As the spring turns to summer, many of us hear the strain “Summer time and the livin’ is easy” from Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess. Most of us spend our summers taking courses, engaging in some sort of professional development, and finding ways to relax and to become rejuvenated for the next school year. These experiences take many shapes and forms, but the commonality to all of them is how we renew ourselves annually in order to better serve our students.

So what would educators write if asked about how they renew themselves? This issue captures educators’ experiences with continuous learning. One article tells of the experiences of a male teacher whose continuous growth came from teaching in Nepal, on an Indian reservation, and in the South Bronx. A second article tells of the learning gleaned by a veteran female teacher who took a sabbatical to work at Harvard and who is now sharing her expertise by teaching staff development courses. A third article highlights an assistant superintendent’s trip to China with Primary Source, while the remaining articles tell of the experiences of teachers who spent their summers learning to do web work and to use a writing rubric.

Last summer I embarked on an “outward bound” type of trip for my personal renewal. With my husband and two friends, we journeyed to Glacier Bay National Park, in Gustavus, Alaska. Having never done anything of this nature before, with some trepidation, we geared up and boarded the kayak drop-off vessel to begin our self-guided, six day, 130 mile journey to the tidewater McBride Glacier via the Adams Inlet.

The breathtaking scenery of this unspoiled wilderness was enhanced by our travel in two person sea kayaks which allowed us to glide silently through pristine waters dotted with small to mid-size icebergs. We observed humpback whales, sea otters, sea lions, harbor seals, porpoise, orcas, bald eagles, moose, black bears, and even a grizzly bear from a distance as well as dozens of marine bird species. Camping on pristine beaches with expansive views, we cooked the finest meals, this side of the Fairweather Range, from freeze-dried food. And after each magical day, we retired to our tents to fall asleep to the sound of whales feeding. Several days we awoke to the splashing and blowing of humpbacks.
Continuous learning is being able to gain knowledge from our own experiences. Workshops may show us new methods and strategies, but it’s through our own teaching that we decide what works and what doesn’t. If our teaching remains stagnant, then most likely our learning will too. How often do we have the chance to visit other classrooms, schools, or districts? The late George Harrison put it best, “The more one travels, the less one really knows.” I’ve been blessed with the chance to engage in a variety of adventures that have enriched my life in and out of the classroom. I’ve taught on a Navajo Indian reservation, in an alternative high school, in Nepal, and in New York City’s South Bronx. Each of these experiences gave me a first hand look at a different facet of the jewel of education. Although I am able to share stories and reflections on what I have done, nothing compares to experiencing it first hand.

In our careers as educators we have seen the challenges before us accelerate as responsibilities increase. Although demands continue to grow, we manage to balance the many competing concerns without sacrificing the quality of education and the services we provide our students. Like Shackleton, we believe in action; we have the courage to pursue a dream, and we have a sense of responsibility to see that it is carried out to its end. I have rarely witnessed educators retreat from the challenges presented.

The reflections captured in this edition of Perspectives provide us with snapshots of how we learn and grow, how we realize what is important to us, how we shape our values, and what deserves our focus. The experiences described in this issue reinforce our optimism about educators and contribute to the cultivation of school communities where teaching and learning is central.

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**From The Himalayan Mountains To New York City**

*By David Hruskoci*

They often treated us to a breakfast show along the shoreline of our camp. Six days later, having reached the glaciers and journeyed back, we met our pick up boat for the trip back to Gustavus.

The solitude and remoteness of our surroundings (we did not see another human being the entire six days!) afforded us time for reflection and rejuvenation. Before I left home, a colleague gave me an inspirational book, *ENDURANCE: Shackleton’s Incredible Voyage*. Within the inscription, my colleague wrote the Outward Bound motto “To serve, to strive, and not to yield.” As I paddled away in Glacier Bay for more than five hours a day, I thought about how the *Endurance* saga and the Outward Bound motto related my life work as an educator. I concluded that the crew on the *Endurance*, the Outward Bound motto, and the educator’s *esprit de corps* each deal with the common themes of meeting challenges, making commitments, caring for others, and pledging to a collective purpose.

