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Bridgewater Review

Also in this issue:

BORIANA MARINTCHEVA on Lessons from HIV
ASHLEY A. HANSEN-BROWN and KEVIN McGOWAN on Teaching Modalities
FERNANDA FERREIRA on Family and Paulo Freire
Tales from the Road – No Gold Watches and No Retirement by MARGARET JOHNSSON

BOAH KIM and TAL YAAR-WAISEL on International Teaching Collaboration
Burnout Matters! Prevention through Education by WENDY KNIGHT
PAUL RUBINSON reviews the film *Oppenheimer*

INNOVATIVE TEACHING featuring INKYOUNG KIM, MADHUSSUDANA N. RAO, JABBAR AL-OBAIDI, and JO HOFFMAN

Report on the WAC 2023 Summer Institute by JONATHAN SHIRLAND, JOHN MULROONEY, and SEAN McPHERSON
Book Review by JOSÉ LARA
and Poetry by SHEENA RANCHER and PAM MYETTE

Reflections From a Plantation Visit by TINA MULLONE
Black Man: Oh, how I Love Thee

Sheena Rancher

Black man, you are powerful!
You have the supernatural power of being feared
with your smooth, brown, dark, chocolaty skin
with handcuffs or even down on the ground
Know your power and use it correctly!
Never think you are less than
when you’re the best Man!

I love my black man
Skin slicker than
Mind stronger than
Always forgiving them
My black man

I breathe for my black man
Stand tall and speak up and out for him
Shining light in his life
I’m not a mother but a wife
I’m shouting from the rooftop

Win black man
Grow strong black man
Fight on black man
Yes, you’re a bad – black man
I love my black man!

Sheena Rancher is Assistant Professor in the Department of Special Education.

Credits for Author Photographs
Sarah Wiggins (by George Rizer); Boriana Marintcheva (by Andrew Holman); Kevin McGowan (by Andre Alexander); Paul Rubinson (by Kristin Hay); Inkyoung Kim (by Brenda Kozuch); John Mulrooney (by Rachel Layne); José Lara (by Steven Dubois).
Editor's Notebook
Sarah Wiggins

Lessons From HIV
Boriana Marintcheva

Teaching Modalities after COVID: BSU Professors’ Opinions of Hyflex, Asynchronous Online, Remote Synchronous, and In-Person Teaching
Ashley A. Hansen-Brown and Kevin McGowan

What I Learned From My Grandmother, My Mother, and Paulo Freire
Fernanda Ferreira

Tales from the Road – No Gold Watches and No Retirement
Margaret Johnson

American and Israeli Students’ Perceptions of African Emigration to Europe
Boah Kim and Tal Yaar-Waisel

Reflections From a Plantation Visit
Tina Mullone

Burnout Matters! Prevention through Education
Wendy Knight

And Now I Am Become That Guy, Reviewer of Films
Paul Rubinson

INNOVATIVE TEACHING
International Exchanges Through Living Lab
Inkyoung Kim

Pathways to the Middle East and North Africa at Bridgewater State University: The First Federal Grant for BSU’s Global Programs
Madhusudana N. Rao and Jabbar Al-Obaidi

Equity-Focused Civic Learning Across Disciplines
Jo Hoffman

WAC REPORT
Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) 2023 Summer Institute
Jonathan Shirland, John Mulrooney, and Sean McPherson

BOOK REVIEW
Solito: A Memoir by José Javier Zamora, José Lara

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rtificial Intelligence (AI) has arrived at our educational doorstep. In the past spring semester, one could hear the murmurs of “ChatGPT” floating down the corridors of Tillinghast Hall. By the fall semester, these programs have become a direct academic reality rather than distant echoes. At the College of Humanities and Social Sciences fall 2023 opening meeting, the concern of faculty was evident. How do we handle this new technology within our classrooms and assignments?

I feel odd writing on this topic, as I am no expert on technology. I have been called a Luddite. I use my smartphone primarily as a telephone, my laptop for word processing, and am absent from social media. I would rather be sneezing over a dusty old book than scrolling through commentary. When I started learning about the emergence of AI and its potential consequences, I chose to ignore it for as long as possible. But now the writing is on the wall . . . and it was generated by ChatGPT.

Much of my teaching career has involved confronting technology, i.e. the Internet. That does not mean that I do not accept technology as a tool. As an educator, it has been my job to train students to sift through online noise and discover quality websites. Online digital archives, for example, have been amazing for research and teaching opportunities. Still, the Internet has competed against me to grab students’ attention with information whittled down into a few short and simple summary paragraphs. The ability of our students to read and process material written with length and depth has been an ongoing concern. Holding up an assigned book, I have implored students to “Just read it, please, that’s all that you have to do. You do not have to go online for anything. Just . . . read . . . the book.”

Are we entering a phase where, more than ever, we will have to encourage our students to “just write the essay?” For many faculty, the concern with ChatGPT centers on writing. We have always struggled with making sure that student writing was original, but AI introduces unchartered territory. In the past, I have encountered students who misused information from the Internet to write essays. Yet in doing so, they appeared to put in more work piecing together the various online parts to avoid detection than if they followed the assignment correctly. With ChatGPT, even that stage of the incorrect writing process would be eliminated, as the program would do that for the user. It also appears that it will be easy for students to have essays generated even when these AI programs are still in their rudimentary stages of development. What happens when they get sophisticated? That’s where the true anxiety lies.

Over the summer, I designed assignments based on perceived possibilities of AI usage. In a strange way, I felt robbed of my academic freedom due to the limitations that I encountered while thinking about how I would outsmart the robots. I will not know until I start grading how I fared. What we all know and recognize is that a dialogue (among humans) is necessary. Perhaps Bridgewater Review can serve as an additional platform for faculty discussion on the topic, as we have different perspectives and approaches to new technologies. Such a possibility will be addressed in the next call for submissions.

In the meantime, I have been left to contemplate what this new technology could mean for educators in the humanities. Those who teach in the humanities are now facing anxieties similar to artists who worry about being eclipsed by AI. Will students continue their exodus from the humanities due to fears that potential jobs will be usurped? Or will students flock back to those classes, exhausted from living in a more de-humanized world? For historians like me, discussing how new technologies impacted societies is common practice. Even so, as someone who teaches in the humanities, I can already sense that I will be placing even more emphasis on what it means to be human – all that is magnificent and tragic. That conversation will continue as the great unknown of AI unravels.
Lessons from HIV

Boriana Marintcheva

Undoubtedly, everyone has heard about HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), and many are questioning why, decades after HIV emergence, we still do not have a cure or a vaccine. The great news is that the path to HIV eradication is clear and within reach.

To start, it is critical to recognize that while HIV is still a deadly virus, HIV infections are no longer a death sentence. UNAIDS, a UN program focused on HIV eradication, estimated that in 2022 new infections were down by 60% after peaking in 1995, and HIV-related deaths were down by 70% after peaking in 2004. Presently, the HIV prevalence in adults is 0.7% worldwide with half of all HIV-infected individuals (20.8 million) living in southeastern Africa. In the USA, the largest number of HIV-positive individuals live in the South, whereas the Northeast has the highest infection rate, with disproportionately high levels among transgender individuals (10.3%), men having sex with men (7.7%), and injectable drug users (5%).

When HIV infections are treated, one is posed to have a long and productive life. For example, if a 20-year-old individual was infected with HIV before the availability of anti-HIV drugs, they were expected to live only until the age of 30. After anti-HIV drugs became widely available (2002), the life expectancy gradually increased and in 2010 an infected 20-year-old was expected to live until the age of 75, only 5 years less than an uninfected counterpart.

Today we have tools to combat HIV because we understand how it works. HIV is a fast-propagating retrovirus with complex biology. If left untreated, it gradually destroys the immune system leaving individuals immunocompromised and dying from diseases that a healthy immune system would have easily neutralized. In the early days of HIV, society saw clusters of unexplained deaths in homosexual communities, blood transfusion recipients, and sex workers. Through the power of research, today we recognize that the initial HIV infection results in mild flu-like symptoms that are frequently disregarded. The body recovers swiftly and years may go by without any symptoms while HIV quietly deteriorates the immune system, leading to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). If the HIV infection is detected, a completely different scenario could unfold. Individuals start treatment, HIV propagation is controlled, the immune system works, and life could bring great things as it did for Magic Johnson, a renowned NBA player who announced his HIV diagnosis in 1991 and is still thriving.

Once HIV was recognized as the causative agent of AIDS (1984), research aimed to understand its biology and transmission routes to inform development of reliable testing, prevention, and treatment. One can think about HIV testing as the switch between the two alternative scenarios sketched above because it provides us with powerful information to keep ourselves healthy. HIV testing can be done at home with a pharmacy-purchased self-test or in clinical settings using saliva or blood samples. It is recommended for all adults to test at least once per lifetime or as frequently as necessitated depending on risk. Any contact with blood, semen, vaginal fluid, anal mucus, or breast milk presents an opportunity for HIV exposure and should trigger consideration for testing. Testing is highly recommended for pregnant women and routine for infants born to HIV-positive mothers. Testing and treatment together led to 1% risk for mother to child transmission, down from 35%. Tests are covered by insurance, Google is helpful for locating testing facilities by ZIP code, and HIV/AIDS advocacy websites offer plenty of advice on how to approach personal issues frequently associated with HIV testing and HIV status. Simply stated, one can contribute to stopping HIV by getting tested and encouraging people to do so. Over the years, testing has been refined tremendously, allowing for fast, reliable, and convenient processes. Most importantly, testing leads to HIV status awareness, which allows access to treatment.
typical sterilizing cure for HIV is currently not possible because we cannot cut HIV out of our DNA. HAART is delivering a functional “cure,” effectively stopping HIV propagation by supplying a continuous stream of anti-HIV drugs for the duration of one’s life. In that sense, we have effective treatment but no cure for HIV.

The first drug against HIV (1987) was AZT, a repurposed anti-cancer medicine. Unfortunately, AZT extended the life of HIV-positive individuals by only two years due to mutations conferring drug resistance. The development of new anti-HIV drugs paralleled the increasing understanding of HIV biology and the realization that fast HIV mutation rates are a huge obstacle. HAART was introduced in 1996 with the rationale that three drugs taken together will shut off HIV propagation with minimal risk of resistance. Initially, following HAART protocol required taking multiple pills several times per day to mitigate harmful side effects. Medicine refinement and introduction of slow-release formulations allowed doses to be lowered, thus lowering side effects, simplifying treatment protocols, and increasing treatment adherence. Declining infections and increased life expectancy followed. Meanwhile, science delivered new milestones. In 2019, ART (Anti-Retroviral Therapy) protocol, employing two instead of three drugs, was introduced and 2021 brought to market a monthly injectable treatment for virally suppressed patients. Viral suppression refers to a state where virus propagation is halted and HIV is no longer detectable. If HIV is undetectable, it is untransmissible, thus the popular slogan “undetectable=untransmittable.” Keep in mind that HIV remains present in the patient’s DNA. If therapy is discontinued, propagation picks up and immune system damage progresses. In summary, once HIV-positive status is identified, treatment must start immediately, aiming to achieve viral suppression as quickly as possible. Viral suppression is a ticket for good personal health and curtails HIV spread.

Anti-HIV drugs are prescribed for three purposes: therapy, PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylactics) and PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylactics). PrEP is recommended for HIV-negative individuals with ongoing high risk for HIV infection and entails taking a daily pill or a monthly injection along with regular testing. PEP on demand refers to a four-day schedule where medicine doses are spread before and after a high-risk event. PEP is a tool to manage potential HIV exposures in emergencies (accidental needle stabbing, broken condom, sexual assault) and must be started within 72 hours. PrEP and PEP are relatively new and currently a subject of active awareness and education efforts.

Even though there is still no cure for HIV infections, the available knowledge has taken us to the point where society has a meaningful plan for HIV eradication within reach. Frequently the plan is described as 90/90/90, referring to three targets: detecting 90% of HIV cases, 90% of the HIV-infected individuals starting treatment, and 90% of the people in therapy becoming virally suppressed. The initial goal was to reach 90/90/90 targets by 2020, aiming to achieve 95/95/95 levels in 2030. However, the COVID pandemic complicated things. According to UNAIDS, in 2022 the world stood at 86/89/93 globally with broad variability margins. The USA standing by region is shown in Figure 3.

Despite the tremendous efforts and funding dedicated toward HIV vaccine development, the prospects of having one soon are not promising due to the complex nature of the virus and its profound impact on the immune system.

