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News from CART

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News from CART

(Center for the Advancement of Research and Teaching)

CART—DAY OF DIALOGUE

Bridgewater State College has a distinguished history in teacher education and the mission of the School of Education and Allied Studies (SEAS), which prepares professional educators who will function successfully in an ever-evolving pluralistic society, has been central to the mission of the College for nearly 160 years. The SEAS has adopted the

“Growth of the Professional Educator” Model for its programs and is committed to supporting professionalism, effective practices, and collaboration within the School of Education and among school systems and teachers throughout southeastern Massachusetts. Within this philosophy, the relationship between the college and cooperating teachers—those who agree to host and mentor student teachers—is a vital one.

Understanding the significance of this ongoing relationship, two Bridgewater State College professors, Dr. Barbara Bautz and Dr. Kelly Donnell, collaborated to create the Day of Dialogue project, a day-long seminar for cooperating teachers filled with discussion, support and recognition for those often overlooked practition-

ers. Funded by a Center for the Advancement of Research and Teaching (CART) grant, the workshop was held on April 7, 2005 and was attended by ten teachers from Randolph and Brockton. “We wanted to find a way to strengthen the school-college partnership,” stated Dr. Bautz, who has run similar programs

here at Bridgewater since 1992, “both by explaining the Bridgewater State College teacher education philosophy and by supporting the work of cooperating practitioners.”

According to Bautz, classroom teachers are sometimes excluded from the discussions that take place at the college-level regarding student teacher expectations and standards. As was pointed out in the CART application, these public school educators, who work with student teachers all day, every day, for an entire semester, often lack the support, information, and collaborative environment necessary to be effective mentors.

Thus, Day of Dialogue was created to bring the classroom teachers into the center of the discussion. “One of our goals was to promote a seamless transition from Bridgewater’s teacher preparation courses to the public school classroom,”



**Barbara Bautz
and Kelly Donnell.**

Bautz explained. To do this, part of the program addressed the requirements for student teaching and the cooperating practitioner's role via a clinical supervision video and an open exchange of ideas. Attendees particularly enjoyed meeting with other professionals to talk about having a student teacher in the classroom, the process of mentoring, and the rewards and drawbacks of the experience. Such collaboration and mutual understanding on these subjects is essential if the student teaching experience is to be rewarding for both the student and the cooperating teacher/mentor.

But the SEAS faculty did not stop there. "In addition, we wanted to know how we could assist the classroom teachers," Donnell said, "because an honest exploration of professional satisfaction among classroom practitioners leads directly back to the classroom environment and ultimately pupil success, which is what we are all after." For that reason, the day also included a lively discussion about the experiences and expectations of the teachers attending: What had their first teaching experience been like? What were their fears, successes, and disappointments? How had they coped? Participants were also given educational materials, including a copy of *What Keeps Teachers Going?*, a book by Sonia Nieto that shares the stories of veteran teachers who continue to meet the challenges of today's classrooms enthusiastically. Nieto's book focuses on public school teachers in urban locations, those who work among the most marginalized students in our public schools. Its subject matter related well to another aspect of the Day of Dialogue. "One of my own research interests has been the process of learning to teach in an urban setting," Donnell explained, "so I was thrilled when Barbara invited me to join her on this project and we chose to focus on teachers from urban, high-need school districts like Randolph, Brockton, and Fall River." These teachers and school districts together host a number of student teachers from Bridgewater State College each year and although the project sought to strengthen the 'student teaching triad'—college student, college faculty, and public school teacher—another significant goal was to offer support, resources, and recognition to those local public school teachers who are willing to open their classrooms as cooperating practitioners. The fact that the Bridgewater professors had made the time to meet with them, had provided educational materials, and had listened to their feedback was all appreciated by the teachers who attended. In particular, it was a unique opportunity to share experiences and enthusiasm with one another. Many teachers also indicated their desire

to observe and be observed by peer professionals in order to keep current within the disciplines and to share successful classroom ideas and activities.

Bautz and Donnell do not intend this to be the last Day of Dialogue they hold. "We'd like to try different models, topics, and teacher populations," Donnell said. For example, workshops could be held for new and experienced cooperating teachers to learn from one another, or sessions could focus on time management problems, conflict resolution issues, or the process of mentoring. "The options are really endless," she concluded. Within her own research, Dr. Bautz has always been interested in the experience of beginning teachers and their development into successful practitioners. In the future, she hopes to follow some Bridgewater State College graduates into their own classrooms. "I want to center my research on second and third year teachers to find out what resources, opportunities, and supports the College can offer them as their careers progress."

There is an adage that describes the basic philosophy underlying Bridgewater's professional education model: "Effective teachers are neither born nor made; they are developed." Drs. Bautz and Donnell are seeing to it that Bridgewater State College's School of Education and Allied Studies does its best to assist in that development, not just for Bridgewater students and graduates but for public school teachers across the region. They agree that the important thing is to keep the "dialogue" going.



Participants in the Day of Dialogue program exchange ideas at the Elizabeth Lyons Elementary School in Randolph, Massachusetts.