Affairs, Financial Aid, Career Services, the Librarians, the C.A.R.E. Team, deans and division and department chairs; as needed. The other main contacts are the Associate Vice President and Dean of Academic

**Table 2.** *HIVE Series Demographic Data*

| | Participant Gender | | School | | | | | |
| | M | F | Arts and Sciences | Aviation, Industrial, and Engineering | Business | Cyber and Design Media | Health Science | Public and Professional Services |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Understanding Needs | 0 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Creating Inclusive Spaces | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Improving Upon Course Design | 2 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Total | 4 | 14 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 1 |

Note: This table lists HIVE Demographic data.

Instruction and Academic Services, and the Registrar. Networking helps me track and record the offices and people that are contacted by the "Slider" students as this proof is needed for proof of applying their Action Plan.

I report on the Sliders each fall and spring and do a fall to spring persistence analysis. Then, I do a fall-to-fall retention report. Fall 2021, after the official drop/add date will be the fifth year of the program report. With the Covid-19 pandemic beginning March 2020, I will be interested in how complete online learning has affected the students. Quite a few have incompletes to finish, and August 28, 2021, is the last day Walsh University students can drop or add classes for fall semester 2021. After that, I will complete the final five-year study report and publish it in late September 2021.

Identifying the students who are close to academic probation and who are not meeting the GPA requirements for their major but are all still in good academic standing has been an effective retention strategy.

Having another reliable, go-to person that the students feel comfortable working with, who reinforces the idea that someone believes in them, made the students more proactive in their educational success. This Sliders Initiative achieved a consecutive two-year 89% success rate with only 11% moving to academic probation. I encourage other colleges and universities to utilize this viable retention program

I wish to thank Mrs. Pam Bichsel, Recorder for NOSS Ohio and co-founder of Academic Coaching Specialists (https://academiccoachingspecialists.com/) for her support and advice to nominate The Sliders Initiative. It is with gratitude and humbleness that I thank the NOSS Awards Committee and the NOSS Board for choosing the Sliders Initiative for the Outstanding Program of Promise. I also want the thank Dr. Edna McCulloh, Associate Vice-President and Dean of Academic Administration and Academic Success for her support and advice throughout the five-year study.

**Appendix A.** Four-Year Report of the Five-Year Slider Initiative

| Term | # | Persisted through | # | % | Stopped Out after Spring Semester | % | Academic Probation | % | Graduated | % | Academic Good Standing | % |
|------|---|-------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------|---|-----------|---|------------------------|---|
| Fall 2016 | 132 | Spring 2017 | 132 | 100% | 43 | 32.57% | 4 | 0.30% | 31 | 23.48% | 54 | 40.91% |
| Fall 2017 | 95 | Spring 2018 | 95 | 100% | 32 | 33.68% | 4 | 0.42% | 16 | 15/84% | 43 | 45.26% |
| Fall 2018 | 108 | Spring 2019 | 108 | 100% | 10 | 27.8% | 1 | 0.092% | 5 | 0.74% | 97 | 89.81% |
| Fall 2019 | 96 | Spring 2020 | 96 | 100% | 10 | 10.41% | 0 | 0.00% | 3 | 3.125% | 86 | 89.58% |
| Fall 2020 | 301 | Spring 2021 | 291 | 96.67% | 15 | 4.98% | 6 | 0.199% | 7 | 2.33% | 280 | 93.02% |
| Fall 2021 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Totals | 732 | | 722 | 98.63% | 100 | 13.66% | 15 | 2.05% | 62 | 8.46% | 560 | 76.50% |

**Note:** Spring 2021 with 220 students has not added in yet to the total number. This and fall 2021 will be added in after the official drop/add date for fall 2021 and included in the five-year report.

# Raising the Roof: Erasing the Ceilings of Expectations for Limitless Learning

**Brynne M. Barnes, M.A.**
Adjunct Professor, Schoolcraft College

Years ago, I came across an article by Bob Tierney in *The Quarterly* entitled, "Let's Take Another Look At the Fish: The Writing Process as Discovery." He discussed Louis Agassiz, a Swiss-American, 19th-century naturalist who taught at Harvard and was well-known for his writings about glaciers, fossil fish, and proposing the existence of an Ice Age.