Understanding where HIV comes from matters. Since 1999, science knows that HIV originated from Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV), which likely jumped from chimpanzees to humans when the animals were hunted for food and individuals were exposed to infected blood. Currently, it is believed that HIV arose in Central Africa and over decades “rode” the wave of industrialization and human migration unrecognized. HIV arrived in the USA sometime in

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Figure 2: National Institutes of Health (directorsblog.nih.gov/tag/undetectableuntransmittable/).

the mid-1970s, years before its first documented appearance in Los Angeles in 1981. Of course, in those early years the question of where HIV comes from was asked in a very practical way to understand the modes of transmission. Although the answers and prevention recommendations came quickly, it took a while for reason to replace fear.

The story of Ryan White, the poster child of HIV/AIDS in the USA from the mid-1980s, illustrates a broad range of issues. Ryan White got infected with HIV through a blood transfusion while receiving treatment for a blood clotting disease. After his diagnosis became public, his family found themselves in the middle of a legal action to keep him in school. Despite the recommendations of his doctors and the clear rationale why he did not present a risk for the school, there was a strong pushback from the local community. The case sparked national conversation and political action. The family won the legal battle and Ryan White was allowed to return to school, however community reactions escalated, and the family moved. White’s legacy continues to live through the Ryan White CARE (Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency) Act which dedicates resources to help HIV infected individuals manage their condition. For example, because of the CARE Act, health insurance is required to cover HAART and PrEP for qualified individuals.

Understanding that HIV is transmitted through blood allowed HIV testing to be developed. Screening of donated blood for HIV became a standard practice. Fast-forward to today the number of infectious agents donor blood is tested for has tripled. It is important to realize that when HIV screening of donated blood began, the practice already existed for Syphilis and Hepatitis B, i.e. learning from the past provided a fast solution for HIV in 1980s and other infectious agents afterwards.

The history of HIV denialism offers an example of how detrimental the disconnect between science and personal beliefs can be when the burning question is “Where is AIDS coming from?” Between 1999 and 2008, the government of South Africa shaped national public health policies based on the notion that the roots of AIDS are socio-economic, while denying HIV as the infectious agent causing AIDS. The introduction of anti-HIV medicines in health care was discouraged and resulted in unthinkable loss of life. After changing policy and accepting the science, the country changed course and by 2022, it was experiencing positive changes in HIV/AIDS management at record rates.

One can only hope that truly embracing the knowledge of origins and modes of transmission of HIV will soon erase its label as a “homosexual issue,” and when the next virus emerges from the wild, there will be less room for conspiracy theories and labels, which quickly grow into social injustices that take forever to eradicate.

Societal attitudes and support infrastructure are essential for science and medicine to deliver to their fullest potential. Social issues can become life or death for people struggling with HIV because they are directly connected to people’s access to HIV testing and life-saving medications. Homophobia, stigma, and inequalities are often recognized as the biggest obstacles of our time to combating HIV and AIDS. They rob people of access to resources, limit choices to exercise HIV prevention, propagate misconceptions, and stop individuals from seeking treatment. In many communities around the world, homosexual activities and drug use are illegal, thus criminalized, and penalized. HIV infected individuals are less likely to seek testing and treatment when fearing that they will be questioned and penalized. Similarly, gender-based violence increases the risk of HIV infection and diminishes access to care. Misinformation and fear create and increase stigma toward HIV-infected individuals, further exacerbating the complexity of battling HIV. On the other hand, economic stability, supportive social networks, access to specialized health care, and a holistic approach to managing life with HIV have been shown to improve adherence to treatment and long-term outcomes.

Educating the public about HIV is a must to ensure prevention of new infections, to empower HIV positive individuals to have productive lives, and to reduce stigma. There is no shortage of knowledge and tools for HIV education. The good news is that their focus is somewhat changing in recognition of the needs of different risk groups, inclusivity, and social connectivity. HIV infections are complex and multidimensional and are best contained when addressed with human-centered, complex, and multidimensional measures. Regardless of how many and how powerful tools and strategies are available in the clinic, there is no replacement for HIV awareness, equitable access to care, and humanity.

Boriana Marintcheva is Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences.
Teaching Modalities after COVID: BSU Professors’ Opinions of Hyflex, Asynchronous Online, Remote Synchronous, and In-Person Teaching

Ashley A. Hansen-Brown and Kevin McGowan

Introduction

Out of the two co-authors of this paper, one of us (Kevin) had experience with Hyflex teaching whereas the other (Ashley) had no experience with online teaching before the Covid-19 pandemic. You can probably guess which of us fared better when BSU moved to remote instruction in March 2020.

Many faculty members have adapted to new ways of teaching and learned new skill sets as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. At BSU, most faculty members spent the second half of spring 2020 and the full 2020-2021 academic year teaching asynchronous or remote synchronous courses, many for the first time. Now that we are back to mostly in-person teaching, we’ve had to decide our current level of comfort with various types of online course offerings and grapple with how many in-person vs. online courses to offer our student body. Crucial to these decisions are the perspectives of both the students enrolled in our courses and the faculty teaching them. In this paper, we focus on the latter.

Much past research has examined the effectiveness of online courses (e.g., Peacock et al., 2020; Rovai, 2002; Shen et al., 2013), but surprisingly little work has examined distinctions between online course modalities. For example, Kohnke and Moorhouse (2021) found in a self-described “small-scale exploratory study” (p. 1) of a HyFlex course that despite difficulties in communicating between students attending in-person vs. online, students generally viewed the flexibility of the course positively.

To our knowledge, our current paper is one of the first to investigate faculty members’ perceptions of different course modalities. We became interested in this question after the virtual 2021 CARS May Celebration, where Kevin attended Ashley’s presentation on the results of a study examining BSU students’ sense of belonging and loneliness during remote online instruction. Someone in the Zoom audience asked a question about how students and faculty experience Hyflex teaching, which we both found interesting. Understanding this may help departments and administrators in planning future course offerings as we continue approaching a post-pandemic world.

We connected after the conference and decided to put our research skill sets to good use in a mixed-methods project researching how faculty perceive four different course modalities: (1) Hyflex, in which the professor and some students are physically present in the classroom while other students are attending remotely via videoconference; (2) remote synchronous, in which the professor and all students in the class meet virtually via videoconference; (3) asynchronous online, in which there are no in-person or virtual meetings during the course; and (4) in-person, in which the professor and all students in the class are physically present in the classroom. Ashley took the lead on designing a survey study and Kevin took the lead on designing a focus group study, both of which are described below.

Survey Study with BSU Faculty

After gaining IRB approval, in spring 2022 we sent an invitation to participate in a survey to all BSU faculty via both the full-time and part-time faculty listservs. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and open to any faculty member who had taught at least one class at the college level. Our sample consisted of 179 participants, ranging in age from 32-79 ($M = 50.52$, $SD = 12.13$). The majority of our participants (78) identified as female (44%), with 39 identifying as male (22%) and 62 not responding (34%). Our sample was also majority White/Caucasian (99; 55%), with 5 identifying as multiracial (3%), 5 identifying as Asian/Asian American (3%), 2 identifying as African American/Black (1%), 2 identifying as Hispanic/Latino (1%), and 66 not responding (37%).
Participants were asked to imagine they were teaching a course within their major next semester which they had not yet taught before. They were randomly assigned so that their instructions were specifically about a course in one of the four modalities; thus, some participants were instructed to imagine it as a Hyflex course, some as a remote synchronous course, some as an asynchronous online course, and some as an in-person course. Each modality was defined so that participants had the same understanding of what was involved. Participants completed a questionnaire about their perceptions of teaching in the given modality, modified from the Online Instructor Satisfaction Measure (Bolliger et al., 2014; sample item: “I think students in this course would participate enthusiastically”). Participants then answered a series of questions about their own teaching experiences and likelihood of wanting to teach in each of the four modalities. Lastly, participants answered demographic questions and read a debriefing statement which explained the purpose of the study and our research questions.

To test our hypotheses, we first examined participants’ perceptions of the imagined course.1 Perhaps unsurprisingly, our sample of professors believed that in-person classes would be superior to other modalities in terms of both student/student interactions ($F(3, 121) = 10.71, p < .001$) and student/instructor interactions ($F(3, 120) = 8.00, p < .001$). Overall, participants seemed to hold generally negative views of Hyflex courses, as participants believed affordances (i.e., convenience, flexibility, and accessibility) were lower in Hyflex classes ($F(3, 121) = 4.37, p = .006$), believed they had lower institutional support for Hyflex classes ($F(3, 121) = 11.72, p < .001$), and believed Hyflex courses would be lower quality in terms of course development and teaching ($F(3, 119) = 8.86, p < .001$) compared to other course modalities.

Next, we examined whether participants’ prior experience with each course modality influenced their likelihood of wanting to teach in that modality in the future. Because only one participant ($n = 1$) reported never having taught an in-person class before, we do not report that analysis. People who had not previously taught a Hyflex course ($n = 98$) were less likely to want to teach a Hyflex course in the future compared to people who have previously taught in this modality ($n = 28$), $t(34.94) = 2.20, p = .04, 95\% CI [.05, 1.22], d = .57$. Similarly, people who had not previously taught an asynchronous online course ($n = 42$) were less likely than people who have ($n = 84$) to want to teach an asynchronous online course in the future, $t(115.47) = 10.00, p < .001, 95\% CI [1.60, 2.40], d = 1.65$. Lastly, people who had not previously taught a synchronous remote course ($n = 12$) were less likely than people who have ($n = 114$) to want to teach in this modality in the future, $t(124) = 3.07, p = .003, 95\% CI [.46, 2.11], d = .93$.

Focus Group Study with BSU Faculty

For the focus group, we concentrated on the virtual options: Hyflex, remote synchronous, and asynchronous online. Our focus group consisted of five faculty members representing four departments. The focus group was conducted during spring 2022 via Zoom. The session was recorded and the transcript from the recording was analyzed using qualitative, inductive processes. This inductive process began by identifying and assigning labels to meaningful units from the transcript that conveyed specific ideas (Maxwell, 2013). Throughout the focus group data analysis process, data was reduced and transformed using axial coding.

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1 We are presenting simplified results for easier readability. If you would like the full details, feel free to contact Ashley (ahansenbrown@bridgew.edu).
In exploring these teaching modality options, the following overarching themes emerged: (1) Hyflex – great in theory, not so much in practice; (2) remote synchronous – reimagining student engagement; and (3) asynchronous online – one size does not fit all. Participants did not have experience with teaching using the Hyflex option; however, all five had experience teaching with remote synchronous and four out of five had experience teaching in an asynchronous online format.

For the Hyflex option, participants thought that it was good in theory but were concerned about how to effectively implement this option in practice. For example, participants expressed concern about how to effectively manage the students that you have in class while simultaneously engaging with the ones that are virtual. One participant said, “The Hyflex option scared me. It was a lot to think about managing that much. You know, looking at the participant list, looking at the people in the room, looking at the virtual people, focusing on PowerPoint and keeping track of activities.” They were also concerned about having the necessary resources to effectively implement a Hyflex option. In addition, faculty were concerned with how this option would impact the evaluation of tenure-track faculty.

Participants indicated that remote synchronous teaching posed new challenges in terms of hands-on activities. For example, it took considerable time to find online options that simulate in-class, hands-on activities. In addition, participants discussed how this option encourages creative thinking about how to engage students in large-group and small-group discussions. One participant stated, “With in-person teaching, I do a lot of hands-on stuff. With remote synchronous, I used online virtual manipulatives.”

With asynchronous online teaching, participants suggested that some students are not always aware of the independent aspect of online learning. Students need a certain level of self-direction in order to do well with the asynchronous online option. It was suggested that faculty be explicit about how their asynchronous online courses operate. One participant noted, “Asynchronous online is not for all students. I try really hard at the beginning of every semester to lay out in an email and intro video before class even starts, you know, here’s what you have to understand about this if you’ve never done one before.” In addition, participants discussed how some courses work well with this option and others do not.

Implications & Conclusions
Overall, our survey study gave us valuable information about what BSU faculty think of the four course modalities. Faculty have negative perceptions of remote/online teaching modalities, especially Hyflex; however, participants with experience teaching in a given modality are more likely to want to teach in that modality in the future.

