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## **Community Gardening Activities in Higher Education: Planting Seeds of Inspiration**

**AUGUST JOHN HOFFMAN**  
Metropolitan State University

“Everything I have ever planted dies” is a phrase I hear several times a semester in my classes. I don’t teach biology, horticulture, nor any type of agricultural course work. The course I actually teach is psychology and for the last 15 years I have incorporated community service gardening activities in courses ranging from the community college to graduate levels of psychology. Students are typically confused at the beginning of the semester why a psychology professor would initially offer community gardening activities in a psychology course, so I explain to them the first day of classes that community gardening activities (and volunteer activities in general) actually hold several psychological benefits. Gardening activities have been linked to numerous physical and psychological benefits, but perhaps the single most common benefit that I hear is: “I just *feel* better after I dig my hands into the soil and begin to plant things that make the campus more beautiful . . . It’s good to know that I have contributed to making the campus a better place for people to enjoy.”

The gardening activities that have been incorporated into my psychology course curricula occurred quite by chance over 10 years ago. I was a recently hired psychology professor at Compton Community College, a historically Black community college that is dedicated to serving underrepresented students within the southeast portion of Los Angeles, California. Compton College has been described as an “educational oasis of hope” that currently serves thousands of students who are first-generation college students facing numerous challenges. The majority of students typically work part-time jobs (some of them several different part-time positions) and are parents raising a family. One student of mine several years ago was a single parent of three children, worked three part-time positions, and had to use three different bus systems in order just to get to campus. Other students were recently paroled and were trying to start over in their lives by learning a new skill at Compton College. Clearly, the level of determination commonly seen among Compton College students is rarely matched.

Fresh out of graduate school from UCLA, I was determined to somehow make a positive influence in the lives of my students through psychology course work. Little did I know at the time that I would manage to positively influence my students lives, not just directly in the classroom (which is what I would have initially expected), but also through activities *outside* of the classroom. Compton College was established as an institution of higher learning in 1924 and has historically served disadvantaged students by providing them with educational resources that would help them to gain entry to four year colleges and universities. The campus is located in southeast Los Angeles county, which has one of the highest crime rates in the United States (Compton, currently has the highest homicide rate in any city within the United States). There are few public resources (i.e., parks or libraries) that are available for either students or community residents. Supermarkets are rarely found in this area – typically just gas stations and liquor stores on corners. There are several homes with bars on windows, or abandoned homes with foreclosure notices pinned on peeling front doors. The campus itself is not immune to these

environmental blights – the 90 acre campus had plenty of open space on the campus but was strewn with litter and graffiti.

*Gardening on Campus*

I still remember very clearly the first day when I discovered the unique relationship between gardening activities and education. It was a Tuesday (April 2002) afternoon and I had just completed my introductory psychology (Psychology 100) course. Despite my efforts to make the lecture course relevant and interesting (professors today are not only expected to be knowledgeable in our areas but also “entertainers” in the subject format) for the students in class, the droopy eyelids and the silence that fell from the questions I directed to the class were indicators that class was over for the day. After the class ended I decided to go back to my office (really a secluded room that was 15’ X 15”) and do something different. I had brought a flat of unused flowers from my house to plant near my office, and I figured today was as good as any other day to do some planting. The faculty offices and student classrooms are actually long corridors with grassy rectangles interspaced between each row of classrooms, as seen below.



**Compton Community College Garden**

The facilities department (what was left of it after cutbacks to the budget) had abandoned these corridors and now what was left were clusters of weeds growing over the sidewalks. I began first to pull and clear the weeds and then had planned on planting some of the flowers I had brought to cheer up the area near my office. Two of my students from my earlier class came up to me and asked me what I was doing. I indicated that I was doing something that had always made me feel good after a tough day, and that was getting outside and doing gardening work. Immediately the two students put down their books and began pulling weeds with me. Their assistance was unsolicited, and I could tell that they were beginning to enjoy the transformation from weeds to dirt. We then used shovels that I had provided to cultivate and prepare the rich soil that was hidden under the weeds and litter that was strewn about. After clearing the weeds

and preparing the soil, the two students (Jamal and Latrice) asked “what’s next?” with enthusiasm.

### *Mixing Psychology with Flowers*

I provided Latrice and Jamal with seedlings that I had brought along with some of the starter flowers, such as Dianthus and sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*), and mixed herbs (rosemary and basil). Despite their smudged faces, they clearly looked satisfied. It was about this time that something struck me as quite remarkable as an educator. While working interdependently, the two students discussed the information that was previously addressed in the classroom: “It was Freud who argued that the id is the ‘child’ of the personality, not Erikson.” I noted that what actually was happening *outside* the classroom was something that should have been happening *inside* the classroom. Latrice and Jamal were grappling with theories relative to the psychoanalytic theory, classical conditioning theory as described by Pavlov, and finally Bandura’s concepts of observational learning. Ironically, more intellectual stimulation had occurred in 30 minutes of weeding and planting flowers than an hour and half of lecture time within the classroom. As an educator I was intrigued by what was happening between my students, their work and the topic of their discussion. Clearly, something was stimulating and encouraging my students to engage in scholarly psychological theory – I just needed to find out how to keep the dialogue continuing.

The following semester I applied for a small grant at California State University Northridge (CSUN), a local school where I also taught psychology as an adjunct faculty member. I was awarded a small grant (under \$500.00) with the stipulation that the funding would be directed towards a service learning project: “The Compton College Community Gardening Program” was now established.

### *Implementation of Community Gardening*

Once I discovered the inherent value of gardening activities and how students enjoyed participating in the service learning activities, I needed to create a formalized program where students could work collaboratively with each other on a more structured basis. Students who were enrolled in any of my psychology classes (i.e., abnormal psychology, introductory psychology, or human sexuality) were provided with the option of completing community service work activities (3 hours a week for a total of 16 weeks) or complete a 10 page APA format paper addressing any topic in psychology. Needless to say, over 90% of the students chose to participate in the community service work activity.

Another important component of the community gardening program was in addressing some of the subjective experiences of their community service gardening activities. What specifically was rewarding to them about community gardening? Were there any unique challenges that they encountered during the gardening activities? Did they feel better able to interact and communicate with other students from different ethnic backgrounds as a result of the gardening experiences? Finally, the student participants were asked how likely they would continue in participating in future community service work activities based on their initial experiences in the Compton College gardening program.

An initial hypothesis of mine was that due to the limited opportunities that communities now provide for people to engage in service work activities, many community members and students simply do not have many civic engagement opportunities. If students were provided with an interactive community service activity, such as developing a community garden on their own campus, my colleagues and I felt that they would be more likely to engage in future community service work activities and discover the value of these activities with their classmates. The value and importance of community service work activities and civic engagement has been well documented (Putnam, 2000). When community residents are provided with opportunities to interact and complete projects designed to improve their community, civic pride increases as well as a “psychological sense of community” (Sarason, 1974).

Over 90% of the students who participated in the community gardening activities “somewhat” or “strongly agreed” with the statement: “I am more likely to participate in future community service work activities.” Additionally, our results indicated that students who were provided with community service work gardening activities were significantly more likely to participate in future campus volunteer activities (Hoffman, Wallach & Morales-Knight, 2007).

#### *Benefits of Community Gardening, Perceptions of “Connectedness” and “Stereotype Threat”*

Over the course of several years, I explored the relationship between participation in community service work activities with student perceptions of “connectedness” to their campus, and community at large. When students participate in a campus project such as community gardening, they develop a greater sense of connectedness to the campus and a sense of pride and ownership in their work (Hoffman, Wallach, & Sanchez, 2010). Saturday mornings would often show family members including children and community members in their efforts to plant vegetables and flowers. Students from different ethnic backgrounds would grow specific vegetables to use in ethnic dishes (i.e., collard greens and turnips were very popular among African American students whereas peppers and tomatoes were popular among the Hispanic students) and they would often exchange recipes with each other. We also explored the academic benefits of community service work activities. One area included academic self-efficacy, or the inherent belief that one may achieve his or her own academic goals. Given the numerous challenges of successful academic performance among underrepresented students, I felt that any community service project that could support student belief systems in their ability to complete their educational endeavors at Compton College was very important.

One increasingly important issue that educators see in the academic performance among underrepresented groups is “stereotype threat.” Claude Steele (1977) has identified a phenomenon in social psychology where members of underrepresented groups in some situations underperform in academic areas as a means of maintaining a negative stereotype. Stereotype threat explains why some African American students initially excel in sports and athletics and avoid the sciences, despite showing significant aptitudes and strengths in these areas. Volunteer work and civic engagement are becoming increasingly more popular activities in not only improving the quality of living among community members, but perhaps more importantly as methods of improving the well-being and self-esteem among a broad range of community members (Brown, Hoyer, & Nicholson, 2012; Alaimo, 2010).