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*Mr. Hruskoci with Fifth Graders in Nepal*

**Teaching the Navajos**

In addition to the usual responsibilities of student teaching, I participated in a cultural immersion project. On a
Navajo reservation I studied the traditions of the Navajo people and participated in a peyote meeting, an all night prayer session designed to offer spiritual guidance to those in need. At this meeting we were praying for peace within an argumentative family. From dusk until dawn we sat in a circle inside a teepee I helped to build. A fire blazed in the center, and its embers created a glowing crescent moon. Smoke rose to the top and carried with it the sounds of singing, drumming, and praying. During a sweat I sat curled up, half-naked next to other Navajo people in a tiny dome structure. My skin felt afire as steam rushed in and out of my lungs. When the ceremonies ended, my mind was suddenly drawn back to the stack of lab reports screaming for attention on my desk. It occurred to me how difficult it was for students to live in two cultures. The youth were being pulled into mainstream American culture through the hustle and bustle of the media and their schooling. At the same time they were Navajo children with the responsibility of keeping the traditions alive.

In my science classroom I searched for opportunities to mesh the two cultures. The concept of tension related to the animal hide leather stretched over the water drum used in peyote meetings. Boiling point and heat of vaporization related to the water poured over the hot rocks during a sweat. Other departments in the school also embraced this effort: Navajo was offered as a language course and Navajo authors and artists were studied in other classes.

Students on the reservation felt empowered when I asked them questions about their Navajo traditions. Although we might not be teaching in schools that have such a clearly defined difference in culture, we can still recognize the groups that do exist. By calling upon the talents of the athletes, musicians, artists, and scholars in our classroom, we show that we respect and value the roles they have in the school. If I need to make a drawing to aide my instruction, I ask a student to produce the work, rather than to rely on my weak artistry. I’m not afraid to turn to the students while writing on the board and ask, “Should that be one ‘r’ or two?” The more we are able to recognize and acknowledge that students can be better at some things than we are, the more we as teachers will be respected.

Facing Unexpected Challenges

My first “real job” was at an alternative high school back in the Midwest. Students attended the school because they had serious emotional and behavioral issues. The students were dealing with thoughts of suicide, drugs, and anger at themselves and society. As a result, the class groups were arranged based on the therapeutic rather than the academic needs of the students.

In a class of eight, I had students taking basic math, algebra, and geometry. I suddenly found value in individualized instruction, something I had not done nor even appreciated before. For each student I created a folder that contained graded work and a description of their next assignment. I then spent class time moving around the room teaching each student his/her own lesson. This was a very effective way of managing a class of students with separate emotional and academic needs.

Over time the alternative school also taught me that students are people too. One day a young man placed his head down and refused to do work. After trying to motivate the student several times, he reared up holding a face mixed with emotion, shouting, “That folder means - - - to me, I just found out my girlfriend is pregnant.” That certainly brought an end to math for that day. The students left the room to convene with their counselor in hopes of brainstorming appropriate ways of dealing with this young man’s crisis.

Workshops may show us new methods and strategies, but it’s through our own teaching that we decide what works and what doesn’t. If our teaching remains stagnant, then most likely our learning will too.
What did this experience teach me? I learned that what students learn in my classroom may be important, but there are more significant lessons to learn in life. There are times when my lesson plans must take second stage to other issues and problems. Recognizing those times shows that I am human just like my students. My continuous learning led me from the alternative school to a stint in Nepal.

Volunteering in Nepal

After three months of learning the language, customs, and educational structure of Nepal, I began my Peace Corps service as a teacher in a small village near the border of India. I rented a small room from a family who lived near the school and with them I ate the usual two meals a day of rice, lentils and vegetables. Electricity came on for only a few hours in the evening, and we pumped our water by hand from a deep well near the pit toilet outside the back of the house.

The school did not have electricity and stood as a two-story cement structure about twenty feet wide and one hundred fifty feet long. Air moved freely in and out of the windows that were guarded with iron bars instead of glass panes. The K-10 school housed about four hundred students who arrived in time to hear the secretary bang a mallet on an iron plate to designate the start of the first class at 10am. In the 100+ degree summers, school would begin at 6am and end at 11am just before the building turned into a brick oven. I taught English and co-taught science. Boys would sit on one side of the room and girls would sit on the other, while class sizes varied from forty to seventy students. I developed low-cost experiments and activities to assist in learning, while my peer explained the information in greater detail. Fifth graders were learning about solar time so I had them poke sticks in the ground to create sundials in the schoolyard. We dissolved *tika* powder, prevalent in the Hindu culture, in water and blended colors to show that blue and yellow made green. In seventh grade science I scratched a large heart in the dirt outside and had students imitate blood while naming each part they walked through. I had volunteers act out the symptoms of ailments like malaria and tuberculosis while other students guessed what was wrong.