I learned about the way Agassiz taught — by having students discover things for themselves by simply looking, again and again. Through this process, students made connections. Facts alone do not make an educated mind. Everything of value is in the connection. In order to find it, though, one must *be* connected. Attentiveness is required — not the easiest thing to teach in a distracted world. How can I get my students to connect?

I recently read Jim Kwik's *Limitless.* Kwik asserts that we are all capable of learning anything. He includes a quote by Alvin Toffler: "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn" (178). This reflects the notion of higher education itself: the shaping of minds (including our own) for lifelong learning. How, then, can I connect Agassiz, Tierney, and Kwik to teaching composition?

I considered what writing is. First, writing is thinking through one's fingers. Second, in order to write something, one must know something, and one cannot know something without paying attention. Third, only through lending attention does one learn. Writing *is* learning. It is a constant state of expanding what one thinks one knows.

In *Limitless*, Kwik teaches readers how to unteach themselves everything they *think* they know that limits them — the beliefs people hold that, in turn, hold them back. In chapter eight, Kwik refers to these as "ANTs": Automatic Negative Thoughts (137). I could

not help but think of all the times I've heard this from students: "I'm not good at writing." Imagine a stream of ants pouring out of an ant hill; one seems harmless, but they are mighty together. And my well-meaning students are unknowingly feeding these "ANTs" breadcrumbs (by agreeing to these thoughts and repeating them constantly) which keeps the "ANTs" alive and well. This is what we are up against. I then realized that part of learning how to write is learning *how* to learn — and how to unlearn false beliefs.

How can I teach them how to stamp out their "ANTs"? In his article, Tierney described an activity that he implemented to replicate what Agassiz had succeeded in doing with his students. I have adapted this very activity according while applying teaching and learning principles from Jim Kwik's *Limitless.*

The first essay I assign for my Composition 1 courses is an essay regarding beliefs. Students must write a narrative essay connecting an experience to a lesson they have learned or a motto that drives them forward. They must create meaning out of an experience, connecting *what* they believe to *why* they believe it. The following activity teaches them how to focus their attention to create meaning from the otherwise meaningless in preparation for this assignment.

I tell my students to take out a sheet of paper and a pen, fold their papers into fourths, and number the boxes, one through four. I pass around a container, filled with seashells (or in the fall, leaves that have fallen from the trees). Then, they select their shells. I select one last because I always do this writing activity along with them.

In Box 1, I tell them to fill their box by writing a basic description of the shell. What is it in the world? I ask everyone to go around the room and read what they have written in Box 1. This creates results such as, "The shell is slightly ribbed" and "The colors

range from dark brown, light brown, white, and it even has shades of purple" and so on.

Then, I ask them questions, like "Could you picture the shells?" Students say, "No." I ask, "Why not?" Students respond, "They all started to sound the same." I ask them, "Why?" Someone will mention, "There wasn't enough detail." I will read something aloud from my Box 1 that has detail and reply, "That *is* detail." They will insist, "Not like that." When I inquire, "Like what, then?", they may get stumped. Then, I ask, "How did you *feel* about the shells everyone described?" They will often respond with a resounding, "Nothing." When I ask, "Why not?", they can put words to it now — "There was detail, but it wasn't connected to anything. It was random." Facts are useless without connection.

Next, I tell them to fill Box 2 with as many metaphors and similes they can think of for their shells. What *could* it be? I ask students to select three or four of their favorite ones to share with the class. Here are some of the results:

"The rough bumps on the vertical ridges are like reading braille."

"The bottom has the mouth of a sea monster."

"It looks like an ingrown toenail."

"The shell looks like a sleeping dinosaur."

"It feels like goosebumps."

"The color is like an uneven roasted marshmallow."

"It looks like a candy wrapper that is twilled at one end."