Our results indicated that when students participated in a community service activity project (i.e., a campus gardening program) on a structured basis, their belief system and academic self-efficacy (and academic performance in the class) significantly improved. Improvement was based on a comparison among students who were not participating in any community service work activity. Participants ( $n = 38$ ) were given weekly psychology assignments over a 16 week semester and academic results were compared with students who did not participate in the gardening program. Student participants were interviewed after the community gardening program, and 31 out of the 38 respondents (82%) indicated that they felt “more confident about beginning new [academic] projects . . . and can complete them more successfully” (Hoffman, Thomson & Cruz, 1994). The majority of students (over 68%) enrolled in the psychology course improved in their academic work (i.e., examination scores, group project scores, etc.). Those students who participated in the Compton College community gardening program improved their academic performance in introductory psychology approximately 5-10 points on examination scores and group projects.

The participants indicated that the gardening experience provided them with opportunities to relate their academic experiences more directly with each other and to use each other as resources in preparation for their academic assignments. Additionally, all participants who actually completed the community gardening program ranked academically in the top 25% of the class, and 60% of the participants received the grade of “A” in the introductory psychology course.

#### *California State University Northridge Students Serving as Academic Mentors*

Many of the students who were enrolled in my CSU Northridge (CSUN) classes also wanted to participate in the community gardening activities at Compton College. I began to organize the CSUN students with the Compton College students on weekend gardening activities. The CSUN students served as student mentors with the Compton College students, providing supervision not only in terms of planting flowers and cultivating mulch, but more importantly served as models for the community college students. The CSUN mentors inspired the Compton College students to continue their work at the community college level and to apply to universities and four year colleges. Many of the CSUN mentors provided the Compton College students with applications, and even provided tours to their university to students who needed help in the application process. The community service gardening program was successful because it helped students to discover their own academic potential with the support and direction of their peers and mentors.

#### *Concluding Notes*

If anything this process has taught me that the role of effective teaching (regardless of the discipline) often occurs outside the walls of the classroom. Effective teaching means connecting with students in a variety of ways to make the content more meaningful for them. At Compton College, this meant showing students what a vacant lot on campus could be transformed into. I think also that when students see their instructors working side by side with them, they feel more comfortable in discussing important issues relative to course material. When students see their instructors working with them on a community improvement project, it tells them of the



instructor's commitment not only to successful education, but to community growth and improvement as well.

More importantly, the students who participated in the community gardening activity learned new skills that helped shape their confidence in not only completing their course work at Compton College, but also in transferring to the four year college and university systems. Teaching students theories in psychology became significantly more effective (and meaningful) when they were afforded opportunities to volunteer within their own community outside of the classroom. Today many students are spending more time on Facebook and social media sites than actual ("real time") projects. It is disconcerting to me that the majority of undergraduate students today are missing out on "real time" community involvement and improvement projects. Communities and educators need today more than ever to remain committed to providing interpersonal community improvement projects for our students and citizens. Community service gardening is just one example of helping students to connect theory with practice in the community.



**Community Garden Workers: Gardening is Fun!**



**Campus Community Garden**

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## The Challenge to Teaching Humanities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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University of Louisville

For centuries, people have pondered philosophical questions, wondered at the breadth and variety of human creation, and sought to understand the languages, literature and traditions of world cultures. The pursuit of humanities studies requires deep thoughtfulness and analytical thinking. With modern technology, young students may regard this contemplative pace as fitting for the upstairs libraries of Downton Abbey. The engagement essential for the study of humanities is slipping away. There is little time to think deeply amidst the cacophony of cell phones, text messages, iPhones, Apps, iPads, iPods and computers generating a constant barrage of reminders, information, and communications.

This is not to say technology is bad. Computers have opened up access to information at a scope and breadth which was unimaginable ten years ago. People in remote corners of the world are now connected and able to access an education and information otherwise not available to them. Students have access to unlimited information within seconds. Global business demands quick thinking and the ability to collect and compile information rapidly. These are requisite skills for modern life. However, there is a downside. In this paper, I will discuss the ways in which intensive computer use can threaten our ability to concentrate, think deeply, and enjoy the arts and humanities in traditional ways; and how our redesigned “thinking patterns” may undermine the basic tenets of the ways our museums and musical organizations present their collections and performances. I will begin with a couple of examples, look at the current research examining this change in thinking pattern, and suggest ways teaching may have to adapt to engage the next generation.

Judy Woodruff interviewed Yukio Lippit, the curator of the “Colorful Realm” exhibit of Japanese scrolls by Ito Jakuchu at the National Gallery of Art. She noted that today life has a much faster pace than when the scrolls were painted in the mid 1700s and asked if this makes it hard for people to appreciate these complex works. Yukio Lippit replied: “I think it does. I think these are works that are so detailed, so well-crafted, that they really are predicated upon very long periods of looking and contemplation in a quiet milieu. So, one of the things I hope this exhibition does is, it really allows people to slow down their metabolism for even a short period of time during the day and really just take in the artworks and the kinds of cultural significance of the artworks before having to return to their fast-paced lives.”<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan Weiss, the founder of Oswaldsmill Audio, invented a new sound system which produces incredibly subtle musical tones. He notes, however, few people are interested in it because of their overexposure to sound coming from so many sources: “People listen to music constantly, and because they do, they have lost the ability to listen.”<sup>2</sup> Will the ability to look, listen and contemplate be lost to future generations? Can the next generation enjoy a full symphonic piece after listening to short iTunes? Does easy access to Internet art galleries replace

<sup>1</sup> Judy Woodruff’s interview with Yukio Lippit on NPR, April 9, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Sunday Times Magazine*, “Prick Up Your Ears,” April 1, 2012.

a visit to a museum to observe the real works of art? With constant perusal of websites, text messages and tweets, will the next generation have the ability to read books and later be able to analyze what they have read? Will the next generation of students not only take the time—but be *able* to think in this manner?

Technology has changed the way we access and process information. Current research indicates the intensive use of computers rewires the brain to think differently. Michael Rich, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and Executive Director of the Center on Media and Child Health in Boston, discusses the problems children have sustaining attention: “Their brains are rewarded not for staying on task but for jumping to the next thing . . . The worry is we’re raising a generation of kids in front of screens whose brains are going to be wired differently.”<sup>3</sup> Dr. Gary Small further offers: “Spending hours in front of the computer can atrophy the brain’s neural circuitry that controls recognition and interpretation of nonverbal communication.”<sup>4</sup>

The 2012 *Pew Internet and Computer Life Project* and Director of Elon University’s *Imagining the Internet*, Jana Quitney Anderson, calls the 20’s age group Generation AO—“always on.” In the Pew survey, she noted concern from many of the business participants: “some said they are already witnessing deficiencies in young people’s abilities to focus their attention, be patient and think deeply . . . This generation will be good at connecting, collaborating, and working quickly . . . they (the survey participants) also expect (the young people’s) characteristics to include . . . a lack of patience and deep thinking ability.”<sup>5</sup> Herein lays a major challenge for teaching humanities.

Dr. Deanna Kuhn, Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University, notes the emphasis on standardized testing has not only reduced students’ involvement with inquiry based learning, but has resulted in a lack of teachers’ understanding and knowledge of developing this skill in their students. She states: “There has been a rush to design inquiry software. Yet educators have found that the capabilities of the software that has been developed far outstrips the ability of the students to engage it. What deserves the closest attention . . . is not the teaching tool . . . but the nature of the capabilities students bring to it. Skills of inquiry are not intuitively given and cannot be assumed to be in place among students of any age, nor do they develop ‘naturally.’”<sup>6</sup>

The brain has infinite variability—it can learn, retain, and regain analytical and deep thinking skills. If these are not learned in the pre-college school system, however, they will need to be taught at the college level. Humanities studies can develop this type of thinking, and help the brain exercise its full range of thought processing capabilities. To do this, humanities teachers may need to first captivate their students with vibrant, fast-paced technological presentations, and then wean them to slow down their thinking processes through exercises which challenge the students to concentrate for longer periods of time, observe details and subtleties, and think more deeply about the meanings and revelations of the works they are

<sup>3</sup> Richtel, Matt, “Growing Up Digital, Wired for Distraction,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Small, Gary, MD and Vorgan, Gig, *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*, Harper, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center, “Internet and American Life Project,” with Elon University, February 29, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Shaughnessey, Michael E., “An Interview with Dianna Kuhn,” *Educational Psychology Review*, Volume 16, No. 3, September 2004.

studying. This may require faculty to develop teaching skills to address “remedial skill development” in their classes in addition to the subject matter.