Results from the focus group indicated that more support in the form of professional development and in-class assistance is needed in order to make faculty more comfortable with the Hyflex option. Some of these in-class assistance supports included teaching assistants and access to in-class technical support. Focus group faculty responses regarding the Hyflex option were consistent with the responses indicated from the survey data given that focus group faculty had not taught using the Hyflex option. Focus group participants were more receptive to teaching using the remote synchronous and asynchronous online options given that all of them had taught using the remote synchronous option and four out of five had experience using the asynchronous online option. This finding is also consistent with our survey data results indicating a more positive response based on previous teaching in a specific modality.

Overall, it seems clear from these two studies that faculty at BSU have mixed opinions about Hyflex, remote synchronous, and asynchronous online teaching. We began this article with an anecdote about how our different prior experiences with online teaching affected our experience during the pandemic; now that we’ve all had some shared experience with online teaching of some sort, it’s up to us to decide whether and how we offer online courses in the future, and how to ensure that our students have the opportunity for world-class education in whatever format it may come.

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Kevin McGowan is Associate Professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education and Academic Director of the Martin Richard Institute for Social Justice.
What I Learned From My Grandmother, My Mother, and Paulo Freire

Fernanda Ferreira

I wasn’t the first in my family to go to college. I was the second. My grandmother could barely write her name. When she did, it looked like a little kid – and not a grown woman – had scribbled the letters to form the name “Maria” on a piece of paper. When she attempted to read from her Saint Anthony prayer book, she would say the words hesitantly. She wasn’t a good baker at all because she never followed a recipe. Yet, she was a remarkable cook, who knew exactly just how much salt to add to savory foods, like her stewed fish in creamy coconut sauce.

My mother, on the other hand, could not cook anything. She became an elementary school teacher and later received her PhD in education from Vanderbilt University. In Brazil, she was a professor in the same university where I got my undergraduate degree. Having my mom with an office right across from the building where I attended classes was actually reassuring. Indeed, I had inside knowledge of university life even before passing the university entrance exam. One could say that I knew the “ins and outs” of academia even before attending my first undergraduate class. However, it was disconcerting to have my mother as a professor in the same university I attended. I knew that if I messed up, my mother would have access to my degree audit!

Iracema Pires, as she was known, specialized in curriculum and programs. Much of her academic work was guided by the revolutionary ideas of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator who wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. At one point in her career, she was the educational consultant for the government of Suriname, the former Dutch Guiana. She lived in Paramaribo for six months, helping Surinamese educators develop their curricular programs, based in part on Freire’s ideas. She was so enthusiastic about his revolutionary theories of education that she successfully pushed for and created the “Paulo Freire Center” at the Federal University in Pernambuco. She wanted all her graduate students to have easy access to his works. In 1993, the “Paulo Freire Desk,” as it was called then, was just a section of the university library. During the ribbon-cutting ceremony, attended by Freire himself, my mother must have been thinking about the implausibility of her own life. She was the daughter of a woman who struggled to read and write, yet she was also someone who later became a university professor, an expert in education. Today, close to three decades after her untimely death, the Paulo Freire Center is a much larger institute that offers scholarships to aspiring scholars and is an integral part of that Brazilian university.

So, when my colleague Kevin McGowan (Academic Director of the Martin Richard Institute for Social Justice) asked if I wanted to be part of a book club reading Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I jumped at the chance. Life would be coming full circle for me. I had just started my three-year Alternate Professional Responsibility as Faculty Associate at the MRISJ in the fall of 2021. My goal in that capacity was (and is) to help the institute fulfill its stated mission. Specifically, the MRISJ aims to build knowledge about social justice, develop skills for advancing social justice (individually and collectively), and serve as a catalyst...
to BSU’s commitment to social justice. These goals connect with Freire’s work because he was profoundly committed to social justice insofar as he wanted to find solutions for high rates of illiteracy in Brazil. The failed educational system of the 1950s and 1960s meant that most of the Brazilian working class did not finish school and could not read or write. Thus, Freire’s ideas about education were conceived around his efforts at adult literacy.

Freire starts by opposing the dichotomy of “educator-student” in which the teacher has all the knowledge, and the student is the passive recipient of said knowledge. That “banking system” of education is outdated, he declares. Instead, he proposes that knowledge is rooted in the whole human experience and literacy is but a stage in a larger project of “becoming aware” for the learner. The idea is to guide the nonreader in becoming an agent of their own learning, by means of having them think critically about their own situation as a “maker” of reality. How does that translate in concrete terms in the classroom? It means, for example, that in selecting a keyword to start the literacy process, the learners themselves come up with that lexical item. Instead of learning how to read a sentence (typically found in the old primers) such as Ivo viu a uva (“Ivan saw the grape”), a learner, who might be a bricklayer for example, will want to learn how to read and write the word tijolo (“brick”) or the word voto (“vote”) in order to grasp the syllables that make up significant words for them.

Hence, Freire sees learning to read and write as part of a person’s “conscientization.” This Portuguese neologism – conscientização – is challenging to translate (Andreola 1993). It does not mean simply “awareness” or “consciousness raising” as some have suggested. In Freire’s own words, conscientization means that “learners need to perceive that they can ‘write’ their life and ‘read’ their reality, which will not be possible if they do not take history into their hands, and make it, and be made and remade by it” (Freire 1977, 16). In other words, literacy is not purely a mechanical endeavor; it is a political act; an act of self-discovery and personal agency.

In my own pedagogy, I try to avert the “banking system” by asking students – usually heritage language learners of Portuguese – to tell me what words or semantic areas they want to learn. What do they long to know, as they recapture their ancestral language? How can I assist them in their efforts to be fluent in the language of their close relatives? From that perspective, I attempt to be part of that dialogic process of teaching and learning.

As I attempted to make my grandmother’s fluffy rice at home, I reflected on the philosophical writings of Paulo Freire. I understood that knowledge includes the entirety of human experience and that it is intrinsically connected to action. Freire reminded me that my grandmother, despite being a nonreader, was a “maker” of cultural knowledge. In Freire’s view, her attempts at literacy were part of a larger pursuit for self-actualization. That idea was, in and of itself, revolutionary.

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My mother (far left), and Paulo Freire (far right) on the day of the ribbon-cutting ceremony.
Photo: author’s photo collection.
Retirement, the last stage in a series of five career lifespan stages, is simply defined as the cessation of work. Increasingly, in the United States of America, the full-retirement stage may be unattainable and/or undesirable. Many of the Baby Boomer generation may never be able to afford retirement and it’s not our fault! Due to changes in employer pension practices, increases in human longevity, catastrophic economic downturns, and shifting social structures, a majority of Americans age 50+ have less than $10,000 in retirement savings.

Even if we may be able to afford to retire, many still choose to seek bridge employment or other working-in-retirement arrangements, rather than a full cessation of work and complete withdrawal from the workforce. Relevant to the field of management, this phenomenon has resulted in the creation of a new career lifespan stage! The new Working-in-Retirement stage has emerged between the fourth stage, the Maintenance stage (last 10+ years at the top of a career journey, but no longer moving up the career chain), and the traditional Retirement stage (complete withdrawal from the workforce), which is still the final stage in the career lifespan trajectory.

Prior to June 2023, my research about the Working-in-Retirement phenomenon was a mix of academic research and hands-on experience. I served as center director and faculty in several grant-funded positions, developing entrepreneurship programs for individuals who were age 50+ and/or low-income, at two universities. This essay is based on my earlier work as well as sixty talks/interviews I had with people this past summer about their experiences.

Not Retiring

I spent this past summer not retiring. The same was true – not retiring – for many of the people I met over the course of my cross-country travels. My youngest adult daughter hiked the Continental Divide Trail and I had the pleasure of providing two hotel-intercepts, where she could come off trail for a break and sleep in a real bed. While spending two weeks working and waiting in Wyoming and Montana for my daughter to come off trail, and while driving across country twice, through a total of 15 states, I met a lot of people age 50+ at the hotels, motels, and lodges where I stayed, dining next to me in restaurants, and even at the local Friday night rodeo. I’d mention my ongoing research and interest in learning about people working in retirement, or not retiring at all. Wherever I went, people opened up and told me their stories, like a female Harley Davidson motorcyclist who said her husband insisted she couldn’t retire from her job as a coder because of her “Harley habit!” She declared this proudly as she re-tied her bandana around her forehead. As she was walking out the door she turned and said, “I wouldn’t have to retire if they’d let me work remotely.”

Quietly Coerced Retiring

One recurring narrative in my conversations is what I call “Quiet Coerced Retiring.” Person after person confessed, often with more than a little embarrassment, that they had been called into Human Resources, or had received an email, informing them that their job had been eliminated. Often, they were politely escorted out of the building or, if they were being fired/
retired via email, never even returned to company premises. There were no retirement parties, there were no thank yous for the years or decades of service. I certainly didn’t have to ask whether they received a gold watch on the way out the door.

One man I spoke with had worked for a bank in the Chicago neighborhood where he spent his whole life. He started working for the bank as an intern, in the mailroom, as part of a program through his high school. He stayed at the bank after graduating high school and took on various responsibilities over the decades. The bank was sold multiple times over the years, including a federally forced sale/bailout during the global financial crisis of 2008/2009, but always, for 40–plus years, he worked at that bank location, employed by each successive bank owner. The man didn’t miss a day of work during the COVID pandemic, major snowstorms, or due to personal matters. And then, when his direct supervisor was on vacation for a week, this 61-year-old man was called into the bank’s human resources office and informed that his job was being eliminated, outsourced to a national company. He was given the telephone number of the national company to see if they might be hiring and was told he could file for unemployment benefits.

When he asked about his pension, the human resources department (of the bank that recently acquired the bank location) replied that they did not have any information about the pensions the man may or may not have earned from any of the prior bank owners over the past 40 years.

Afraid he would no longer be able to make the mortgage payments on his home, he overcame the hesitation he had (due to embarrassment about his predicament) and reached out to his family and people he knew in the community to try to find work. It was several months before he finally found a new full-time job, paying slightly above minimum wage. And he felt fortunate to have found two small part-time jobs while searching for full-time employment. As he told me when we last spoke, “I’ll need the full-time job and the two part-time ones to keep up

with things. They’re just not paying me good money like the bank was paying.” I didn’t ask him if or when he planned to retire, even though it appears the Maintenance stage of his career lifespan has ended.

Unfortunately, this is one of the sad realities for many individuals aged 50+ in the Working-in-Retirement stage. Very few are earning as much as they did during the Maintenance stage of
While the impact of increased profits was immediately evident on companies’ balance sheets, the devastating impacts on individual Americans who have to work until they drop dead, due to severely inadequate retirement savings, and/or spend their final years living in poverty, are just starting to be felt.

Access to Capital Issues for Older Entrepreneurs

One alternative to low-paying or sporadic part-time bridge employment is senior entrepreneurship. I first started working with older entrepreneurs through the AARP Foundation’s “Work for Yourself at 50+” program. I quickly became aware of the unique obstacles faced by older entrepreneurs, including an often urgent, even desperate, need to generate income.

In the Netflix series *Grace and Frankie*, Jane Fonda’s and Lily Tomlin’s characters have difficulty raising funding for their business, which they believe is at least in part due to age discrimination. Jane Fonda’s character lamented that the bankers were afraid they wouldn’t live long enough to pay back the loan, even though it was a business loan and Jane Fonda’s character was a successful entrepreneur who had completed a second-generation transfer of her first business to her daughter.

During my travels this summer I discussed access to capital issues with several people aged 60 to 90+. They told me their ventures had to be successful so they could generate the income they needed to live. Many told me they had been doing fairly well financially in retirement until something unexpected happened to a spouse, family member, or themselves. Whether the unplanned issues were health related, a result of life changes such as divorce, or due to substantial loss of value in their underlying assets (e.g. due to the housing and financial crisis of 2008/2009), the pool of retirement savings was drastically reduced for many of these older entrepreneurs.

Despite these dire straits, the seniors I met were resilient, optimistic, and motivated to keep moving forward. Several of the age 50+ entrepreneurs invested some of the little money they did have to obtain U.S. patents and/or currently have patents pending for inventions. Many of them have extensive experience in their industries but worked mostly for companies during their careers. So a lot of them have little prior experience raising the capital required to launch and grow an entrepreneurial venture. Furthermore, many of them don’t have experience launching an entrepreneurial venture and growing it from nothing into something.