At some, we raise our eyebrows. At others, we giggle. I ask students if they could picture the shells this time. "Yes!" they announce. I ask again, "Did you feel something about them?" They nod in agreement. "Why?" I ask. Answers pour forth, "They were connected to something", "I could imagine it", and so on.

I tell them Box 2 is all about figurative description — making the unfamiliar, familiar or the meaningless, meaningful. This engages their associative, observational skills — the beginning of creating connections.

In Box 3, I instruct them to become the imagined. In other words, pick something from Box 2, and bring it to life. What would it be like to be that thing? I

read an example, and then I leave them to their own imaginations. Afterwards, I ask students to volunteer to share with the class. One student shared this:

## Student Sample

Box 2 Metaphor: "It's like a battle-worn horn."

Box 3: "I hear shouting, then something slams open. 'Is this my time? To finally be useful?' The bag starts shaking up and down, indicating that he's running. This is it. I hear the zipper, and all I can see is white. I was grabbed with confidence, so I knew this would be the first time the world hears my roar. As I'm ready to belch, I fall to the floor. The last thing I remember is being kicked and stepped on. . .Others released their voice[s], but not me."

I tell them Box 3 is all about personification — imagined identity and becoming it, if only for a moment. I urge them to see how they can create connection and character and build empathy.

Finally, I instruct students how to fill Box 4: select something from Box 2, and relate it to their lives. In other words, how is something about this shell (or what it reminds them of) like something in their lives? What is it to you? One student shared this:

## Student Sample

Box 2 Metaphor: "An abandoned house, once useful to someone"

Box 4: "I step in, and the smell is worse than a high school bathroom after lunch, but I remember that it's not the smell I need to worry about, but my footing. Holes scatter the floor like a groundhog exhibit, but the lack of creaks justifies my safety. . .Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, as if everything isn't beautiful. The vast pillars, the rows and rows of chairs (or where they would be), the pure vandalism of graffiti and litter; all of this now nothingness is beautiful.

It used to be valuable to everyone, now only to those who look."

I ask students for their reactions. I remind them, "It can't mean something to us, unless it means something to you." Eventually, someone says, "It's not just a shell anymore." At first, it was. Now, it is something more.
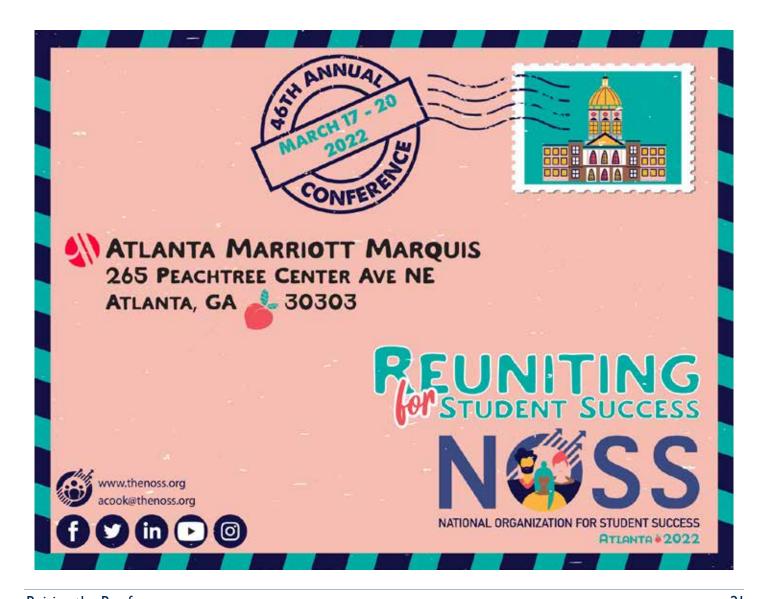
Robert Frost once said: "All thought is a feat of association: having what's in front of you bring up something in your mind that you almost didn't know you knew." This is the beauty of it all. Every now and again, between the boxes, students will get stuck, or they run out of things to say. That is the challenge. I tell them to look at their shell — again and again — keep looking, until they see something different. I promise them they will, and they always do.