*The Wall Street Journal* conducted a survey of college recruiters for business and found more than half identified the need for improvement in a “combination of critical thinking, problem solving skills, and an ability to think independently.”<sup>7</sup> Some feel the use of search engines and social networking has undermined students’ ability to conduct research. A number of universities have begun to address this problem. Harvard University physics professor Eric Mazur shortened his lectures to allow time for problem solving among his students. MIT, UC San Francisco and the National Center for Academic Transformation have adopted and promoted the redesign of large lecture courses to allow time for small group problem solving and training in guided learning labs.

In his report, “Learning, Technology and Education Reform in the Knowledge Age,”<sup>8</sup> Bernard Trilling presents a comparison of the skills needed for the Industrial Age contrasted with those required for our current Knowledge Age. It describes a transformation of the role of teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

***Industrial Age***

*Teacher-as-Director*  
*Teacher-as-Knowledge Source*  
*Curriculum-directed Learning*  
*Time-slotted, Rigidly Scheduled Learning*  
*Primarily Fact-based*  
*Theoretical, Abstract*  
*Principles & Surveys*  
*Drill & Practice*  
*Competitive*  
*Classroom-focused*  
*Prescribed Results*  
*Conform to Norm*  
*Computers-as-Subject of Study*  
*Static Media Presentations*  
*Classroom-bounded Communication*  
*Test-assessed by Norms*  
*Rules & Procedures*

***Knowledge Age***

*Teacher-as-Facilitator, Guide, Consultant*  
*Teacher-as-Co-learner*  
*Student-directed Learning*  
*Open, Flexible, On-demand Learning*  
*Primarily Project- & Problem-based*  
*Real-world, Concrete*  
*Actions & Reflections*  
*Inquiry & Design*  
*Collaborative*  
*Community-focused*  
*Open-ended Results*  
*Creative Diversity*  
*Computers-as-Tool for all Learning*  
*Dynamic Multimedia Interactions*  
*Worldwide-unbounded Communication*  
*Performance-assessed by Experts, Mentors, Peers & Self*  
*Discovery & Invention*

**Industrial Age vs. Knowledge Age Learning Practice<sup>9</sup>**

How can we incorporate these changes in the teaching of humanities? As many museums have found, multiple interactive technologies are needed to hold the attention of today’s visitors. Many students are not interested in quiet observation in a museum gallery or listening to a

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, Marissa, “Schools, Businesses Focus on Critical Thinking,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Bernie Trilling and Paul Hood, Published in the May/June Edition of *Educational Technology*, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

symphony in a concert hall. They prefer informal presentations in non-traditional settings such as cafes, storefronts and parks where multiple activities happen at one time. Traditional Power Point presentations of lecture notes will not provide the stimulation and variety of active images needed to hold students' interest. The incorporation of graphics, cartoons, moving images, color, and sound are needed to duplicate the kinds of visual brain activity students receive when multi-tasking on their smart phones and iPads. This will take more sophisticated computer skills, and more time and ingenuity on the part of the instructor. Classes will need to include a variety of activities: a short lecture with engaging visual graphics and sound, group discussion, an individual problem solving activity, and oral reports. Lectures must actively engage the students, and incorporate critical thinking and public speaking skill development in addition to presenting subject material.

Recently, I taught an undergraduate class comparing Kandinsky's art with Schoenberg's music. After examining the evolution of Kandinsky's work which reflected what he heard in Schoenberg's developing modern music, I played five recordings from very different periods of music and asked the students to "draw what they heard" with crayons. Only two students differentiated between the pieces. The rest drew similar forms and used the same colors for each piece. They heard no difference between Debussy's "La Mer" and Schoenberg's atonal "Three Piano Pieces." The music was a blur of sound to them. They were not used to listening closely to music or creating visual images of the sound. I wondered if any of the students had ever listened to and thought about Disney's "Fantasia." Could they make the connections between the sound and images developed for that piece?

To develop the students' ability to differentiate between compositions and to visually and verbally express these differences requires more developed and focused observation and listening skills. My lecture was for an art history class, and most of the students had no background in music. They needed guidance to find the connections and differences between each musical and art pairing. I realized they could not "hear" five different pieces in sequence. To assist them with their "close reading" of these pieces, I should present one paired piece of music and art at a time and explore with them the ways the artist interpreted the music. Although they may not have the knowledge of different compositional techniques, they can begin to develop an overall impression of each work, identify one or two factors which "stand out," and verbally express their thoughts about it. So many students limit their communications to text messages and quick responses that it will take practice for them to learn this "time consuming" communication skill. By creating smaller "bits" on which to concentrate, and helping them develop the skills to hear and see in new ways, I can guide them to make connections between sound, color and form. Harking back to my earlier reference to Jonathan Weiss' observations, people have lost their ability to observe subtlety. To learn this skill, students will need to learn how to slow down and focus their attention. Humanities is the vehicle through which they can learn to expand their range of thinking styles.

This may become more difficult as younger students come up the pipeline. LuAnn Hayes, an early childhood music specialist at Kentucky Country Day School, told me about her experience introducing her first grade students to Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf." She explained to them how musical instruments can represent a character, and played the introduction where the sound of each instrument is introduced as a character in the story. She

then turned down the lights and told them the story was beginning. Immediately, all the children turned to the movie screen in the corner. When no pictures appeared, they began to fidget and talk to each other. She told them there was no movie; the pictures were “in their heads” and they had to sit quietly to “see” the characters in their minds as they listened. They were not able to maintain attention. For the next class, LuAnn redesigned this musical exercise. Students sat on the floor separated from each other and were instructed to find their “private listening spot” to help them focus. This time they understood they were only going to listen, not watch a movie. In their own quiet spaces, they were able to concentrate on the music and hear the story through the sound. Without the listening skills developed by hearing stories told or read to them by their parents, children’s ability to “see a story in their mind” has in many cases been replaced with the automatic pictures delivered through TV and DVDs. If children do not learn this early in life, will teachers in higher education be able to develop this creative skill?

Video game and app makers are beginning to see a market for teaching humanities. In the *Sunday New York Times Book Review* J.D. Biersdorfer comments in his “Applied Reading” section on the new apps available for children. He noted that many “pile on visual stimulation and techno-bells-and-whistles at the expense of story telling”<sup>10</sup> but gave a positive review of the new app of Dr. Seuss’ “Cat in the Hat” entitled “500 Hats.” He felt the sound effects in the app did not detract from but enhanced the story telling. From my perspective, however, this addition may not be as attractive as it seems, since it takes away the opportunity for children to “see and hear” the story in their minds. The connection between the word, its implied sound, and the child’s opportunity to fantasize a sound is lost. Fantasy and creativity in the mind is replaced by the app’s soundtrack. The potential for the child to develop an internal repertoire of sounds and use them in a new creation is blocked.

“Dante’s Inferno” is now available in video game format.<sup>11</sup> I cannot evaluate the effectiveness of this video. Its focus is solely on telling the story. For me, the lack of connection with the literature, loss of language and poetry, and the visual violence which displaces imagination with direct presentation, is a disturbing methodology. It seems, however, that students are attracted and interested in this presentation. Perhaps the video could be used as a connector for a discussion on the differences of their understanding and response to “Dante’s Inferno” when watching the video and reading the verse. The video presentation may be the “hook” to draw the students into a deeper discussion. A dramatic reading of the material might replace a reading assignment. It may be a new experience for the students to read aloud in class.

Class trips to museums and music performances will require the development of observational and listening skills prior to the visits. Small, guided discussions on specific works can help students learn how to concentrate on details. Teachers will need to help students slow their pace, turn off their cell phones, and learn to engage in “old fashioned” activities such as looking at art, listening to music, and reading books.

In summary, the Internet plays a central and vital role in modern society, and meets the needs of our fast paced world. If all learning, however, takes place through computerized presentations, the brain will only develop the skill needed to acquire information in that format.

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<sup>10</sup> *The New York Times Book Review*, “Seussian Software,” May 12, 2013, pg. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Visceral Games, “Dante’s Inferno,” Electronic Arts, 2009.



The study of humanities requires analytical and observational skills which are not learned through computer activities. As children as young as a year old are given DVDs to watch, and classes increasingly utilize computerized learning, it may be necessary to teach these skills in higher education. To insure humanities' relevance and integration in the lives of future students, teachers of humanities will have to fully engage new technologies, create a bridge between fast paced information acquisition and classical "close reading," and design curricula which trains and develops critical thinking skills. This is a clarion call to teachers before a generation loses the joy of humanities studies.