Many older entrepreneurs continue working full-time or part-time jobs while trying to launch their new business. Others, having no source of income from employers, resort to taking on debt or selling their home to fund it. One of the oldest entrepreneurs, with a patent pending on one of his inventions, in an industry in which he had held senior marketing executive roles for several decades, has a wife living in assisted living because she needs full-time medical care. He had to sell the moderately-priced condo they had planned to live in during their retirement years and move to a smaller apartment alone. He’s planning to use some of the proceeds remaining from the sale of their residence to fund his venture. While he and his wife have three adult children, none of them are able to contribute financially to help with their parents’ situation. What once seemed like an adequate retirement situation financially is now a rapidly dwindling nest egg that can sustain the couple only a few more years until it is completely depleted.

This man understands the importance of having succession plans and actual successors built into the business from...
day one, to provide investors with confidence that they will be paid even if the founder dies, and to ensure that his wife and estate receive some benefit from his invention should he die before she does. The need to care for his wife, the urgent need to generate income, his decades of experience launching new products for major corporations in the industry, and his drive for an accelerated time frame will hopefully make this a glowing success story – this senior entrepreneur is literally betting everything he has on it!

defined benefit plans provided for a financially feasible retirement.

Major U.S. employers, like the Ford Motor Company, ended up with billions of dollars in pension-related liabilities on their balance sheets. U.S. companies successfully lobbied that they were at a disadvantage when competing against nimbler domestic and international competitors, due to their massive pension liabilities. When corporations were allowed to change to defined contribution pension plans for employees, instead of defined

Many older entrepreneurs continue working full-time or part-time jobs while trying to launch their new business. Others, having no source of income from employers, resort to taking on debt or selling their home to fund it.

A Change in Direction is Needed

When corporations provided defined benefit pension plans for employees, corporations were rewarded with loyal employees who stayed with the companies for decades, rising through the management ranks, contributing to company profits, and eventually, after a 10-to-15-year Maintenance period at the top of their careers, passing the reins to the next generation. Retiring seniors could rely on the company to which they had dedicated their careers paying them a monthly pension for the rest of their lives. Corporate-funded benefit plans, employee retirement security greatly diminished across the United States.

While the impact of increased profits was immediately evident on companies’ balance sheets, the devastating impacts on individual Americans who have to work until they drop dead, due to severely inadequate retirement savings, and/or spend their final years living in poverty, are just starting to be felt. “More Baby Boomers Become Homeless” was the title of a front-page article in The Wall Street Journal predicting a mounting “Silver Tsunami” (Najmabadi, 2023). I pursued and completed my doctorate degree and

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American and Israeli Students’ Perceptions of African Emigration to Europe
Boah Kim and Tal Yaar-Waisel

Introduction

International collaborations in teaching between academic institutions are an opportunity to enrich teaching and learning processes, even if they are challenging. In the spring 2023 semester, the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) program at BSU initiated an opportunity for international collaboration with Oranim College of Education in Israel. The teaching topic was students’ perceptions about African emigration to European countries. Teaching and learning about immigration is imperative for students who are preparing to navigate a world intricately shaped by complex dynamics (Klein & Solem, 2008).

Teaching geopolitical issues involves exploring difficulties and barriers in various places worldwide (O’Reilly, 2019). The subject of immigration enables us to connect human values to geography lessons. The importance of teaching actual geography can be found in two main directions: the first is specific to the field of knowledge and discusses the importance of the geographic knowledge of the behaviour of an adult, while the second is a general assumption that discussing real disputes improves the critical thinking of students (Sziarto, McCarthy, & Padilla, 2014). With this significance in mind, Dr. Boah Kim in the Department of Geography at Bridgewater State University, USA, and Dr. Tal Yaar-Waisel at the Oranim College of Education, Israel, developed an international teaching collaboration which was able to enrich a current issue based on students’ perceptions about immigration. This collaboration aimed to investigate the effects of teaching this topic to students in two different countries, the United States and Israel. More significantly, this study forced students to address the ethical and moral dilemmas of global decision-making. Exploring the ethical dimensions of forced displacement, the responsibilities of nations in offering asylum, and the principles of international humanitarian law brought students to a critical examination of the role of power, justice, and human rights in shaping global affairs.

The Study

Students in the two institutions learned the same lesson on emigration from Africa to Europe. The following is a summary of answers from both student groups.

(USA) Students’ Responses

Most of the BSU students were surprised by the number of refugees and the reasons they were fleeing and felt sad and disturbed about this topic by the images and videos of refugees worldwide. BSU students’ answers highlighted economic issues and human rights, a description of balancing human rights concerns with domestic security, addressing the underlying causes of displacement, handling the economic impact of refugees, and integrating domestic political concerns with international commitments. Also, many said that the government needs to implement a plan of action to help the immigrants who arrive in the country. Students highlighted the difficulty of immigrants finding a place to live and work in a new country and the potential dangers involved. Also, students were worried about climate change, political instability, and conflict in immigrants’ homelands. An emigrant may also be hesitant about moving to other countries due to racism and economic inequality. Student answers noted the challenges of accessing basic necessities such as water, food, and education in different geographical regions. Indeed, individuals from Africa may face challenges in acquiring higher education and job prospects in different fields, leading to a dilemma in choosing where to live.

Students said that the mistreatment of migrants is a heartbreaking issue that needs to be addressed. Also, as a non-involved country, they must step in and help however possible, such as sending...
aid. Still, students were also worried about the non-involved country’s impact, such as illegal immigration and a structured economy. They also felt bad for those who had to leave their homes and find a better life for themselves. They highlighted the need to plan and create sustainable and livable communities that satisfy the needs of all people.

After the lecture, students said they believed human rights should be a political priority. They also believed there was no need for such aggressive force from the police. The solution to this problem is more complex than letting them into countries with more opportunities and preparing them for professions in creating and administrating cities and urban environments.

Students said that the involvement of strong (wealthy) countries depends on the situation and whether another country should intervene. Nevertheless, students think wealthy countries have a responsibility to help with humanitarian aid in less developed countries. However, if a wealthy country involves itself in a less developed country because it sees the opportunity to exploit them for resources if it were done correctly, it would work, but if not, it can cause detrimental economic effects for the people living there.

BSU (USA) students think the UN should take control of some situations, and organizations should ensure human rights are being taken care of. Indeed, students said this lecture emphasized the importance of planning for a sustainable future and not leaving anyone behind. Helping people should not be a debate. It is essential to be mindful of the people in these situations and think about ways to help, even from far away. Everyone should have a chance to live a good life.

Although using the term “dilemma,” as was mentioned in the question, many of the answers found it clear that a person should save his/her life; it is a survival issue—“He has no dilemma!”—even with the cost of risk and family breakup. The main issues Israelis expressed are leaving their families, risking life-threatening situations along the way, and choosing to face the unknown. Israeli students used extreme terms: “It is life-threatening,” “Desire to survive,” or “Existential questions.”

When asked to describe their dilemmas as non-involved country citizens in the situation they have learned today, students answered this question in two parallel circuits. On the one hand, they stressed Israel as a country built by immigrants, the history of the Jewish people, and the emigration of Jews from all over the world to the Land of Israel. Students said that the State of Israel was founded by persecuted people who experienced being refugees on many occasions: “I believe that our role is to be a beacon for the refugees who arrive at our door, the same way we would like to be treated.” A second circle is Israel, located on the physical border with Africa, dealing with the policy of not accepting African immigrants into its territory today. Students said, “It makes me understand what immigrants in our country feel.”

Description of feelings and thoughts was the most exciting part of the responses: frustration and pain. At the same time, students describe the ‘other side’ of their feelings, “the lesson gives proportions on our situation in our country.” Students in their teaching training describe their thoughts as future teachers: “I think that humanism education is required at all times and should be strengthened.” When asked what they think about the involvement of “strong” (wealthy) countries in non-developed countries, Israeli students understood it was not a right or wrong situation. The words complexity or dilemma arise a few times. Students understand this is a complex issue, as “powerful countries

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have the ability to help and save many lives, and I think they should do it,”; “The ideal way is that strong countries would support weak countries... but it seems that this is not the case in today’s reality; it seems that most countries care about their own interests.”

Discussion of dilemmas was significant in this learning, as reflected in the students’ comments.

Discussion

Although the students’ geographical location, origins, and culture varied, students utilized common terms and different ones to reflect their view of their study. When describing a person’s dilemmas from Spain or Italy, Americans raised Security while Israelis wrote Culture and Fear. It can be a result of the Israelis’ point of view of the African immigrants to the Land of Israel, accompanied by fear of losing the Jewish majority in the Jewish state: “On the one hand, we want to maintain a majority in the country and keep the Italian/Spanish culture; on the other hand, these are people we are obligated to provide a roof over their head.”

When commenting on the feelings of the immigrants, the Americans referred to Better Life, Change, and Home. Israelis also use the words Life and Family, which can be a direct consequence of Jewish immigration, which made life possible, while non-immigration meant death. For the third question about the students’ dilemmas as non-involved country citizens, BSU students used the words Involved, Need, and Help most, while Oranim students used Human the most. BSU students seem more intended to be a “third-party perception,” but Israelis are more involved. Similarities were found in the need for the Help of strong countries, as those who can solve this situation. Almost none describes a non-intervention policy. Understanding the complexity of this situation was similar for all students — “I think the issue of immigration is complex and I see myself on both sides of the fence.”

Students from both groups mentioned the importance of this lesson. From these results, this research confirmed that despite different countries, cultures, and backgrounds, they have similar opinions about immigration and refugees, besides differences evolving from a nation’s heritage. Lastly, many students said they feel lucky, such as “A great sense of gratitude that luck favors my family and me.”

The lecturers were impressed that students found themselves debating and thinking. The request from the students to respond, to take part, and to check their feelings of belonging motivated them to learn. Many students noted that the topic was interesting, especially because it was not easy!

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Dr. Wing-kai To, Assistant Provost for Global Engagement, and the COIL program at Bridgewater State University; and Prof. Mila Schwartz, head of the Research Authority at Oranim College of Education, who gave us the opportunity for this collaboration.

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Tal Yaar-Waisel is Senior Lecturer at Oranim College of Education, Israel.
Reflections From a Plantation Visit

Tina Mullone

Down a winding road, flanked by tall fields of sugar cane ready to be harvested and small modest structures, I finally reached a gate leading to the entranceway of the Whitney Museum and Plantation in Edgard, Louisiana. As I drove slowly down the gravel road, a few thoughts and emotions surfaced. I thought about my family’s stories about plantation life and the plantation system that ruled with a brutal tyranny to subordinate Black people during slavery. My emotions also wandered from sadness to melancholy, imagining all that had happened on this land in this place. I parked my car, turned off my phone, and breathed deeply before entering the museum. I was prepping myself to learn more about what could only be described as unimaginable cruelty.

My visit to this plantation was not an accident. In fact, my research interest in dance and how it is shaped by space and the Black female dancing body has led me to several plantations in the southeastern United States and parts of the Caribbean. What makes this plantation unique to my research is that it approaches its subject—slavery—from the perspective of the enslaved. Most plantations tell the story of the owners or their benefactors, not the rich textual narrative and stories of those who suffered. Many fictional accounts of plantation life romanticize it as a “genteel time,” “simpler period,” or stories detailing a “forbidden love” or point to “southern grandeur.” Such a romanticized view probably explains why these spaces are the backdrop for modern weddings or a must-visit destination for history-minded tourists. Although plantation websites frequently recognize slavery’s existence, they advertise it as an ideal place to host nuptials and other social gatherings. The story of the Whitney Plantation, however, abandons this view entirely. It tells us something very different.

The “Children’s Memorial” is one of several memorials at Whitney. Photo: Tina Mullone.
Seck, greets you in a somber voice and describes in vivid detail the site that stands before you. Listening to the tone of his voice, the cadence, and the emphasis on certain words comes across as a eulogy and testament to the lives lost in a system that knew no ethical, moral, or spiritual bounds.

As I walked slowly along the numbered path toward the next site, the main house (or “big house”) towered alongside several large oak trees. Across from the great house stood several slave quarters, sugar vats of all sizes, and five abandoned rusty mining carts sitting beside a shallow creek. Thinking about these structures and how they were arranged, in this space, in the heat of early June, made me wonder how anyone could endure these conditions, putting slavery in a physical, mental, and emotional context. As I continued through the property, listening to Dr. Seck and Amber Mitchell, Director of Education, on my headset, I learned more about perseverance and determination to survive, as exemplified by the German Coast Slave Revolt of 1811, and the various runaway attempts documented by the Federal Writers Project during the 1930s.