During my second year as a volunteer I moved to a city in the hills to give teacher trainings. I showed other science teachers how to incorporate these low cost experiments into their lessons. I then hiked sometimes two or three days through the Himalayan Mountains to visit the teachers in their home schools. The hospitality of the people I met while hiking was amazing. If it started to rain, I was more than welcome to sit on the porch of a family’s home. If it grew dark people offered a meal and a place to rest for the evening. In comparing Nepal to the States, I observed an inverse relationship between wealth and generosity.

Although I spent two years living tucked away in nearly forgotten corners on the other side of the Earth, it amazed me that human nature was the same there as it is here. In the Nepali classroom I had serious students, class-clowns, and students who didn’t want to be there. The Nepali teachers were the same as they are here. Some walked into the classroom with more energy than an atomic bomb, others were only waiting for the weekend. Nepal showed me that we are all people and it’s only our actions, culture, language, beliefs, and clothing that make us different from each other.

Experiencing Inner City Teaching

Sadly I left Nepal, as I was awarded a Peace Corps Fellowship at Columbia University. The program paid for some of my graduate classes while I earned a regular salary teaching in a struggling New York City school. The day before school started I was handed a key to my room in addition to a box of paper clips, post-it notes,
and chalk. In the room there were no lab tables, sinks or cabinets to indicate that science would be taught and learned. On the back wall was a tired corkboard, but most of it was ripped down, and graffiti covered the rest. Twenty battered science books sat on the teacher desk to be used by the four classes of students I would be teaching. The shelves in the storage room were bare except for a stack of inch rulers, a poster of the solar system and a small collection of glassware. I was amazed that a small village in Nepal could have the same resources as a middle school in the South Bronx.

The children attending the inner city school were confronted with life issues at an early age. Poor living conditions, broken families, large class sizes, and the lack of public funding created a difficult uphill battle toward getting a good education. Children developed tough skins and learned only to trust and believe in themselves. It didn’t take much time for the students to see right through me. I was an outsider who came into their world for only a short time before returning to the comforts of my own apartment. Why should they listen to me? What was I going to do if they didn’t listen to me? How was learning science going to get them out of the ghetto they were living in? They were blunt when they asked me these questions and I was taken off guard with their boldness. I remember telling a student that she was tardy to class. She responded, “I’m not retarded,” “No, I said you were tardy, late.” “Mr. H, you have to quit using them white words.” When I told another student to sit in his seat he responded with, “Or what, what are you going to do?” I stuttered, unable to respond. Contrary to common belief, I found the school to be a very safe environment. I never felt threatened or afraid. Instead of being reserved, the students were open with their sentiments. If students were upset about something I graded or taught they would yell and swear at me, but in the end they would accept what was done in class. For some reason I perceived this as a healthier alternative to the other extreme in which students retain their hate or fear to the point of violence and bringing weapons to school.

Without question, teaching in the inner city was the most difficult of my continuous learning experiences. The South Bronx taught me to think one step ahead of the students. I needed to give consequences with my directions. “If this assignment is not turned in tomorrow, you will earn a zero.” “Please stop talking, or I will move your seat.” I also learned how important it is to plan every minute of class time. Most of the problems I had with discipline resulted from the few minutes of down time before class started, while handing back papers, or after quizzes and tests.

These experiences taught me to acknowledge the talents and the backgrounds of the students I teach, individualize instruction, and recognize the lives we have outside of school. We are all human. Planning and running a well-managed classroom proved to be vitally important. All of these lessons have molded my style of teaching into what it is today.

I doubt that I would have learned these lessons by teaching in one classroom. Besides, I was able to see the world and to meet my wife, another volunteer in Nepal. Now I am able to share stories and photos with my students to help open their eyes to the expanse and diversity of the world that we live in. The early years of my teaching career gave me a store of continuous learning to last a lifetime.

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Capital Records.

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To learn more about the cultural immersion project on the Navajo Indian Reservation and around the world visit http://www.indiana.edu/~cultural/

To learn about the Peace Corps, becoming a volunteer, and the Fellows program available after service visit http://www.peacecorps.gov/
Under The Blue Sky

By Elizabeth Keroack

In a recent Boston Globe travel piece entitled “Feeling Out of This World,” Tom Haines captured the reasons for my interest in travel when he wrote, “We each have our own rooms of experience, and it is in entering other people’s rooms, or pulling on the locked doors of those we cannot enter, that our own experience deepens.” Travel has the unique capacity to act as a window to the world we do not know and as a mirror reflecting the one we do.