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## **Bridging Rhetoric and Teacher Education: Preparing Preservice Preschool Teachers for Parent-Teacher Conferences**

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Unlike decades ago when most families consisted of a father that worked outside the home and a mother that stayed home with the children, today's families consist largely of diverse mixes with most parents working outside the home. The desire and need for parents to obtain full-time employment is difficult to navigate, especially when the family has young children. The demand for full-time child care before the age of five goes hand-in-hand with the growing numbers of these working mothers and fathers. This puts unwanted strain on the parents because of the distance a full-time career places between them and their child. As more and more Child Development Centers (CDCs) pop up across the country in response to the growing numbers of working parents, more demands are also placed on the teachers. Some children spend more than eight hours per day with their teachers, so in order for parents to stay informed of their child's development, effective communication needs to exist between the teacher and the parents.

Aside from the informal communication of rushed day-to-day conversations during morning drop-offs or evening pick-ups, the implementation of parent-teacher conferences is a common practice in many accredited CDCs. But as many scholars have reported, there is little training on this type of communication within university-level Teacher Education programs<sup>1</sup>. In the article "Because Wisdom Can't Be Told: Using Comparison of Simulated Parent-Teacher Conferences to Assess Teacher Candidates' Readiness for Family-School Partnership," Joan M. T. Walker and Benjamin H. Dotger state that "communicating with families is a central facet of the teaching profession, yet few Teacher Education institutions help candidates develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions for family-school partnership" (71). The Interpersonal Communications course is a mandatory general education requirement in many universities<sup>2</sup>, but it is usually taken within the first or second year and is not applied to teacher-related communications. While the course will help, just practicing how to speak in public will not fully prepare preservice teachers to communicate with parents of diverse backgrounds. Preservice teachers need to have rhetorical strategies to use in each parent-teacher conference, but strategies alone will not be as persuasive. They also need to have some understanding of how to rhetorically analyze each situation as it relates to the parents' social class and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, and Nelson discuss the lack of "empirical understanding" as well as the fact that that "impedes development of personnel preparation programs (169). Katz and Bauch discuss the lack of training in parental involvement in undergraduate programs (50). Walker and Dotger discuss how many teacher education programs do not train students for family-school partnerships (62).

<sup>2</sup> Wright State University, University of Cincinnati, Ohio State University, and University of Toledo all have some form of Interpersonal Communications as a requirement in their general education courses.

## I. Rhetorical Strategies during Parent-Teacher Conferences

Both parents and teachers are outfitted with their own idea of what a parent-teacher relationship should be and one factor determining that is the individual's social class. The parents, a majority of whom were brought up in a society that taught us to dread those conferences because they were mostly about behavioral problems, often have preconceived barriers that refute modern teachers' desires to have a collaborative parent-teacher relationship. Dr. Jinsob Choi, an Assistant Professor of Teacher Education at Wright State University, explains that many preservice teachers in his classes come from middle to upper-class families and they cannot fully grasp what the financial struggle is like for lower socioeconomic families (personal interview). Large numbers of children in classrooms today are from single parent households and the traditional parent-teacher conference—usually in the evenings—could burden the single parent for many reasons (i.e., time off work, proper childcare, lack of money for childcare). Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot describes the effect social class can have in her book *The Essential Conversation*: “Affluent parents’ behavior toward teachers is characterized by frequent aggressive encounters and a fierce, determined advocacy; by contrast, poor parents appear withdrawn, uncomfortable, and passive” (109). In her book *Unequal Childhoods*, Annette Lareau discusses that many Americans do not feel that their social class sways their advantages or disadvantages, a belief that Lareau does not accept as true (235). To explain her reasons for doubt, she tells the story of two separate classrooms of children, one from Lower Richmond School and the other from Swan School, that both celebrated the end of their 5<sup>th</sup> grade year with a graduation ceremony. The families from Lower Richmond School came to the ceremony decked out in loud celebratory colors and hooted and hollered when their child got his or her award. The families from Swan School, although they demonstrated pride in their child with smiles and hugs, came to the graduation in pressed business suits and they “politely clapped” when their child got his or her award. Lareau says that the difference in these two schools is largely how they portrayed the futures of their students. Many parents of Lower Richmond students had not gone to college and were not sure if their children would have the opportunity, but parents of Swan students were more educated and it wasn't a matter of *if* their children would go to college, but “which college they would attend” (Lareau 235). While this paper is focused mainly on preschool conferencing, Lareau's example explains how a parent's social class can have an impact on how he or she views education and development. It is very possible that while the parent is the adult and is, of course, wiser than the child, that parent might not feel “smart” enough to really know what is going on developmentally with the child, and therefore leaves education entirely in a teacher's hands. So how do teachers deal with these barriers?

Parents and teachers bring webs of personal experience into the classroom and in order to form a collaborative relationship, the teacher needs to not only be aware of the parent's background, but be genuinely interested in it as well. This interest creates trust and such trust is paramount. Without it, a barrier will form between the parent and the teacher. Aristotle speaks of “personal goodness” in *The Rhetoric* and says “it is not true . . . that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses” (182). This character, or ethos, is part of what Aristotle calls the three “artistic proofs.” The other two proofs are pathos (appeal to the emotions) and logos (appeal using logic). Most parents want to trust that teachers have good intentions, but some parents are skeptical—and rightfully so with all the

abuse and rape charges in schools and athletics. The teacher with good intentions has to demonstrate these intentions—persuading parents that they can trust that their child’s learning is important to the teacher. Keeping Aristotle’s artistic proofs in mind will help remind teachers that each student and each family is unique and individual appeals are required with each situation.

Paying mind to each parent’s ideologies of education (which affect the pathos of the rhetorical situation), the teacher should find ways to put each family inside the classroom—to include them in a way that appeals to their beliefs. This inclusion, which is an example of good character (or *eunoia*), will strengthen trust and work to deconstruct the home/school binary. Walker and Dotger discuss what seems to be another version of Aristotle’s ideas of persuasion, but they label it *responsiveness*: “Across a variety of professions . . . responsiveness (defined as one’s ability to respond to the unique needs of individuals) [is] essential to successfully solving a problem” (63). Also somewhat mimicking Aristotle are Kimberly S. Adams and Sandra L. Christenson in their article “Differences in Parent and Teacher Trust Levels,” when they state that “characteristics of effective family-school collaboration are based on the conviction that educators *want* to work with families, and that parents are a vital and equal part of the schooling process” (2, emphasis mine). This desire to positively influence children is the “personal goodness” that Aristotle speaks of and it is a desire that cannot be simulated. Therefore, in order to have the ability to be “responsive” to the parent, the teacher must display emotions that speak to the parent’s emotions, persuading the parent to trust her.

While social class plays into both parent and teacher expectations, culture also plays a role. Physical objects like clothing and food can be shaped by our culture. Beliefs and values can also be shaped by culture—for example a family from Mississippi could have different values or beliefs than a family from Michigan. The occupation of a family member could shape the specific family’s culture—for example, if a child grows up with a relative that is a teacher, fire fighter, doctor, truck driver. Exposure to those environments could largely contribute to child and family identity and have an effect on the importance of education. And lastly, certain activities also contribute to one’s culture—like fishing, camping, team sports, etc. It is the responsibility of the teacher to investigate and model the significance of each child’s culture by sharing her own as well as encouraging each family to share theirs. This encourages pride in differences, models equality, and breaks down barriers. It communicates to each involved that while we each have our own different cultural identities, we are still in this together—united by a shared interest in the betterment of the child. Rhetorician Kenneth Burke calls this shared interest “identification” or “consubstantiality”:

[The parent] is not identical [to the teacher]. But insofar as their interests are joined, [the parent] is identified with [the teacher]. Or he may identify himself with [the teacher] even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 20)

While a teacher might assume at first glance that she has no commonalities with a child’s parents, it is imperative that she dig deeper and find ways to “talk [the parents’] language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying their ways with his” (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 55). Dr. Choi states the biggest problems preservice teachers have with

parent-teacher conferencing “are the students’ inabilities to gain different perspectives” (personal interview). In order to gain a new perspective, preservice teachers must be able to recognize when this is necessary and be motivated to act.

A parent-teacher relationship cannot have trust without this motivation. Each teacher must be motivated to navigate through the sea of unfamiliarity, and no matter what barriers present themselves, the teacher must be persistent in the search for a common ground. Burke, in “A Grammar of Motives,” discusses how every situation has “motives” and the “five principles” of these motives are “Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose” (1298). When Burke’s pentad is applied to parent-teacher conferences, several forms could be arranged, depending on the perspective of the person filling in the blanks. Two variations of pentads that expose beliefs and perceptions of a parent-teacher conference are listed below.