Perhaps the most fascinating part of my tour, and critical to my research, was evidence that the enslaved people would often dance, a view offering a unique counter-narrative to our
common historical understanding. Not only was dance critical to building mental and emotional strength, but it was also a means of recalling past spiritual traditions, reaffirming an identity separate from a life of bondage, and creating community, which is especially important given the widespread practices of breaking apart families. Taken together, dance was critical to survival at a time when so many persons were forcibly stripped of their culture, language, spirituality, and even name.

I was also drawn to Whitney because the arrangement of the building structures on the property still stands as it did 200-plus years ago. Dance scholars note that dance involves not only the body (performer), energy (the flow, weight, and dynamic quality of movement), time (rhythm, tempo, meter), but most importantly, space (where the movement occurs). In fact, space is an essential dance element, affecting the meaning and execution of the dancer’s movement. Because dance can occur in any space, my research has focused on how the physical dimensions of plantations could have impacted the choices of not only where (e.g. church, home, courtyards), but also what was performed and how. The main purpose of my research is to understand how space shapes African dance when performed by the Black female dancing body. In looking at spaces where dances existed among African Americans, such
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As in abandoned buildings or land that no one wanted, my research has ultimately led me to examine plantations and slave quarters.

The Whitney Plantation offers visitors a rare chance to move through and around various intact slave dwellings, allowing me, the researcher, to speculate about how this space might have affected the female Black body and movement that originated there. My research finds that while dancing occurred frequently among people enslaved at the Whitney, the specific details of those dances are unknown. Sterling Stuckey’s influential book, *Slave Culture*, however, allows us to infer that many traditional African dances may have remained somewhat intact but were significantly reshaped due to limits on slaves to move freely in space. For example, the Ring Shout, a ritual dance performed in a circle and practiced by the enslaved, was transformed when slaves began attending four-walled churches, lined with pews that were anchored to the floor. What replaced it is the more common shouting in the aisles, in pews, and risers in the back of the church. These findings suggest that plantations (and slave dwellings), as a space, may have had differing effects on African dance and the Black female dancing body.

The tour concludes on a more spiritual plane. Visitors enter the final building of the property, Antioch Baptist Church, where roughly a dozen statues of school-age children are arranged in the vestibule, down the church aisles, and in the pews. I stood there reflecting, with only the sounds of the gentle breeze, on the innocence of their lives, their faces staring back at me. I offered my prayers and then thought deeply about what I could do in my capacity to create change. Dance is a way to acknowledge cultural identity, bring spirituality into a community and honor the spirits that have left this earth. I hope my creative and scholarly research in dance will honor the fullness of their lives, lest their names be forgotten again.

*Children of Whitney (by Woodrow Nash) inside Antioch Baptist Church. Photo: Tina Mullone.*

*Children of Whitney (by Woodrow Nash) inside Antioch Baptist Church. Photo: Tina Mullone.*
I committed my doctoral studies to understanding the issue of burnout, the current solution landscape, and opportunities for innovation in prevention and intervention. I interviewed numerous social work professionals, ranging from those in direct service to executive leaders. I found that people often confuse other professional issues, including compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma, with professional burnout. This confusion is significant, because being empowered with information to differentiate the cause of one’s symptoms is crucial to addressing it effectively. These knowledge gaps made clear to me that there is a need in the solution landscape for formal education in burnout.

Innovation through Education

To learn how professional burnout is addressed in educational settings, I researched college-level course offerings. I found no courses focused solely on professional burnout. The courses that appeared in my query focus on student burnout. Professional burnout, however, emphasizes many catalysts that differ from challenges faced while in school, despite some areas of overlap (i.e., overwork). Considering the gap in formal burnout education, I decided to design an online, asynchronous elective course called Burnout in Social Work Practice. Since developing this new course, I have facilitated three sections, which have engaged 62 bachelor’s and master’s-level students. Through this instructional experience, I have had several insights regarding the significance of the content. First, let us discuss a little more about the issue of burnout, since it is the foundation of said insights.

Defining Burnout

Burnout is a significant occupational hazard for today’s workforce. A recent study found that 8 out of 10 full-time employees report feeling burned out at least sometimes (Gallup’s Perspective, 2020). The occurrence of burnout has become so prevalent that in 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) named it an occupational phenomenon as part of the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) (WHO, 2019). According to WHO, burnout results from chronic workplace stressors that go unmanaged over time. Burnout comprises three dimensions, including:

1. Exhaustion - feeling a depletion of one’s energy.
2. Cynicism - distancing oneself mentally from one’s job or feeling negative toward one’s job.
3. Inefficacy - having a reduced sense of effectiveness in one’s role.

Burnout is widespread and poses a significant risk to today’s workforce, including our students as they enter a variety of professional endeavors. The consequences of burnout include threats to one’s physical, psychological, and occupational well-being. Workers experiencing burnout are 2.6 times more likely to be job-seeking and 63 percent more likely to utilize sick leave due to chronic stress (Wigert and Agrewal, 2018).

Burnout Matters!
Prevention through Education

Wendy Knight

Introduction

It’s likely you’re familiar with the term Burnout. Many people have come to understand the unrelenting weight of burnout through personal experience, which develops over time from chronic workplace stressors. In my social work experience, it has become common to witness passionate social workers overwhelmed by burnout. These professionals care deeply for the well-being of others, and may lack a framework or the support to understand their own burnout until it feels insurmountable.

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Burnout in Caretaking Professions

Mission-driven professionals can feel deeply connected to their work, often from a personal passion. This passion can wane over time due to instilled norms within organizations to work excessive hours and manage high caseloads. Workplace pressures can catalyze uncontrolled stress and cynicism towards a job that was once a source of enjoyment and satisfaction. A masters-level student shared the following reflection about workplace norms:

*The common mindset in the workplace is that if you love what you do, it should not feel like work. This mindset is not productive as it contributes to the idea that if you love what you do, you need to dedicate your life to it. Working long hours has become well-respected and glorified in today’s culture. I have always hearing how exhausted everyone is. These kinds of conversations have become normalized in the workplace. Although burnout can affect anyone in the workforce, it is of the highest concern for caretaking professionals, such as social workers, physicians, nurses, and teachers. Social workers, who represent the largest behavioral health profession in the United States with 715,600 active positions (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), are likely to experience higher work-associated stress and burnout than non-caretaking professionals. Such stress occurs due to excessive caseloads and responsibilities, complex job demands, low compensation, and a lack of supervisory support. The Intervention Landscape

Because burnout manifests in individual workers, its solution landscape often emphasizes person-directed interventions, which employ self-care, cognitive-behavioral, and resiliency-building approaches. These interventions may bring many short-term benefits to workers, but they will never cure burnout. An increasing number of organizations offer wellness programs to address burnout in staff, but these programs often prioritize person-directed approaches alone rather than organization-directed approaches, which are more effective in the long term. While well intentioned, in the absence of other workplace supports and changes, person-directed interventions put the onus on employees to bear the burden for their experience rather than focusing on systemic causes that continue to fuel the problem.

Organization-directed interventions incorporate structural changes, increase employee communication, and develop the morale of collaboration and job control. The importance of organization-directed intervention is captured well in an interview with burnout research pioneer Christina Maslach. In the interview, Maslach asked the interviewer to imagine beautiful canaries in a coal mine. She encouraged the interviewer to think about the colorful, singing birds flying deep into the cave. Then, Maslach asked the interviewer to imagine the birds arising from the coal mine, ill and covered in soot. Maslach asked, “Can you imagine us asking why the canaries made themselves sick? No because the answer would be obvious: the coal mine is making the birds sick” (Schulte, 2019). This story is an excellent illustration for students seeking to understand the role organizational systems have on the well-being of their employees.

Course Design

The Burnout in Social Work Practice course aims to empower students with knowledge and resources to mitigate professional burnout in the future. It is offered to bachelor’s and master’s-level students. I use a variety of teaching tools including podcasts, TED Talks, case studies, assessments, current events, peer-reviewed articles, and various readings. I create original short-form educational videos with images, information, music, and voiced-over dialogue for every module. Each week, students complete asynchronous modules with a clear theme, engaging in structured activities, discussion, and peer feedback along with their major assignments.

Teaching Insights

Students begin the course with a general sense of what burnout is, but throughout the course, their knowledge matures to understand the complexity of this occupational phenomenon. The course content highlights how burnout is often viewed as an individual problem because it manifests behaviorally and emotionally in workers. As a result, several modules examine how burnout runs deeper than the individual and develops from organizational systems. Most students initially express a limited understanding of professional and organizational interventions for burnout mitigation.

Bachelor’s and master’s-level students most commonly identify person-directed interventions, including self-care, as the primary method to address burnout and well-being. Students typically report using self-care in their personal lives but were less likely to identify professional self-care strategies. A student highlights their perspective on self-care by sharing the following:

*I think that often people only think self-care is getting a massage or working out or eating healthy, that they forget or are unaware of the other examples that can make a huge difference in their day-to-day lives.*

Another student shared:

*Self-care can also include more practical tasks like meal planning, organizing your space, and establishing limits with others.*
Person-directed interventions, such as mindfulness and walks, are undoubtedly helpful toward one’s well-being; although they will not cure burnout, it is essential to engage in these practices to cope in the short term. This course includes a module on self-care and an assignment on person-directed intervention, which consists of a personal self-care assessment, a virtual vision board, and a written paper incorporating literature on the topic. Students reflect on the strengths and limitations of this approach and leave the course with strategies and a plan to support their well-being.

Importantly, during this course, students learn to reflect upon how decisions and approaches taken by organizational leaders impact workplaces, both operationally and environmentally. Coursework focuses on how leaders often have some control to affect employee burnout. Students complete course modules that include a leadership assessment, a case study, and discussions. In such discussions, students examine how the perceived leadership abilities of a supervisor influence burnout and job satisfaction. One of the course assignments requires students to interview a caretaking professional in direct practice and then complete a paper. In this written assignment, students reflect on major themes and relate this back to the literature. A common theme is the lack of quality and consistent supervision for professionals. Students can reflect on the challenges that poor supervision has for workers as it relates to burnout. Overall, the interview assignment assists students in applying the knowledge they learn throughout the semester to a current professional context.

The responsibility to manage burnout cannot rest solely on workers’ shoulders as this will never remedy systemic causes for its development. Organizational systems and leaders hold the key to change, but this is a complex, multi-faceted undertaking. This course, through a variety of research-informed content, encourages students to learn about the benefits of a combined approach, including person-directed and organization-directed interventions, because this combination has shown the most significant benefit to workers, the organization at large, and in delivering quality services to client systems.

8 out of 10 full-time employees feel burned out

This was a great course that allowed for a foundation of understanding of burnout and how we, as social workers, can navigate the profession moving forward. This course was helpful in understanding leadership and how, as a leader, there is some responsibility in the burnout culture of the workplace. I will take what I have learned and apply it to my internship this coming year and my career beyond. I will be conscious of my surroundings and what I can actively change. I will also be more conscious moving forward about whether my workplace is doing all it can to foster a non-burnout environment. I think learning to say no and not feeling guilty about taking time for myself are ways I will move forward.

These shared insights highlight the importance and impact of burnout education, which transcends all majors. Although this course will continue to develop over time, students have already taught me that focusing on burnout in the classroom has impacted their level of knowledge, awareness, and resources. I hope the lessons learned in this course will stay with my students, helping them be fierce self-advocates for well-being throughout their careers. Perhaps, through sharing the lessons learned in this course, it will inspire us as a learning community to consider how we engage our students in intentional conversations about burnout.

Closing Thoughts

I designed this course intending to bring innovation to burnout prevention through formal education. There is an immense opportunity to teach our students about the prevalent challenges of burnout that plague so much of today’s workforce. After facilitating multiple sections of this course, I have learned that students benefit from having a deeper understanding of the catalysts for burnout development and how they can be empowered in prevention and intervention efforts. Based on student feedback, it is evident that the Burnout in Social Work Practice course has resonated with them and expanded their knowledge and reflection on this critical issue. A student captured their takeaways from this course as follows:

Wendy Knight is Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work.
Being That Guy runs in my family—my biochemist sister who studied DNA repair would, during every episode of CSI, pipe in with comments along the lines of “That machine doesn’t work that fast!” or “That’s not what a mass spectrometer looks like!” I freaking love being That Guy. (Also, That Guy has been banned from the room when my wife is watching Bridgerton.) So naturally, as a historian who teaches the history of the atomic bomb, has written a book about scientists and nuclear weapons, and has read a dozen books on the physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, That Guy was licking his chops when he sat down to watch Christopher Nolan’s film Oppenheimer.