During the past summer, my husband and I traveled to China with a group of other district and school administrators through the auspices of Primary Source of Watertown, Massachusetts, a non-profit organization whose mission it is to ensure that the K-12 curriculum is inclusive of multiple perspectives and underrepresented peoples. We discovered what other travelers to China have known for centuries— that China is enormously complex in its history, traditions, culture, politics, and growth. Today, it has one foot in the twenty-first century and another in the late nineteenth. The country is a world of contradictions: cars in Beijing number 5 million and bicycles 9 million, with cars and traffic jams in ascendancy; Gucci stores co-exist across the street from ancient city walls; hutongs or old neighborhood warrens are being phased out of existence in favor of high rises in preparation for the Olympics of 2008. But while our tour group played traditional tourists at Beijing’s Forbidden City and Summer Palace, Xi’an’s terracotta warriors, Shanghai’s The Bund, and the country’s Great Wall, for me the most memorable experiences of the trip were our meetings with Beijing education officials and migrant school administrators and our visits to two city experimental schools and one village school.

Education in Beijing

As an introduction to the Beijing educational system, our group of superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, curriculum directors and spouses and friends met in city offices with officials of the Beijing Municipal Education Commission. After 22-hours of plane rides and initial exposure to the overwhelming city heat, I was delighted to sit in an air-conditioned conference room for a couple of hours to listen to educational rhetoric. (However, had the visit with officials occurred later

During the translated exchange, we learned that there is a standard curriculum in the Beijing public schools that is decided upon by a commission similar to our DOE, yet city districts can decide upon the texts to be used to deliver the curriculum. Schooling begins for Chinese children at age 6; throughout their school years they typically experience class sizes that average between 50 and 60 students. Elementary schools offer specialized programs; middle schools offer the equivalent of our community college programs, and high schools the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree. The goal of the system is preparing students for entrance into university, which
is a highly competitive enterprise dependent upon exam scores.

While America struggles with the achievement gap between ethnicities, races, and genders, China identifies the challenge of the gap between what rural and urban schools are capable of offering students. The Chinese government seeks to stabilize rural education teams by offering them incentives to stay in rural areas rather than to defect to the cities where life is faster and salaries better. “The dragon head of educational reform is curriculum reform,” one of the officials told us, adding that that the Chinese are now experimenting with adding more creativity to the curriculum in the hope that it will improve the quality of teacher/student interaction and, ultimately, achievement. The Beijing contingent is exploring how to advance educational leadership through professional development. Interestingly, 50% of Beijing’s school leaders are women, as was the senior education official who met with us.

For our visit to an experimental middle school in Beijing, we were led to a well-outfitted conference room where we enjoyed fresh flowers, fruits, tea, soft drinks, nuts and a formal greeting by the principal. A subsequent tour of the building--five non-handicapped accessible floors--concluded in its science observatory. The school enjoyed a certain celebrity status, as pictures of many distinguished visitors, including former astronauts, graced its exhibition area. We learned that the government and successful alumni are supportive of the school with both energy and money. This was similar to the support given to the second middle school we visited further into the trip. Suzhou Middle School Number 1, the largest in the city of 5 million people, serves 10,000 students with 1000 teachers in an impressive and modern campus setting.

There we had the opportunity to meet with students who spoke about long hours of homework and a school day that lasts until 5:00 PM.

**Village Life**

A two-hour bus trip out of Xi’an over washboard roads led us to the village of Pangliu, a village of 7200 residents with whom Primary Source has a community service relationship. There we were greeted by an amazing fanfare of children, adults, elders, and animals who lined the streets leading from the bus to the village center. Flags were waved, instruments were played. We felt like royalty as we walked to the school library to be feted by village officials and the school principal. After seeing the new library and computer room, which was still awaiting its connection to the Internet, we learned that the classrooms and dorms for students and teachers had just recently had heating installed, though the winters are similar in temperature to those of our own.

After short student performances in the blazing sun and stifling humidity were completed, we dispersed in groups of five to peasant homes to have an authentic village meal. That meal in a simple peasant dwelling cooked by the farmer’s wife and daughter in an outside oven was the culinary and cultural highlight of China. Fortunate to have with us Shiping Zheng, Professor of Political Science at Bentley College, the five of us from the tour were able to converse with the peasant farmer and his family through Shiping’s seamless translations. We learned that many of the spicy Sichuan vegetable dishes on the table came from the bounty of the peasant’s own cultivated field. With an annual average income of only 9840 Yuan ($1200/year), the villagers with whom we lunched were provided a small subsidy to allow them to provide us a meal of unparalleled generosity.