Kenneth Burke’s Pentad

| <u>Teacher view</u>   | <u>Parent view</u>  |
|---|---|
| <p><u>Act:</u> Parent-teacher conference</p> <p><u>Scene:</u> My pre-K classroom (Room A-12)</p> <p><u>Agent:</u> Self and Seong’s mother</p> <p><u>Agency:</u> State Assessment tool for pre-K fine motor development</p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> To assess Seong’s fine motor development and talk about ideas that his parents might be using at home to improve this area.</p>   | <p><u>Act:</u> Parent-teacher conference</p> <p><u>Scene:</u> My son’s preschool classroom</p> <p><u>Agent:</u> My son’s teacher</p> <p><u>Agency:</u> Teacher will speak to me in a conference room</p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> Seong is not writing his name and has trouble with fork and spoon. His teacher wants to talk to me about his holding of a pencil. He needs to learn this for next year at kindergarten.</p> |
| <p><i>NOTES: Seong is a new preschooler in my class. He and his family just moved to the area from Korea and Seong speaks very little English. Seong’s left hand did not fully develop in the womb and as could be expected, he is struggling with fine motor development. Also, Seong is eating very little at lunch and seems to want to only use his fingers to eat with. He plays in the block area mostly.</i></p> <p><i>Seong’s parents are very concerned about his building of independence, how he is doing with English, if he is eating American food, and if he is making friends. Seong seems to be right-hand dominate, but he still wants his teachers to help him with things like dressing and eating.</i></p> |   |

Burke states that while the parties involved might disagree on either or all of the five terms, one’s “motivation” is still exposed (1298). The absence or misguided application of this term—*motivation*—is largely the answer to why parent-teacher conferences are not productive, and it also ties in with Aristotle’s idea of “goodness.” If the teacher’s motivator is not to benefit the child both inside and outside of school, the parent will not be receptive. If the parent’s motivator is not to benefit the child’s learning experiences within the classroom, the teacher will not be receptive. It is a two-way street. All parties involved must understand, or at least respect, each others’ perspectives. In the pentad above, both the parent and myself (the teacher) are motivated by a concern for Seong’s development—fine motor development in this example. I am sensitive to the needs of the parent by being sensitive to the needs of the child. I also hope to gain insight, or a better perspective, into this child’s home life in order to implement other strategies being used by the parents. In this example, the parents and I decided to bring chopsticks into our

classroom meal time routines so that Seong could develop at his own pace. I also incorporated more fine motor activities into our lesson plan and centered several of them on the block area (painting signs, manipulating smaller blocks, etc.). Also, as I filled this pentad out, I realized that using this for the actual conference might prove beneficial as motives of both the parent and the teacher will be concrete and easier to understand (and plan for).

## **II. Putting Reality with all this Rhetoric**

### **Case Study 1**

When I was a lead preschool teacher at one of Wright Patterson Air Force Base's Child Development Centers (CDCs), I had three assistants that worked with me in the classroom. I participated in every parent-teacher conference, but did not always take the lead in order to help train my assistants in this element of being a lead teacher. One of my assistants—I'll fictitiously name Sarah—was extremely negative during the team meetings I held to go over recommendations that needed to be discussed with the parent. She'd say, "I do not know why we bother. These parents don't care what goes on with their children—just as long as they can bring them here and go off and do their own thing." She often spoke about how military personnel made plenty of money to support a family and that the other parent should *want* to stay home and raise their own child. Sarah's opinion was based on her own experiences and biases. She was raised in a military home; her father worked and her mother stayed home to raise her and her siblings. Sarah could not understand other family dynamics because she felt how she was raised was the "right" way. Many teachers feel like Ms. Sarah, although they are perhaps not as vocal about it. Further, Garry Hornby and Rayleen Lafaele discuss in their article "Barriers to parental involvement in education: an explanatory model" that although information exists for preservice teachers to read regarding barriers and "disadvantages" in social class, the information has

an essential bias of white middle-class values that ignores difference and diversity. It is a rhetoric . . . that benefits, and is committed to, a dominant white middle-class involvement which, unsurprisingly, is precisely the group of parents who are the main participators . . . (41).

In other words, like Sarah, our society has put into place what the majority considers the "right" way—or perhaps I should say the middle class "white" way—to exhibit values. If educators study historical rhetoric like Aristotle and Burke, they would at the very least have a foundation of all the factors that can shape persuasion. Barriers, like Ms. Sarah had, are often due to lack of exposure and the unaware teacher's assumptions of majority.

### **Case Study 2**

Air Force personnel have many different assignments all over the United States and some, all over the world. Because of this, I had children of varying cultures in my preschool classroom. Neda, a little girl from the Middle East, came to my classroom in the middle of the school year. She and her family spoke English very well and because Neda was fairly outgoing, she made friends quickly and easily. Her father, however, was very traditional, and it is very common for Middle Eastern men to refrain from speaking at all to women except for their wives.

He brought her to the classroom, signed her in, and avoided me when I tried to introduce myself and speak to him. He looked away and put his hand up as if to tell me to stop talking to him. This went on for weeks. The only communication I had with him was through written correspondence via quick notes about Neda's day. Eventually, I decided to try to reach him by using email and this rhetorical strategy worked. He responded right away to my emails and we developed a parent-teacher relationship rather quickly. I began asking if he would come into the classroom to talk about his family and their culture. On several occasions, he came in and read some of Neda's favorite books to the class. He also brought photos of Iraq—of their home—and the children had so many questions. He talked about differences and similarities, charting them on a large white board. Within about five months, Neda's father agreed to come in for a parent-teacher conference. While he spoke very little and never looked at me, his attendance told me that he was at the very least comfortable and that he trusted that I respected his culture. I did not expect him to change his beliefs; I wanted to learn about them and adapt my ways to accommodate our differences in order to benefit Neda and her development. My desire to learn about his family and their cultural beliefs mirrors Burke's philosophies about identification and motivation.

### **Case Study 3**

Working at an Air Force CDC exposed me to many different cultures, not only international ones. There was a boy in my class named Carter; Carter loved tractors. He and his mother lived many miles outside the city in a small rural community. Carter would come to school with cowboy hats and jeans and John Deere t-shirts; he would come to class so excited to tell me and his classmates about his horseback riding lessons or how his grandpa let him ride on the big tractor. The children were mesmerized by Carter's enthusiasm, as was I. No one else in that class lived on a farm, so together with Carter and his mother, we arranged an entire lesson plan on farming—including a field trip to Young's Dairy Farm and Fulton Farms. I did not plan these activities solely with the intention of incorporating Carter's family into the classroom; I planned this because I knew Carter and his mother's enthusiasm to share their culture would indirectly encourage other families to do the same. And it worked! Another boy—Sehuyk—brought his mother in for show-and-share day and they both wore traditional Korean outfits (hanbok). His mother also brought two other outfits and let interested children try them on. Sehuyk and his mother told the class stories about life in Korea and I brought in a few books about Korean art and Korean food. Not every parent participated in this, but I made sure that the invitation to share was all-inclusive, open to creativity, and explicit. Some parents just came to eat lunch with their child, and others would come in and play with their child in the classroom. The barrier between home and school faded with this parental interaction, which in turn improved parent-teacher communication and collaboration during parent-teacher conferences. Looking back on the situation, this improvement was largely based on how Burke defines identification and consubstantiality discussed earlier in this paper. My interest in incorporating different cultures (primarily those that the children and their families identified with) into the classroom was not only an appeal to pathos, but it also showed my motivation and genuine interest in knowing the children and their families on a deeper level.

## Conclusion

The term *effective communication* is thrown around with little emphasis on its meaning to teachers. When the CDC I worked at decided to implement a new curriculum which enforced parent-teacher conferences, the teachers—most of whom had little to no formal training—were expected to complete these conferences without problem. I struggled with these for the first year and the examples I used above were after years and years of practice with more mistakes than I can count. Preservice teachers would benefit from a basic rhetoric class (or series) geared toward teacher communication. Carol Garboden Murray, in her article “Creating a Culture that Acknowledges the Power of Words,” states that

communication is at the heart of our work with children and families. Language is our most immediate and powerful tool; it can teach us about ourselves and ask us to examine our own values (if we listen closely to what we say and how we say it!). We always have the power to change, improve, and shape our language to become intentional educators. When we strive for this level of deliberate conscious communication, we reach a new level of professionalism. (3)

Aristotle’s definition of the Greek word *kairos* is a person’s ability to use the three artistic proofs within each constantly changing situation. In other words, each teacher should have a plethora of rhetorical strategies in his or her back pocket—that broad range of critical thinking skills paired with various rhetorical strategies that can be applied at any time, and in any setting. Many educators call this “the teachable moment.” The key motivator for a teacher should be to improve her own awareness and communication skills for the betterment of the child’s educational experiences. Parent-teacher conferences are just a small piece of that puzzle.