As anticipated, the film abounded with That Guy moments. Some inaccuracies were blatant: Niels Bohr wasn’t with Patrick Blackett when he gave Oppenheimer career advice as the film shows, but rather Ernst Rutherford. (I know, right?!) When confronted with Edward Teller’s concern that an atomic explosion could ignite the atmosphere and destroy the planet, Oppenheimer didn’t run off to consult with Einstein, which would have been a huge security violation. Rather, he called Arthur Holly Compton, at that moment the scientific head of U.S. atomic bomb research. (Speaking of Teller, why was he so freaking sweaty in the film? Teller had many unpleasant characteristics but I have never seen excessive sweating mentioned as one of them.) Perhaps the largest question of accuracy occurs in the opening moments of the film when Oppenheimer attempts to murder Blackett by lacing an apple with cyanide. Did this actually happen? Well…maybe, sort of. Apparently, Oppenheimer told a friend he had done it, and Cambridge University felt the incident deserved punishment. But at the same time the incident is cloaked in

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One of the joys of being a historian is that I get to be That Guy. You know That Guy: he ruins every movie and TV show by pointing out all the technical and historical inaccuracies. That Guy has, obviously, a deserved sense of superiority because he or she can discern reality from Hollywood fiction.

And Now I Am Become That Guy, Reviewer of Films

Paul Rubinson
under three hours. The film also assaulted my ears. I assume the sporadically overwhelming noise was supposed to make me uncomfortable, to evoke a visceral response to Oppenheimer’s turmoil, blah blah blah, but I just felt like the principal in Back to the Future when the Pinheads auditioned for the Battle of the Bands: “I’m afraid you’re just too darn loud.”

As Oppenheimer went on (and on and on), however, I surprised myself by picking on the inaccuracies less—not because there were fewer of them but because they turned out to be the most interesting parts. Almost everything in the film was faithful in spirit and detail to the book on which the film was based: Bird and Sherwin’s American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer. And in the end, that was what I liked least about the film: that it seemed like a sped-up reading of the book with images. (Apparently my students do this—they get the audio version of an assigned book and listen to it at double speed. Wonderful. Maybe the bomb should’ve ignited the atmosphere.)

The scenes I found most moving were those in which Oppenheimer talked with Einstein, even though almost all of these were imagined. (Einstein did suggest to Oppenheimer that he simply move to a different country rather than endure the humiliating security clearance hearing).

Thinking about the movie now, I find that I admire the imagined “poisoned apple” scene because it took a stand on one of the unanswered questions about Oppenheimer’s life. You see, Oppenheimer, his biographers have found, is hard to figure out. One aptly-named biography is titled Oppenheimer: Portrait of an Enigma, declaring him not a tragic figure, as Bird and Sherwin’s title does, but a confusing one. He was a tremendous flake who shocked everyone he knew by becoming an amazingly effective lab administrator at Los Alamos. He thought the hydrogen bomb was morally questionable but had no qualms about relying on many thousands of atomic bombs for national security. He inspired tremendous loyalty and affection among his peers and students, and yet he willingly named names (former students included) during the Red Scare. He possessed a genius that probably merited a Nobel Prize for his work on black holes but he had no better explanation for the Chevalier incident than “I was an idiot.” What made him tick? What were his values? We still don’t know.

Now, to declare Oppenheimer ultimately unknowable is a perfectly solid conclusion for a biographer or historian, but it’s a bit of a copout for

enough uncertainty that Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin, authors of the biography on which the film is based, refer to the “poisoned apple” incident with quotation marks of uncertainty. (Other biographers give the story even less credence.) Bird and Sherwin conclude that he probably did poison Blackett’s apple, but only with the intent of making him sick.

I had other complaints unrelated to historical accuracy. While Cillian Murphy did a fine job as Oppenheimer, it seemed like Nolan’s instructions to the other actors who portrayed scientists were simply Pick a funny accent and ad-lib some science-y sounding things. Also, speak really fast—we’ve gotta keep this thing

Nagasaki, Japan, under atomic bomb attack on 9 August 1945. Image: National Archives.
a filmmaker, in my opinion. Artists, unlike historians, aren’t bound by an adherence to reality—they can imagine who a historical figure really was, even as historians throw up their hands in frustration. Sara Stridsberg, in her novel Valerie, did this with Valerie Solanas, no less enigmatic and fascinating than Oppenheimer. It’s also been done with Oppenheimer himself: the novelist Lydia Millet’s O Pure and Radiant Heart imagines that the atomic explosion at the Trinity test site magically transports Oppenheimer forward in time to 2003 and her Oppenheimer, outraged at the price of a newspaper (35¢!?) and disgusted by women’s fashion (no corsets!?), has stayed with me longer than any biographical portrayal.

Nolan’s film, in contrast, is curiously selective in its use of imagination. While Nolan imagines that Oppenheimer definitely tried to kill his professor with a poisoned apple, at other times he hedges. Consider the scene where Oppenheimer’s friend Haakon Chevalier tells him about a man named Eltenton who wants to share the atomic bomb with the Soviet Union. Historians are somewhat unsure whether Chevalier was actively encouraging Oppenheimer to work with Eltenton or warning him about the presence of spies, and I remember that the scene was handled deftly and ambiguously. But why equivocate on one unknown but not the other? (If anything, that scene had perhaps more ambiguity than it deserved, as Chevalier probably was encouraging Oppenheimer to aid Eltenton.)

There were other instances where I thought Nolan, a creative filmmaker by any assessment, could have used more of his creative license. In 1960, Oppenheimer, the so-called father of the atomic bomb, visited Japan, the country on which his bombs were used—now there is a moment that demands the imagination of great artists. We know precious little about his time in Tokyo, and biographers don’t dwell on it. Bird and Sherwin tell us only that he told Japanese reporters “I do not regret that I had something to do with the technical success of the atomic bomb. It isn’t that I don’t feel bad; it is that I don’t feel worse tonight than I did last night.” I’d hoped Nolan would explore this moment and try to tell us what history cannot. Michael Frayn’s play Copenhagen did exactly this by imagining several versions of the famous but poorly-documented 1941 conversation between Bohr and Werner Heisenberg. But Nolan focused on the well-documented story of Lewis Strauss and his revenge against Oppenheimer. To me this was a fairly cliched story about the insular community of
... Oppenheimer, his biographers have found, is hard to figure out. One aptly-named biography is titled *Oppenheimer: Portrait of an Enigma*, declaring him not a tragic figure, as Bird and Sherwin’s title does, but a confusing one.

Washington—political scheming, petty resentments, and ultimate comeuppance—when it could have been a story of the greater world. As a historian, then, I love the film’s (mostly) faithful adherence to a book by great historians. (Sherwin’s *Gambling with Armageddon* is one of the best books I’ve ever read.) But as someone who doesn’t totally understand Oppenheimer, I feel I’m no further along in that quest.

A final question about *Oppenheimer*: why now? (Remember, I’m a historian, and therefore every work of popular culture emerges when it does for a contextual reason.) For historians of the atomic age, the Oppenheimer craze peaked in 2008, the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth. While I am grateful for this public interest in a topic I study, I’m curious why this story is of such interest fifteen years later? Is there a prevalent fear of nuclear war in society today? Our lasting impression from the film is that whatever else Oppenheimer was, he was haunted by the nuclear weapons he helped create. Are today’s movie-going audiences similarly haunted? The theater in which I watched the film had dozens of youngish people who seemed to enjoy the film. Did that fear resonate with them? What message did they derive from it?

During the Cold War, it was nearly impossible to avoid the subject of The Bomb. American popular culture, from films to video games to books and music, was saturated with images of nuclear war, and this omnipresence reflected a general concern about nuclear weapons among a substantial segment of the population. But what is the meaning of nuclear weapons in works of culture long after the Cold War’s end? Does a fear of nuclear weapons still exist? I have, a few times, in an attempt to win the prize for worst first-class-day-icebreaker ever, asked my students to name their greatest fear. They invariably mention sharks and spiders, and never nuclear weapons. (My answer: ChatGPT.) At the very end of the film we see inside Oppenheimer’s head, where he imagines the world burning in a nuclear conflagration. But the potential cataclysm that he so feared has not yet came to pass. In fact, the world is on fire—from Canada to Maui in this summer alone—but this disaster stems from climate change, not nuclear war. So why this story and why now? That’s a question not even *That Guy* can answer, and he thinks he knows everything.
INNOVATIVE TEACHING

International Exchanges Through Living Lab

Inkyoung Kim

This article introduces pedagogical experiences with the combination of the Living Lab and virtual international exchanges. The Living Lab is a social innovation mechanism, an experiential teaching model, emphasizing “learning by doing.” Through the process of co-creation, residents collaborate with experts, local governments, corporations, and activists to solve their local problems. Various participants design and implement Living Lab experiments to produce and test a prototype or a solution. I explored the Living Lab for one of my courses in spring 2023 through the virtual international collaboration and exchange with Dr. Sangbum Shin at the Mirae campus of Yonsei University, one of BSU’s partner universities in South Korea.

Living Lab in the Classroom

I embedded the Living Lab project in the course assignments of POLI 306/SUST 399 Global Environmental Controversies, a newly developed course supported by the Sustainability Program’s New Course Development Grant in spring 2022. To introduce the idea of the Living Lab project, the class discussed four project examples conducted by Yonsei students in the past few years, while focusing on the relevance to students’ life in Bridgewater. In the fourth week of the semester, students presented their individual problem narrative to identify issues, discuss the community partner’s needs, and imagine a way that the student can address their needs.

After the presentations, students were grouped based on their interests and the relevance to their topics.

International Exchanges through Living Lab

In the last week of spring 2023, each group presented their Living Lab project to the class. The instructor recorded their presentations and shared the recording with Dr. Shin so that his students at Yonsei University could watch the presentations. Dr. Shin did the same thing. After watching the presentations, students wrote a one-page feedback memo about one of the projects conducted by the partner university to discuss similarities and differences in terms of local problems and various local contexts including political, economic, social, and cultural factors. The process of international exchanges helped students understand their own community more deeply. Furthermore, their expected virtual audience helped students keep their energy for their projects to the end of the semester.

Two Living Lab Projects in Bridgewater

The first group focused on overconsumption and textile waste issues. This group aimed to start a thrift store on campus to disrupt toxic fast fashion trends and to assist at-risk students who may not be able to afford market-priced necessities and amenities. This group designed a student-run pop-up store on campus every month to sell secondhand clothing highlighting sustainability, affordability, and proximity of their business. After interviewing several stakeholders on campus, students found that the pop-up store idea would resolve a space issue on campus because securing a permanent space on campus...
Both groups of students cherished their opportunities to develop their ideas on sustainability into actionable projects, as the whole process of the competition urged students to think harder and research more rigorously to persuade their judges.

was one of the biggest challenges for this project.

The other group focused on food waste issues. It sought to start a consulting company to make a greener Bridgewater through promoting recycling, composting, and supporting gardens. The students explored how to get disposable food waste out of the local trash and how to get people utilizing compost bins to reduce the amount of waste. This group designed a consulting organization to create a municipal system that organizes and distributes compost bins to southeastern Massachusetts through collaborating with local town governments and the Massachusetts Department of Health. It also intended to utilize the compost made from food waste for gardens or other purposes in the town.

Excitement and Lessons Learned

Students were eager to participate in the Living Lab model and contribute to solving local environmental problems through this course. Both groups participated in the annual Bear B.I.D. (Bright Ideas Developed) business plan competition, held by the College of Business. Only the first group, as one of the top five proposals, was invited to advance to the final presentation round. Even though this group did not win the competition, students were grateful to have a chance to utilize their Living Lab idea to develop a business proposal.

Both groups of students cherished their opportunities to develop their ideas on sustainability into actionable projects, as the whole process of the competition urged students to think harder and research more rigorously to persuade their judges. However, students found that they should have collaborated more with local stakeholders. Their participation in the competition led their projects into the spirit of how to win the market competition rather than how to work together with community members.