In the end, students often say, "And to think. . .all this from a tiny shell." And I will say, "No. All of this is from all of you. Creating connections is a super-power, and you all have it. Now, you know."

**Works Cited**

Kwik, Jim. *Limitless.* Hay House, 2020.

Tierney, Bob. "Let's Take Another Look At the Fish: The Writing Process as Discovery." *The Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1998, pp. 27-30.

# Navigating with Self Compassion

**Deborah Daiek, PhD and Licensed Vibrational Sound Therapist**
Dean Emerita, Schoolcraft College

Having to teach differently...and navigate this new normal for the past 18 months … is stressing many of us out! In addition to causing burn-out, it's also causing some of us to question our chosen profession. We need to lean into compassion for ourselves. Prior to the pandemic, compassionate practices were often kicked to the curb and seen as time burners by many. If your health and student success are priorities at your institution, compassionate strategies should be considered essential. Teaching and authentic engagement, requires love and kindness to your students. But as important, it requires love and kindness to yourself. How you feel about yourself is reflected in how you relate, connect and teach.

It all starts with self-compassion. You are the center of your classroom (virtual or physical); you control what happens. You set the stage for learning. Your ability to care for others, to teach optimally, relies on your ability to care for yourself. Just as research has shown that our students need to feel cared for, and feel as though they belong….so do you. This is especially true right now since we all have experienced extreme isolation. To start, try some of the following:

1. Begin each day with a positive thought, and breathe deeply. Practice a favorite breathing technique several times before you leave your home. For example, exhale twice, quickly, to cleanse your lungs. Then, breathe deeply to the count of ten, hold for ten and then exhale to the count of ten. Learning how to control your breath can be powerful. A couple of reps will change how you feel.

2. Perhaps sit in silent reflection. Eyes closed, plan the positive things you will do today. In your silence, creative thoughts will come.

3. Sit comfortably, eyes closed, without a focus for your thoughts. Allow all thoughts to come and go without judgment. Just enjoy your space for 5-7 minutes…more time if you have the luxury.

4. Be the change. Initiate brown-bag lunch talks or breakfast coffee breaks with colleagues; facilitate a group discussion regarding what's working, what's hurting, and what's missing from your classroom. You're not alone.

5. Talk with your department to consider purchasing new materials that are more reflective of the changes going on in the world, and materials that are more reflective of the students in your classrooms. The new materials will be uplifting to you and to your students. If funding isn't available, consider contacting your college's Foundation. They enjoy supporting projects that enhance teaching and student success.

6. Be kind to yourself and know that we all have those days when we wish we would have connected with our students more. Don't judge yourself harshly. Reframe your views of failure. Use all of your experiences as learning opportunities. Give yourself the benefit that you did your best or that you may have had an off day…. it's all good!!!! Do remember that thoughts are things and that if you only focus on the negative, it hurts and has a way of blowing itself out of proportion.

7. Always be aware of your emotions. Learn to detect those things that serve as triggers. What brings you down? What brings you joy? I encourage you to consider keeping a journal. Be intentional with your self-compassion. I recently read a brief, but good article online (http://re-kindlesolutions.com/compassion-fatigue-three-questions-need-ask/) regarding self-compassion. It suggested answering similar questions to those below on a regular basis:

A. Why am I teaching?

B. What aspects of teaching give me joy?

C. What would I change about my teaching this week, if I could?

D. Do I feel good at the end of the day (most days)?

You may answer some negatively at times, but over a span of time, you should begin to see patterns emerge. You'll gain awareness of those things that trigger negative and positive thoughts and emotions. Once aware of them, you'll be better able to deal with them.

8. When you have the time, listen to a guided meditation. My colleague and I recorded one, you are free to use. Share with your students if you wish. It's an easy way to kick back, relax, breathe and enjoy! If you do use the guided meditation, and enjoy it, please consider subscribing.

**The Vibration of Joy**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZsIJwZqRfE

Self-Compassion is an essential component in education….but it's also essential for a healthy life.