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**Pinn, Anthony B., Caroline F. Levander, and Michael O. Emerson. *Teaching and Studying the Americas: Cultural Influences from Colonialism to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 296 pp. Hardcover ISBN: 978-0-230-61512-0.**

A happy result of a long-running faculty colloquium at Rice University is *Teaching and Studying the Americas*, a collection of twelve essays focused on institutional practices, pedagogical approaches and research perspectives related to the study of the Western hemisphere by humanists and social scientists. The essays, all by authors at work in the United States, describe and evaluate scholarly visions and practices that transcend regional, national and disciplinary boundaries. Ranging from conceptual issues and controversies to the nuts and bolts of creating and running innovative programs and courses, the volume is of interest to professors, graduate students and archivists working in such fields as religion, history, sociology, economics, comparative literature, English, Spanish and Portuguese, as well as Environmental, Gender, American, African-American, African Diaspora and Latin American Studies. The volume will appeal to educators seeking to know more about emerging paradigms in Hemispheric Studies and how to incorporate them into their institution's existing culture and curriculum.

The editors divide the collection into three sections. Part I, "Locating and Dislocating the Americas," offers a broad overview of the interdisciplinary conversation to date. In the first essay, Antonio Barrenechea traces the vital but largely ignored watersheds in hemispheric studies, beginning with the work of historian Herbert Bolton in 1932. Calling on today's intellectuals, and in particular literary scholars, to craft a coherent trans-American studies project by examining established materials in light of common histories, influences across languages and inclusion of themes and cultural positions that traverse borders, Barrenechea also describes two very interesting courses he developed at the University of Mary Washington. Like Barrenechea, Rice's Caroline Levander cites Bolton's work for its early departure from nationalist paradigms, and goes on to argue that the nation state should be only one of a number of possible organizing frameworks used or ignored by scholars according to the dictates of evidence and data they seek to understand. She references recent work by Bruce Harvey, Robert Levine, Rachel Adams, and Anna Brickhouse, among many others, to demonstrate that the reorientation of U.S. culture in hemispheric frameworks is already underway. In the longest and least accessible piece of the section, Walter Mignolo (as translated by Michael Ennis) examines how the notion of a Western hemisphere changed the modern/colonial world's sense of itself and power. By considering tensions between the beliefs of figures such as Theodore Roosevelt and Luis María Drago, Samuel Huntington and Vine Deloria Jr., the Duke University scholar invites us to think critically about the "interior exteriority" paradigm that shaped the "imaginary" of the Western Hemisphere.

Part II, "Disciplining Hemispheric Studies," presents five analyses of theoretical approaches that have allowed their authors to look at familiar subjects in new ways. Michael Emerson of Rice University, for example, proposes motion as a key concept to examine the social structuring of the Americas. He argues that physical movement of humans across and within national boundaries, motivated by economic, political and institutional forces (i.e., slavery), opens paths to fresh understanding, and he develops an interesting case study using

motion as a tool to examine his own Houston neighborhood. Emerson's colleague, Anthony Pinn, focuses on the human body as an underexplored and underappreciated framework for the study of religion. In particular, Pinn recommends the careful study of photographic images, noting that the "look" and "location" of humans in time and space captures a social nature that can reinforce or challenge the status quo. Ruth Hill of the University of Virginia offers an overview of emerging patterns within the burgeoning field of Critical Race Studies, and urges us not to ignore paradigms of white supremacy if we hope to bring intellectual and moral clarity to our teaching. Karen Monges Douglas of Sam Houston University and Rogelio Saenz of Texas A&M look at the role race has played historically in influencing laws meant to control the population coming to the U.S., contorting the distribution of property and resources, and at how race-conscious policies continue to play out in the twenty-first century. They advise scholars and educators to consider the past a window on the present, expand whatever lens they employ and counter the notion of perpetual foreigners. The closing essay of this section, by Rice's Moramay López-Alonso, centers on applying multidisciplinary approaches and advances in research technology to the demographic and environmental collapse of Mesoamerica in the wake of the arrival of Europeans. She maintains that a clearer picture of the interconnected causes that impacted sixteenth century population size and determined the magnitude of decline can help us better meet the urgent challenge of environmental preservation today.

The final section of the volume, "Programs and Pedagogy" moves from theory to practice, looking closely at archives, new courses and curriculum creation. Rice doctoral candidates, Heather Miner and Robin Sager, call attention to a recently rediscovered author of the US-Mexican borderlands, Jovita González, arguing that the disciplinary and geographical tensions inherent in her writing offer a valuable counterpoint to the master narrative of historical inquiry and nation building in the twentieth century. Rodrigo Lazo of the University of California, Irvine, dismayed that migrant archives are generally excluded from how we constitute memory and write history, brings together a particular Spanish-language memoir from the early part of the twentieth century, Derrida's *Archive Fever*, and a discussion of *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage* to suggest how we might better store and use information. Memory and research are also the primary concerns of archivist Melissa Bailar, whose strong essay explores the challenges and opportunities associated with the Our Americas Archive Partnership (OAAP), a multi-institutional (Rice, University of Maryland and Instituto Mora) digital collaboration that uses a hemispheric approach. Bailar discusses, among other topics, document selection, juxtaposition, clusters, national biases, male voices interpreting and masking female experiences, page images, maps, transcriptions, instances of "plagiarism," new sorts of tools for textual, geospatial and chronological searches and, in general, how difficult yet stimulating it is to make a multilingual digital archive faithful to theoretical goals. Finally, the volume closes with an excellent piece by Deborah Cohn and Matthew Pratt Guterl on the creation of a new program in American Studies at Indiana University. They begin with the call by an external review committee for the establishment of a rigorous undergraduate major alongside an independent, stand-alone PhD program, and take readers through collective efforts to define "America," find funding, design new courses, expand requirements, hire faculty and create innovative programs abroad. Guided by the conviction that American Studies should push students outside of the United States, and a commitment to hemispheric and comparative inquiry, these writers found that the academic architecture of the Bloomington campus, "with some of the nation's largest and oldest Title VI centers creating wide bore holes sideways through the

college, and foregrounding multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship across standard units,” allowed the project to succeed despite many unexpected challenges. Cohen and Pratt Guterl conclude by offering three lessons for others who wish to follow Indiana’s lead: take the study of “foreign” languages seriously, tap area studies centers and programs as partners and know your own institution, including what kind of roadblocks you are likely to confront and how you can find allies, crawl spaces and breathing room as you build.

Wellesley College

Nancy Abraham Hall



**Blair, Ann M. *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. xv + 397 pp. Paperback ISBN: 978-0-300-16539-5.**

“Of making many books there is no end,” saith Ecclesiastes, “and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” What seems a quintessentially modern disease, information overload, has in fact been afflicting the learned for more than two millennia. It may feel like future shock, but its history goes back many centuries.

Many ages have felt this scholarly weariness of the flesh, but fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe felt it more acutely than most. Gutenberg’s great invention was a blessing but also a curse of a sort, because it brought in its wake an unprecedented increase in the amount of reading material, often figured as a flood or a tidal wave that threatens to drown us. Blair may be contributing to the problem by producing yet another book we need to read—a work, as it happens, of tremendous scholarship and almost intimidating erudition. And yet, for all its prodigious learning, *Too Much to Know* is clear, engagingly written, and accessible even to nonspecialists.

Our age takes reference books for granted: when we need to find the meanings of words, we know to look to dictionaries and lexicons; when we need to be reminded of a half-forgotten quotation, we turn to Bartlett’s. We know about bibliographies and indexes and thesauruses and chronologies and concordances. When printing was invented, though, those genres were still inchoate, and a scholar hoping to keep his head above the flood of information had to make his own way. Blair’s achievement is to reveal the neglected early history of the modern reference genres.

Her scope is international, covering the whole of the early modern republic of letters, primarily in the learned languages, at the time of the transition from manuscript to print. Many dozens of reference works are discussed, though a few get extended analyses. Many have to be judged failures—they never acquired a significant readership, and were quickly forgotten. Others, though, were remarkably successful, and served scholars for centuries. Ambrogio Calepino’s *Dictionarium*, for instance, went through more than two hundred editions and an indeterminate number of spinoffs. So influential was the *Dictionarium* that polyglot dictionaries were long known as *calepinos*. (Even now a French company called Calepino sells blank notebooks for managing the messy information of our own lives.)

Blair’s history of the reference book owes much to the history of the book in general, since she ties the genre to early modern European print culture. She is interested in the market for reference books and the strategies booksellers had to employ to turn a profit on dictionaries. She traces how commonplace books, meant for private study, evolved into collections of extracts for larger audiences, and eventually into dictionaries of quotations. Along the way, she pays particular attention to the logistical and even physical means of producing these books. Scholars were cutting and pasting long before the invention of the word processor, and Blair examines the surviving annotated copies, compilers’ notes, and illustrations of early modern scholars at work, all reproduced in facsimile.