The biggest challenge for the instructor was how to guide students to build community partnership. The instructor participated in a workshop on “Community-Engaged Teaching and Scholarship” at BSU in May 2023 and learned about resources and support that BSU offers for civic engagement and will use that support system to guide students towards building community partnership with local business and local governments.
Pathways to the Middle East and North Africa at Bridgewater State University: The First Federal Grant for BSU’s Global Programs

Madhusudana N. Rao and Jabbar Al-Obaidi

A Welcome Surprise

It was August 6, 2020. The grip of the Covid-19 pandemic was still unabated. Amidst this grim scenario, an unexpected email from ed.gov bore the exhilarating congratulatory note: “Your grant has been selected for funding.” It was the least-expected email during the unprecedented challenges imposed by Covid-19. The grant would fund us $375,268 for two years, the result of a 40-page proposal and an array of appendices, completed by Dr. Madhu Rao, Director of the Center for the Middle East Studies (CMES), Dr. Jabbar Al-Obaidi, Academic Director for Global Engagement, and the late Dr. Laura McAlinden, Chair and Professor of Philosophy.

Rejuvenation of the Program

Our endeavor, Pathways to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) at BSU, marked a significant milestone as the first federal grant (2020-2022) for one of BSU’s global programs: CMES. This visionary project, sponsored by the Title VI Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Languages (UISFL), a division of the Department of Education, was designed to intertwine various activities underpinning the four crucial pillars of education essential for the internationalization of area studies at BSU: 1) Curriculum Enhancement, 2) Student Success, 3) Faculty Development, and 4) Community Outreach. Our region of focus covers 22 countries, nearly 400 million people, and the second largest religion of the world, Islam. This initiative has contributed to fortifying the connections between BSU and MENA through international integration and foreign language learning.

The intrinsic strategies of the project design are captured in Diagram 1. The Department of Education funding prepared a pathway to support curriculum development, student success, faculty development, and external outreach activities. The strategies to achieve the objectives of the MENA project have been successful and inspiring, as is illustrated in the following examples:

Objective 1. CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENT: The CMES was transformed into the MENA Studies Program, while new core courses were introduced to the MENA minor, including an introductory and capstone course, a study abroad course, and a course on modern Hebrew language.

Objective 2. STUDENT SUCCESS: This grant program resulted in the establishment of the MENA Studies Minor, attracting 13 students from diverse interdisciplinary areas. Travel to foreign countries was facilitated through student stipends.

December 2023
Objective 4. COMMUNITY OUTREACH: Several initiatives were undertaken to enhance community awareness of MENA society and culture, particularly a workshop on women’s entrepreneurship in the Arab World, a summer institute for K-12 teachers, seminars, and panel discussions on campus during the semester. Talks and discussions during MENA awareness week each semester were the norm. BSU solidified partnerships with Universities in Jordan, Morocco, and Israel. For example, our team adopted the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) model with Al-Qasemi Academic College in Israel. Further collaborations with the University of Bahrain, the

Diagram 1: Pathways to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) at Bridgewater State University.

BSU Study Abroad group with Dr. Mohammed Redah Qadar, the Vice President of Academic Affairs of the University of Bahrain, Manama, Bahrain. From left: Josh Lovering, Anna Sarr, Sarah Calis, Ahmad Somakia, Mohamed Ali Chadi, Dr. Mohammed Redah Qadar, Nolan Carrie, Cassandra DeMotte, Kaidin Afienko, Caitlin Pestana. January 15, 2023. Photo: Madhu Rao.

Students visited Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain. The student-run Jewish-Muslim Association has promoted interfaith dialogue.

Objective 3. FACULTY DEVELOPMENT: Faculty opportunities included research stipends to publish on topics related to the MENA region, organizing and leading foreign field study tours, paper presentations at conferences, designing and delivering new MENA courses, and extending consulting services on topics related to MENA and Islam. Faculty involvement and participation in these activities increased their international knowledge and expertise, which benefitted students and the regional community.
University of Sharjah in the UAE, and Qatar Community College are being pursued.

Dissemination: Sustaining the Momentum

The International Conference on Education (ICE) is already well established and will continue providing a venue for educators, scientists, researchers, teachers, and professionals worldwide to connect and explore issues affecting US relations with the MENA region. Research papers presented at recent (ICE) meetings were peer-reviewed and published in a book, The Role of Educators as Agents and Conveyors for Positive Change in Global Education.

One chapter, written by Dr. Rao, Dr. Al-Obaidi, and Dr. Wanchunzi Yu, is entirely devoted to the achievement of BSU’s first UISFL grant. It is noteworthy that the 2022 study abroad trip, involving 11 students, culminated in participating at the ICE conference in Fez, Morocco, while 5 students from the MENA Minor Program showcased their undergraduate research papers at the 2023 ICE conference in Jordan. The details of this conference were also publicized in the leading newspaper of the region, The Jordan Times.

The overall goal of the Pathways to MENA project is to bring about fundamental changes in the outlook of our students from local to global, a change in the research agenda and focus of faculty scholarship from domestic to international, and a change in the perception of our local community from regional to international in their appreciation of diversity, geography, people, cultures, and religions. The grant acted as a catalyst for positive change, encouraging deeper global understanding among students, faculty, and the community. In summary, the journey of the Pathways to MENA project contributed to the university’s overreaching goal of faculty-student scholarship, curriculum changes, and regional engagement. The legacy of the MENA program remains, with the promise of further expansion and development.

Acknowledgments: We extend profound gratitude to the US Department of Education for providing this opportunity for the Title VI – UISFL programs award, 2020–2023, CFDA # 84.016A.

Madhu Rao is Director of the MENA Studies Program and Professor in the Department of Geography.

Jabbar Al-Obaidi is Academic Director for International Student Recruitment and Global Partnerships and Professor in the Department of Communication Studies.
Equity-Focused Civic Learning Across Disciplines

Jo Hoffman

Equity-focused educational practices that foster culturally-responsive teaching and learning environments hold potential for students entering civic life. In summer 2018, I began my support for civic learning at the K-12 level in earnest as the senior associate dean in the College of Education and Health Sciences (CEHS). With a team of writers from civic-focused organizations across the Commonwealth, we developed micro-credentials focused on civic learning with topics including, but not limited to, Massachusetts city and town governments, local civic action projects, and managing difficult discussions.

Transitioning to full-time faculty in 2020 and the subsequent appointment of Endowed Professor for Civic Education and Engagement in 2021, I shifted my attention from K-12 to civic learning that benefits college students and the community. Studies in civic learning support in higher education find it is common for civics to be viewed as a separate subject area or even something extra-curricular. I researched civic mindedness and responsibility and found writers like Sylvia Hurtado explaining, “college teaching based on civic learning goals can model community and democratic principles to enhance students’ civic skills and dispositions for a diverse and changing world…Intentional, engaging pedagogy for coursework and campus programming is the primary way to develop the different dimensions of civic learning in college students” (Hurtado 2019, 95, 99).

Prompted by supportive literature for curriculum-embedded strategies, I invited faculty from across degree programs to include civic learning in at least one required course with the aim of building capacity for social awareness, incorporating diverse perspectives, empathy, co-constructing equitable and just solutions, disrupting and resisting inequities, a sense of duty, concern for others, and a feeling of agency. The initiative had these civic learning goals: 1) incorporate intentional and specific course outcome(s) with the expectation that students will identify civic dispositions; and 2) incorporate specific criteria for students to identify and reflect on the development of civic dispositions and the impact for future learning and action in an associated assignment and its assessment.
Eight faculty from seven different programs across three colleges joined me and worked to develop rubrics and scoring tools so that students could demonstrate that they met the civic learning criteria. In order to explore student perceptions and analyze evidence of educational impact, a survey was developed to gather data for evidence of students’ growth and development regarding civic dispositions, including civic-mindedness and civic responsibility. Ten survey items addressed student perceptions and areas of growth we hoped to target. The survey was conducted at the end of the fall 2022 semester across all courses identified by the civics initiative faculty participants. The data from the responses received (n=59) indicated that incorporating civic learning expectations in required coursework across disciplines may benefit student growth in understanding civic responsibility and possibly the value of civic action for their field of study and future communities.

In spring 2023, faculty presented our results at two conferences: the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement conference, co-sponsored annually by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Each of the sessions was well attended and we heard from participants whose roles ranged from staff in student affairs, to directors of centers for community engagement, and some faculty. Overwhelmingly, they, too, are looking for strategies for spreading civic learning throughout degree programs. As a result, we have made connections with institutions across the country and shared with them the goals and processes for our initiative.

Learning about students’ growth and development regarding civic dispositions, including civic-mindedness, civic responsibility, social empathy, and collaborative efforts toward the greater good, is incredibly important. Fostering civic dispositions speaks to students’ readiness to contribute to their communities for the betterment of society. As we endeavor to advance the work we do for social justice, racial justice, and civic engagement in the pursuit of equity, we answer the call from the Department of Higher Education in Massachusetts as they describe how civic learning fits with their Equity Agenda, “…which calls for equity and racial justice in all elements of the undergraduate experience. Through equitable access to civic learning, all students—including students of color who have previously experienced barriers to their success—will develop the knowledge and skills that they need for informed and effective participation in civic and democratic life” (https://www.mass.edu/strategic/civic.asp).

“Through equitable access to civic learning, all students—including students of color who have previously experienced barriers to their success—will develop the knowledge and skills that they need for informed and effective participation in civic and democratic life.”

Jo Hoffman is Associate Professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education and Bruce and Patricia Bartlett Endowed Professor of Civic Education and Engagement.
WAC REPORT

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) 2023 Summer Institute

Jonathan Shirland, John Mulrooney (WAC Coordinators), and Sean McPherson (Outgoing Coordinator)

From August 21 to August 24, 18 BSU professors representing 13 departments gathered on campus for the 2023 Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Summer Institute. The institute is the flagship event for WAC and a much-valued professional development opportunity for faculty. Diverse writing projects are developed during the institute through small working groups facilitated by the WAC coordinators; participants have time every day to write a significant section of their project, which is then shared within the working group for peer review. The opportunity to receive feedback and perspectives from fellow academics who are often from outside one’s own discipline is invariably of great benefit as the projects develop towards publication; just as valuable is the sense of community, accountability, and collegiality the week generates among faculty from across our colleges. This report therefore publicizes the range of scholarly endeavors pursued by BSU faculty to a wider audience.

WAC as a pedagogical movement began in the late 1970s with roots both in the United States and the United Kingdom and is widely considered one of the longest standing curricula reform movements in higher education. Its aim is to help foster writing pedagogies across the entire university curriculum as well as to provide opportunities for faculty development and support for writing. The WAC Program at BSU was initiated in 2007 by Michelle Cox and has grown through the stewardship of subsequent coordinators from various departments. Two guiding WAC principles are that writing remains a vital tool for thinking and learning and that writing is a form of social behavior that creates academic communities. The 2023 Summer Institute generated compelling verification of both of these beliefs. We thank everyone who participated and look forward to working with more faculty from across the BSU community in the coming academic year.

2023 WAC Summer Institute Projects:

Halina Adams (English)
Olivia and Sarah: Resurrecting Black Women’s Anger
The anonymously penned novel, The Woman of Colour (1808), tells the story of Olivia Fairfield, the daughter of a plantation owner and enslaved woman, who travels to England to marry her cousin in order to secure her inheritance. My project examines Olivia’s anger at the racism and pro-slavery attitudes she encounters in Britain through the joint contexts of the objectification of women like the Khokhoi captive Sarah Baartman and white female abolitionists’ use of anger in their poetry and objects associated with the material culture of anti-slavery movements.

Jessica Birthsel (Communication Studies)
“What in ‘The Matrix’ hell?” The possibilities and problematics of contemporary animated films that take young audiences ‘into’ the internet
This qualitative textual analysis explores four recent animated films in which characters travel into the internet, exploring how these digital spaces are portrayed (including the anthropomorphization of digital concepts such as computer viruses and algorithms). The project asks: how do fictionalized media texts communicate digital concepts to an audience of children, and what are the implications of these representations for children’s digital media literacy and attitudes toward internet culture more broadly?

Christine Brandon (Geological Sciences)
Nesting site selection by Northern Diamondback Terrapins
For this project, I am preparing a paper to submit to a conservation biology journal at the end of December.
The paper describes the results of my research into the environmental factors that Northern Diamondback Terrapins (Malaclemys terrapin terrapin) use to select favorable locations to lay their eggs.

Adam Brieske-Ulenski (Elementary and Early Childhood Education)

The Clinical Literacy Coaching Framework
I am working on an eight-chapter book about a framework I developed for literacy coaching in K-12 public schools. During the WAC writing institute, I was able to focus on writing chapter two of my book proposal and get feedback about how to make it more interactive. As a result, the chapter better reflects a higher level of engagement among my potential readers than before.