Most important, she helps us recover some of the alien scholarly mentalities from an age before dictionaries and encyclopedias were found in every literate household. Even something as seemingly natural and inevitable as alphabetical order was once new and strange. Scholars experimented with all sorts of organization, with endless branching diagrams of the tree of knowledge, but the arbitrariness of A, B, C eventually carried the day. But the alphabet was not yet something that could be taken for granted even among small children. “If thou be desirous (gentle Reader),” Robert Cawdrey advised in *A Table Alphabeticall*, the first monolingual English dictionary, in 1604, “rightly and readily to vnderstand, and to profit by this Table, and such like, then thou must learn the Alphabet, to wit, the order of the Letters as they stand, perfectly without booke, and where euery Letter standeth: as (b) neere the beginning, (n) about the middest, and (t) towards the end.”

We know what it feels like to be overwhelmed with twenty-first-century information overload; Blair gives us an idea of what it felt like to be overwhelmed in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, and she does so engagingly, even elegantly. There are few books based on extensive original research in Latin and Greek that are still accessible to undergraduates. This essential contribution to the history of scholarship represents the best in the modern humanities, and deserves to be widely read and widely cited.

Rutgers–Newark

Jack Lynch



**McGrath, John and Kathleen Callanan Martin with Jay P. Corrin, Michael G. Kort, Susan Hagood Lee, John W. Mackey and Benjamin E. Varat. *The Modernization of the Western World: A Society Transformed*. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2013. xiv + 266 pp. Paperback ISBN: 973-0-7656-3948-6.**

The team of authors of this volume delivers successfully what the title intimates and the preface, more elaborately, outlines: a simultaneous survey of modern European history and a focused study of the processes and implications of social change. This is not a social history of the West, but is rather, as they carefully explain, an historical sociology of the transformation of Europe and the West from the Late Middle Ages to the present.

The first two chapters, “The Modernization of the Western World” and “Modernization and Social Change,” detail straightforwardly the methodological framework for the book; in doing so they introduce students to Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Tones, who formulated the original theoretical understandings of modernization which the authors use to structure their interpretive presentation of Modern Western History. The next eighteen succinctly focused chapters provide a clear history from the Middle Ages through the Cold War. This history applies the prescriptive methodology strategically, if not always deftly, to help students organize and understand the character of modernization. The final chapter, “Globalization and Social Change” very usefully explores present global processes from the perspective used throughout the volume and thus helps students recognize the value of understanding history for negotiating the present. A very helpful “Glossary of Historical and Sociological” concepts concludes the book.

I would recommend *The Modernization of the Western World* for students in European History survey courses, especially those courses offered to satisfy distribution requirements rather than as prerequisites to an History Major. Indeed, it is an ideal text to anchor such courses in General Education programs and Liberal Arts programs in professional colleges such as Business, Engineering, and Music and the Arts.

Its benefits are numerous. The chapters concerned with the Industrial Revolution on are very well done for a brief survey; those on Nationalism, Imperialism, World War I and Fascism, particularly so, as they carefully navigate among current interpretations while they manage to highlight in a nuanced way the social change concepts that frame the study. The attention to pre-enlightenment Europe (six chapters) in a book on the “Modernization” of the West deserves commendation. Too often modern history texts forget this history or include a preliminary chapter that summarizes the qualities of the pre-modern that become characteristic of the modern, such as individualism (a bit on the Renaissance) and reason (a bit on the Scientific Revolution).

Perhaps the greatest strength of this book, its value added, if you will, is that it models for students how to think. We all claim that in this resides the inherent value of a Liberal Arts education. The authors make conspicuous, here, how to frame and interpret data, how to apply theory, how to construct and sustain an argument, how to choose and organize information carefully, how to fit data together conceptually to render meaning—in short, how meaning is always already interpretive, an interpretation. Whether one agrees with their interpretive

framework or not, that they present it self-consciously is of great value to students. Theirs is a perspective made clearly and manifest. Most texts insidiously hide theirs, to their discredit and to their students' loss. And, of course, any careful exploration, as this is, of the ideas of Marx, Weber and Durkheim requires, as this does, that students recognize and struggle with the reality that history is always, in some fashion, about human agency and those larger social forces that threaten to mitigate it.

Finally a few minor quibbles: the authors apply sociological theory much more conspicuously and aggressively in the early chapters on the Middle Ages. Some might argue that these theories are less useful here because they serve more to highlight difference from the modern than they describe or analyze the pre-modern accurately. In any case, to make them work, more generalization, perhaps, than is warranted is used. On the contrary, the chapters from the French and Industrial Revolutions on, that better fit the text's theoretical emphasis on modernization, integrate those theories only intermittently even as they respectfully attend to historical detail and complexity. There are those, as well, I'm sure, for which the authors' functionalist approach to history won't be abided. I think this is a mistake. Such a clearly argued, well-organized, and concisely rendered survey of the processes of modernization in Western society will greatly benefit our students.

Babson College

Stephen L. Collins





**Van Elferen, Isabella. *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012. ix + 229 pp. Hardcover ISBN: 978-0-7083-2512-4.**

“Listen to them – the children of the night. What music they make!”

Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

We live in a haunted world, haunted by the past, haunted by fear, by what we remember and by what we repress. The Gothic reveals what haunts us, destabilizing our sense that the world is secure, that reality is knowable, that the past is behind us. According to Isabella Van Elferen, music—in its potential for transcendence and its ability to evoke real and imagined worlds, hidden memories and fears—is key to the Gothic’s “main critical gesture.” That is, to disclose “cultural spectres.” In *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*, Van Elferen argues that music is central to the Gothic challenge to rationalism, begun by the Gothic novelists of the late eighteenth century, and continuing in literature, film, television, video games and the Goth culture.

In this work of intricate interdisciplinarity, Van Elferen examines what she calls the “sonic Gothic” across various fields of interest. Her main aims are to promote a definition of Gothic music that shows its distinction from the music of related genres (such as horror) and to “develop conceptual models for the definition and functionality of Gothic music.” She argues that the Gothic “evokes the Freudian uncanny—the return of the repressed,” destabilizing our sense of what is real, dislodging us from our understanding of time, and reminding us of things we would rather forget. Van Elferen analyzes the ways in which the description of sound (and silence) expresses the Gothic in novels, how heard music in film, television and video games is used as a “sonic accompaniment to Gothic narrative,” and finally works—through her understanding of Gothic music—to locate what is often called a sub-culture, Goth, within the centuries-old Gothic tradition.

Van Elferen explains how sound—both diegetic sound (from a known source) like the playing of liturgical music and non-diegetic sound (from an unknown source) such as the “ephemeral childsong” common in horror films—can haunt narrative. This is true of both the pre-constructed narratives found in film, television and novels and of participant-created narratives like those of video game play and the social interactions of Goth culture. Sound evokes the uncanny, bringing the repressed to the surface. In Chapter 1, Van Elferen begins with an examination of the sonic Gothic in literature, both in traditional Gothic novels like Anne Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* and modern novels that include Gothic elements like Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*. In these novels, music is portrayed as a direct agent of the supernatural, suggesting the presence of ghosts both real and metaphorical.

Chapter 2 focuses on the sonic Gothic in films such as Tod Browning’s *Dracula* and Alejandro Amenábar’s *The Others*, and the ways in which such films “actualize” the sounds we read. In film, we hear the uncanny music sung by the “children of the night;” we don’t have to imagine it. While Van Elferen recognizes the difficulty of talking about the Gothic in cinema because of the overlap with horror and other genres, she makes an excellent case that various elements of music—from the use of the organ and harpsichord with their religious and thus supernatural associations to the “strongly alienating effect” of atonal sound—serve to

“Gothicize” the filmic narrative. Through music, films of many genres may contain Gothic elements.

In Chapter 3, Van Elferen argues, from Derrida, that the very nature of the experience of television watching is haunted, ghosts in a box existing “in an eternal past that is framed by televisual presence.” Van Elferen’s argument as to how music haunts television is particularly engaging, including the idea that the repetition of television theme music—its weekly entry into our homes—can create a sense of the “domestic uncanny.” Chapter 4 focuses on video games and suggests that the eeriness of certain game soundtracks—as in the *Silent Hill* series—is integral to the immersive sense of “hyperreality” that is necessary for full engagement in video or computer game play. These kinds of games place us in a separate reality, the hauntedness of which is made clear through the soundtrack.

Finally, Van Elferen argues for music as the core of the Goth culture. Chapter 5 begins with a deeply persuasive political and philosophical argument against the use of the word subculture to describe the various social, artistic and musical groups that describe themselves as Goth. Van Elferen also succeeds in her attempt to locate Goth culture within the larger Gothic tradition and to present Gothic music in musical terms rather than in terms that connote an aesthetic and moral judgment upon the genre's creators and fans.

In *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*, Isabella Van Elferen breaks new ground, creating an increasingly sophisticated way of looking at music, the Gothic and the complex intersections between them. The work is erudite, fluidly written and well-grounded in the language of Gothic studies, musicology, film and television studies, video game studies and literary criticism. Readers in those disciplines—as well as the general reader—will find much to haunt them here.

Boston University

Regina Hansen



## CITL CONFERENCE ON TEACHING GLOBALIZATION

*An Interdisciplinary Conference  
to be held  
June 22, 2013  
Boston University  
College of General Studies  
871 Commonwealth Avenue  
Boston, MA*

This is a one-day event where college professors and high school teachers can present ideas and share strategies for making courses more global and interdisciplinary.

**As the challenges now facing students transcend old borders dividing cultures and politics, new curricula must also transcend old boundaries dividing the academic disciplines. To address these parallel trends, our conference calls for papers from teachers and scholars in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences addressing the following question: How has the challenge of teaching your students about globalization, or teaching other subjects with a more global orientation, required you to integrate more than one academic discipline?**

For additional information, please go to [www.bu.edu/cgs/citl/](http://www.bu.edu/cgs/citl/).

## CITL SUMMER INSTITUTE ON THE IRISH IN BOSTON



Courtesy of the John F. Kennedy Library

This summer, the Center for Interdisciplinary Teaching & Learning (CITL) is offering an interdisciplinary institute on “**THE IRISH IN BOSTON**” to be held on July 26 & 27, 2013. CITL institutes are designed for alumni, parents and members of the general public who enjoy exploring a subject of common interest from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. These institutes draw on the expertise of professors at the College of General Studies at BU. The weekend will include a day-and-a-half of lectures, discussions, pub outings and performances on the history, music and poetry of the Irish in Boston. The institute will be held at Boston University’s College of General Studies, 871 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

Sally Sommers Smith, an Associate Professor of Natural Science and an expert scholar and practitioner of Irish fiddle music, will be presenting a session on “The Sounds of Home: Irish Music in Boston, 1880-2012.” Megan Sullivan, an Associate Professor of Rhetoric and author of *Irish Women and Cinema* and *Women in Northern Ireland: Cultural Studies and Material Conditions*, will be presenting a lecture/discussion on “‘Bridget’ in Boston: Irish Domestic Servants and the Culture of Work.” Meg Tyler, Associate Professor of Humanities and author of *A Singing Contest: Conventions of Sound in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, will be giving a talk entitled “Crossing Yet Another Border: Irish Poetry in Boston.” And Tom Whalen, Associate Professor of Social Sciences and author of *Kennedy Versus Lodge: The 1952 Massachusetts Senate Race* and *Profiles in Presidential Courage*, will be hosting a lecture/discussion entitled “Triumph of the Irish Brahmin: John F. Kennedy, the 1952 Massachusetts Senate Race, and the Creation of a Political Dynasty.” Together these presentations and discussions will explore questions such as: How has Irish music influenced the American music scene? When Irish

women cleaned houses, did they also reorganize a city? Does Irish poetry matter beyond Ireland? And, what's the difference between 'shanty' and 'lace curtain' Irish? The Kennedys knew—do you?

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With regard to lodging for the “BU The Irish in Boston Institute,” you can stay in a dorm room in the Student Village OR you can stay in one of the two hotels below. Blocks of rooms have been reserved until **June 26, 2013**.

**Boston University Dorm Room** has single rooms available in suites of four that share two baths and a common area for \$79.00 per person per night. *We will make those reservations for you.*

**Hotel Commonwealth** has rooms available for \$259.00 per night not including taxes. *You are responsible for making your own reservation.* The phone number to make your reservation is 866-784-4000 or 617-532-5019. In order to get the above rate, you will need to mention “BU The Irish in Boston Institute.”

**Hotel Buckminster** has Standard Queen rooms available for \$169.00 per night not including taxes and Standard Double Twin rooms available for \$179.00 per night not including taxes. *You are responsible for making your own reservation.* The phone number to make your reservation is 800-727-2825. In order to get the above rate, you will need to mention the “BU The Irish in Boston Institute.”

Experience Irish Boston in all its interdisciplinary wonder! Join us for a memorable weekend of fun, friends and exploration of America's Irish background. For more details about the schedule, please go to <http://www.bu.edu/cgs/citl/interdisciplinary-institutes>. If you have any questions, please contact [njmck@bu.edu](mailto:njmck@bu.edu) or [akcook@bu.edu](mailto:akcook@bu.edu).

## IMPACT BEST ESSAY COMPETITION

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The Editors of *IMPACT: The Journal of the Center for Interdisciplinary Teaching & Learning* invite submissions of scholarly and creative non-fiction essays between 500 and 5,000 words on any aspect of interdisciplinary teaching or research. Essays should be readable to a general, educated audience, and they should follow the documentation style most prevalent in the author's disciplinary field. Essays should be submitted by **November 15, 2013** to <http://CITL.submittable.com/submit>.

The author of the winning essay will receive a \$250 award and publication in *IMPACT*.

**IMPACT BEST ESSAY WINNER**

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The winning essay for 2013 is “Community Gardening Activities in the Higher Education: Planting Seeds of Inspiration” by August John Hoffman from Metropolitan State University.

***Congratulations Professor Hoffman!***

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Stephen Collins** is a Professor of History in the History and Society Division, Babson College. His current research and writing focuses on the cultural history of the self in Late Medieval England.

**Gina Marie Giardina** is a graduate student in English with an emphasis in Composition and Rhetoric at Wright State University and a Technical Writer at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Her academic work has appeared in [\*Textual Overtures\*](#) and her creative writing has appeared in the Dayton-based zine *Mock Turtle* and in [\*Stepping Stones Magazine\*](#). In her spare time, she enjoys working on home improvements, playing basketball, and daydreaming about getting a PhD in Rhetoric or English & Education.

**Nancy Abraham Hall** is Senior Lecturer in Spanish at Wellesley College, writes about Latin American literature. She is the co-editor of *Studies in Honor of Enrique Anderson Imbert, A Necklace of Words: Mexican Women Writers*, and *Campo abierto: Lecturas sociopolíticas hispanoamericanas*. Nancy's essays have appeared in the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos*, *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* and numerous edited volumes.

**Regina Hansen** is Senior Lecturer of Rhetoric at Boston University's College of General Studies. She publishes and presents on film and television, religion in the fantastic, Victorian and Neo-Victorian Studies and composition studies.

**August John Hoffman** is currently a Professor of Psychology and Coordinator of Graduate Studies in Psychology at Metropolitan State University. He earned his B.A. from UC Santa Barbara, M.A. from Radford University in Clinical Psychology (with an emphasis in Sport Psychology), and Ph.D. from UCLA in counseling psychology. As a former professor of psychology at Compton College, CSU Northridge, and Pepperdine University, he has assisted students from various educational backgrounds in accomplishing their goals. He began and developed a highly successful gardening program at Compton College in an effort to help students improve their campus and community. Dr. Hoffman's current research projects at Metropolitan State University include the development of a community fruit tree orchard and community garden with students at Inver Hills Community College. Current research interests also include community service work and student mentoring as effective methods to reduce ethnic conflict and improve social capital among student and community members. For the last five years, Dr. Hoffman has conducted research combining outdoor gardening work with Metropolitan State University students with community members. Students generally appreciate the ability to engage in community service work and see how psychological theory applies itself within the community with community members. Additionally, Dr. Hoffman has taught several psychology courses including Motivation and Sport Psychology, which include an applied approach to creating healthy lifestyles for his students. He has published several books and academic research articles, including the texts, *Unity Through Community Service Activities*; *Understanding Sport Psychology and Human Behavior*; and, *Stop Procrastinating Now!*. He



enjoys gardening at his home in Hudson, Wisconsin during his time off with his family—Nancy his wife, and two children A. J. and Sara.

**Lydia Kowalski** is a part time non-traditional PhD student in Humanities at the University of Louisville. She served as Assistant Dean for Administration at the UCLA Henry Samueli School of Engineering and Applied Science for 11 years. Her 35 year career as a non-profit executive includes planning, education and management for museums, botanical gardens and park systems. Ms. Kowalski has a Master's Degree in Urban Planning with a focus on multi-cultural community planning from MIT, and a BS from Indiana University in Music, Speech and Theater. She is currently a Consultant Grant Writer for Asia Institute-Crane House in Louisville, KY.

**Jack Lynch** is Professor of English and Acting Senior Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences at Rutgers-Newark. He is the author of *The Age of Elizabeth in the Age of Johnson, Deception and Detection in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, and *The Lexicographer's Dilemma*. He is now at work on a history of reference books, under contract with Walker and Company.