Todd Harris (Management)

Jackie Robinson and the Integration of Major League Baseball: A Contemporary Analysis of a Historical Organizational Change
On April 15th, 1947, Brooklyn Dodgers’ first-baseman Jackie Robinson became the first Black Major League Baseball player in the modern era. My project examines the case of Jackie Robinson and the integration of the Brooklyn Dodgers’ baseball team as an example of successful organizational change. This analysis looks to better understand why this organizational change occurred and how barriers to the change were overcome.

James Hayes-Bohanan (Geography)

Amazon Deforestation in Lula’s Encore
This project examines the environmental geography of deforestation in the Brazilian portion of the Amazon rain forest in the context of dramatic political currents at the regional, national, and global scales. During the institute, I completed my presentation for an upcoming geography conference and made significant progress on a draft for publication in a geographic journal.

Inkyoung Kim (Political Science)

Book Review on Global Environmental Politics: The Transformative Role of Emerging Economies (2022) by Johannes Urpelainen.
This book review introduces an important book that expands the horizon of global environmental politics shedding light on the growing roles of emerging economies. It highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s theoretical and empirical analysis on the relationship between international political economy and global environmental politics.

Hannarae Lee (Criminal Justice)

State-Sponsored Financial Theft between 2015 and 2020: Their Ramification and Impact on Cryptocurrency.
This study stems from my previous work evaluating ransomware, bitcoin prices, and terrorism cases. This time, I focused on state-sponsored ransomware attacks and their ramifications and impact on cryptocurrency.

Boriana Marintcheva (Biological Sciences)

Lessons from HIV
The summer WAC institute provided the gift of time and collegial feedback that allowed me to write an article for Bridgewater Review. My project tracks
the advances in understanding HIV biology that allowed our society to establish a clear path to HIV eradication even though we do not have a HIV cure or vaccine.

**Vignon Oussa**  
*(Mathematics)*

My project involves writing an article that showcases the application of a powerful tool in mathematics known as frame theory. This tool solves concrete problems in representing and preserving data collected on physical objects. The paper explores a solution to the following problem: Given data on a surface (such as the intensity of light on the surface of a telescope’s lens, data related to conductivity at every point inside a crystal, or even the temperature at various locations on the surface of a hot stove) that is modeled as a function over a manifold, how can this data be encoded in a manner that is robust against erasure?

**Donald Padgett**  
*(Biological Sciences)*

*An Angler’s Guide to Lake Vegetation*  

I am writing a book-length field guide to assist recreational fishers in identifying the plants they may encounter in ponds and lakes. The book will serve as a resource to better identify the plants and also use the plants to their benefit in better understanding the role plants have in fish biology, lake health, and ultimately increased fishing success.

**James Pearson**  
*(Philosophy)*

*A Series of Envatted Brains*  

The skeptic describes an outlandish possibility – that an evil demon is systematically deceiving us about what the world is really like, or that we are brains trapped in a vat being manipulated by an advanced scientist - and challenges the philosopher to explain how we can know their scenario is false. At the institute, I distinguished and articulated a range of envatted brain cases to demonstrate that, while some are philosophically intractable, others may be answered by appealing to semantic externalism – the view that the content of our thoughts and utterances is fixed, in part, by what causes us to think and say what we do.

**Joseph Schwab**  
*(Psychology)*

*Flourishing in a binary world: The creation of transgender alternative narratives*  

This psychological research study investigates how American transgender emerging adults have experienced gender throughout their lives. The results from their life-story interviews indicate they have experienced marginalization from the gender binary culture in which they live, and yet they have learned to创造性地 subvert these gender binary expectations to be able to flourish and thrive.

**Shelagh Smith**  
*(English)*

Set in a New England lighthouse, *MEREN* is a supernatural coming-of-age novel exploring a young woman’s sexuality amidst the mystery of her mother’s death. As she explores the circumstances of her mother’s passing, Meren comes to realize the death of her mother is actually tied to the centuries-old folklore of mermaids, selkies, and sirens.
BOOK REVIEW


José Lara

Over the last ten years, numerous images of women, men, and unaccompanied children from Central America, detained at the US-Mexico border or placed in holding cells, have been disseminated widely in different media types. Unfortunately, many of those images were accompanied by misinformation and disinformation, which has intensified xenophobic attitudes, increased the number of false and racist narratives about immigrant populations taking jobs from US “White” Anglo Americans or “unlawfully” benefiting from US resources and social services, and has led to inhumane and malignant policies and laws, primarily supported by the reactionary right (Chomsky 2007). Two essential pieces of information have seldom emerged during discussions surrounding the increase of Central Americans migrating to the United States since the 1980s. The first is that the violence, political instability, and economic hardships these individuals are escaping from stem, in large part, from the long history of unauthorized US intervention and economic imperialism in that region (Chomsky 2012; Galeano and Belfrage 1997). The second is that these migrants can and should not be reduced to statistics or political pawns but should be treated with dignity and humanity, as every individual has their own migration story.

José Javier Zamora is one of the few Central American migrants whose first-hand account we are fortunate to have in print. Zamora is a Salvadoran writer and activist who became widely known with his book of poems, *Unaccompanied* (2017), where he described the challenges of living in the United States as an immigrant, the longing for his war-torn country of El Salvador, and some of the horrors he endured on his journey to the United States. Nevertheless, it is in Zamora’s coming-of-age narrative, *Solito: A Memoir* (2022), that we are privy to an array of episodic memories and intimate details of his nine-week migration from the rural town of San Luis La Herradura in El Salvador through Guatemala, México, and the US-México border until reuniting with his parents in the early summer of 1999. *Solito*, the male-gendered diminutive term for alone, is where Zamora expresses his truth of migrating as an unaccompanied nine-year-old child to “La USA,” as he often referred to the United States in his book.

As an immigrant from Central America myself, I was extremely eager to read this memoir. I can honestly say that I found myself immersed in Zamora’s story and impressed with his meticulous use of rich figurative language that elicited numerous emotions and reactions in me. However, I had a few reservations about writing a review and remaining as neutral as possible, especially since I had read a few commentaries that questioned the accuracy of Zamora’s memories, critiqued the repetitions and gaps in his account, and criticized his code-switching between English and Spanish and inclusion of Spanish words, phrases, and sentences.
in a book primarily written in English. But the reality is that I cannot remain neutral, nor do I agree with those criticisms. Memory is a complex process, even more so when it is tied to trauma such as the one experienced by Zamora. According to Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, an expert in trauma and memory, the precision and retention of our memories largely depend on how intense, meaningful, or threatening we perceive them to be. In addition, traumatic experiences are imprinted in one not as coherent, linear, or complete episodes but rather as fragmented parts (van der Kolk 2014, 177-78). Consequently, as indicated above, the criticisms are unwarranted, and the events narrated in Solito are the byproduct of Zamora’s sensory memory; it is how he experienced the world during those nine weeks. Zamora’s use of his native Spanish tongue, colloquial expressions, and references to Latin American telenovelas, musical groups, and singers makes his memoir more personal, unique, and reflective of his bilingual and bicultural identity. Many of those cultural references are part of my identity and very likely an aspect of the upbringing of other Latin American and Latinx people of our generation.

Zamora’s book includes numerous episodes of danger, fear, solitude, survival, and the stark contrast between expectation and reality. Chepito, or Zamora’s nine-year-old voice, describes how he and members of his makeshift “little fake family” (Patricia, Carla, Chino, and to a lesser extent, Chele) had to endure the harsh climate and environment of the coastal waters, mountains, and Sonoran Desert that left their bodies emotionally and physically scarred. He also emphasizes the fear he experienced when they were held at gunpoint by corrupt local Mexican policemen who robbed them of all their money; slid under or jumped over barbed-wired fences; and got caught and incarcerated by US patrol agents on their first attempt at crossing the US–Mexico border. The fear of dying and never again seeing his loved ones is also expressed by Zamora when he prays to Cadejo – a spirit guide in the shape of a dog that originates from Central American folklore – for protection. Zamora silently uttered, “Cadejo, cadejito. I don’t want to die” (110). In addition, Zamora explains how he quickly had to adapt to being alone once his grandfather left him in Guatemala under the care of a coyote (colloquial term for smuggler) and, in essence, mature so that he could survive and not be considered a nuisance or burden by others. Zamora mentions how he learned to clean up after himself, wash his underpants, remain silent, and overcome his fear of using a toilet. Another significant aspect of Zamora’s growth was discovering that prejudice existed among the Latin American community and was only exacerbated by the politics of immigration. Zamora learned about the challenges that came with being an undocumented immigrant, as locals often used the disparaging terms “mochos” (wetbacks), “ilegales” (illegals), and “pinches migrantes” (a vulgar expression for effing migrants) when referring to them.

Indeed, his voyage was filled with hardship and gut-wrenching moments, but it also included instances of tenderness, laughter, and unity. Zamora vividly described how truly happy they felt when they reached the beach and seaport area of Acapulco and how he still remembers the smell and taste of the “oil and salt, sea and lime” and “potato chip consistency” of the fried fish they all enjoyed together (150). Also, the tacos he ate for the first time, and that according to him, were “the best thing ever… the best food in México” (180). Zamora also makes it a point to represent numerous humorous episodes, including those in which he smoked for the first time and “felt older,” like one of the guys (118); he and the others would practice or make attempts at speaking like Mexicans so that they could blend in; and those where they all laughed at their pronunciation of “Mexican” and English curse words. The compassion and warmth among the members of Zamora’s second family are palpable throughout most of the book–too many to list here, but I will say that whenever they felt alone, tired, or required any assistance, they were there for each other. That is why it was hard for Zamora (and me) to see them leave for Virginia when they finally crossed the US–Mexico border. It was the last time Zamora ever saw them.

Solito is a complex and rich immigration narrative from the perspective of a precocious nine-year-old who shares with his readers many of his memories and experiences of his journey from El Salvador to “el norte” (north). It is a memoir that one can approach in different ways. Still, it is best to let yourself be guided by Chepito’s voice so that you can walk in his shoes and realize that “every immigrant who has crossed, who has tried to, who is crossing right now, and who will keep trying” (381) is a human being worthy of compassion and respect and not a “threat” to this country. It is a one-of-a-kind “American” immigrant story.
Call for Submissions

Bridgewater Review invites submissions from full- and part-time faculty members and librarians, and others in the BSU community. Bridgewater Review is published twice yearly by the faculty and librarians of Bridgewater State University. It provides a forum for campus-wide conversations pertaining to research, teaching, and creative expression, as well as a showcase for faculty art. Articles in all disciplines and genres are welcome and encouraged, including scholarship about research interests and trends, scholarship about teaching and learning, creative writing, and short reviews of other publications.

Articles should be 1700-2200 words in length, though shorter articles will also be considered. Creative writing can be submitted at lengths briefer than 2200 words. Those wishing to submit are asked to consult the Bridgewater Review submission guidelines (available from the Editor).

In keeping with the founding spirit of our faculty magazine, the editors are equally interested in unfinished pieces of writing that may need assistance with revision and in polished pieces that are publication-ready. All submissions will be reviewed, but there is no guarantee that submitted work will be published.

Bridgewater Review also welcomes Letters to the Editor with the hope that BR may become a locus for community discussion at Bridgewater State University.

Submissions should be sent electronically to:
Sarah Wiggins
Editor, Bridgewater Review
bridgewater.review@bridgew.edu

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Vygotsky in the Zone

Pam Myette

Ah Vygotsky, transformer of understanding how children learn, the James Dean, the Chadwick Boseman of 1930s Russian psychology. Your scorching intellect extinguished too soon. Yet you created an unprecedented, unparalleled socio-cultural theory in ten short years.

You dared to counter Piaget’s view that young children talk only about themselves, realizing they were practicing external thinking, soon to be their rich “inner speech”—your seismic insight. Leading Flavell to know the self-monitoring system he named metacognition.

How masterfully you unearthed that missing piece of language acquisition. Expanding the brilliant work of behaviorists, cognitivists, and nativists, you realized fully developed language required children’s social interactions.

Riffing off the power of these social interactions, you observed how learning happens most effectively. You recognized how children absorbed concepts from adults and each other. You coined the term “zone of proximal development” to describe this phenomenon.

Almost a century later, after many translations, your theories thrive. Now we watch young children interact, problem solve, and voice play by plays. We teach children to use their inner speech, their monitoring voice, to reflect on their own thinking. We group children of different abilities to learn in perfect synchronicity. Ah Vygotsky, in your brief thirty years you generated monumental learning theories. You drew us into your zone, to be enriched and ever changed by you.

Pam Myette is Assistant Professor in the Department of Special Education.