Following lunch, we trekked out to the fields to see the brickyard. The brickyard profits of 1 cent a brick mark the entrepreneurial means by which the village supports itself. The brickyard consists of open mud pits. Workers use a small bulldozer to bring mud up and into the extruding machine, which compacts the red clay into formed bricks. Those are then loaded onto pallets, which are in turn loaded onto two-wheeled carts strapped to the

The family resides in the Beijing landfill … sometimes the bus that picks up the children doesn’t know where to stop because the refuse piles shift.
backs of middle-aged women who bring the bricks out to the field to dry. That day was one of the hottest of the trip, with temperatures approaching 100 degrees Fahrenheit and 90% humidity. A middle-aged woman myself, I was well protected by 45 strength sunscreen, sunglasses, a hat, good sneakers, and a cold pack around my neck, yet it was a physical trial to stand for 10 minutes in a field to pay homage to the industriousness of a village proud of its 50 year old school and its recent sponsorship of 8 students to the university.

The Migrant School

But perhaps the most moving school interaction wasn’t a visit to any school but a visit to our Beijing hotel by the principal of a Beijing migrant school. With him came one school board member, one teacher, and four students from one family. Unfortunately, we couldn’t visit the actual school because the school has moved three times in four years due to funding difficulties. Still, the current 100-room school has 35 teachers serving 1000 students from 15 provinces; these students live within 10 kilometers of the school. A non-profit school that operates completely with donated equipment, the school has only recently received monetary support from the government because of its growing national and international publicity.

Why is the Beijing migrant school so special? Because it serves the disenfranchised, 1000 of the 10 million migrant children whose parents do not have residency permits because their move to the cities without job prospects and skills means they cannot support a permanent address. The four children from one family who came with the principal—a girl 13, two twin girls ten and a boy eight (whose nickname translated to “little surplus”)—defy the “one child policy” because of their peasant status. Their middle-aged parents include a father who is an amputee and mother with severe vision problems. Of great import is the fact that the family resides in the Beijing landfill (yes, they live in the city dump) and that sometimes the bus that picks up the children doesn’t know where to stop because the refuse piles shift. When the children are not in school, they help their parents pick through the garbage to shelter, feed, and clothe the family as well to make a small profit. When asked what they liked best about school, the elder girl replied, after a long, thoughtful pause, “We love our principal and teachers because they teach us and don’t beat us.” To see their faces when they were presented with individual gifts of school supplies was humbling.

After the meeting, we moved from the conference room to lunch in the hotel restaurant. There we noticed that the children were not taking food from the lazy susan in the middle of the table. Only when we put generous helpings of each dish onto their plates did they feel free to eat. The children’s behavior was easily explained by their teacher who informed us that this was a morning of “firsts” for them— the first time they had met Westerners, the first time they had been in a hotel and hotel elevator, the first time they had eaten in a restaurant. Little wonder they seemed shy. Surprising to all of us educators was the different but mandatory tuition charged per student for all students who attend public school throughout China. Even though the migrant family is unable to afford the 400-yuan per semester (elementary) and 600-yuan per semester (middle) tuitions for the school, the children attend through the sponsorship of scholarships. Interestingly, their teachers hadn’t been paid for two months, and they are not paid well at the outset because most of them have only a middle school education. Yet they are dedicated to their charges, as is their principal and the supportive board member who epitomized the challenge of educating migrant children when she told us, “Once these children come into the world, they should be treated equally.”
Cultural Understanding

Of 1.3 billion people in China, 360 million are children. Of that number, 250 million reside in the countryside rather than in urban centers. These children represent the future of China and the future of the world. If there is power in their number, there is also power in their rich history and industriousness. China, that once slumbering power, has definitely awakened and, for good or for ill, has been touched by the “breath of the West” (Eileen Gouge in *Golden Lilacs*). We have much to learn from what that country has been and what it is becoming. Though America’s educational infrastructures and legal supports are clearly more highly developed than China’s, both countries must focus on their commitment to their children. Perhaps one day, through visits like this one, diverse cultures can begin to understand the closing comment of the board member of the migrant school: “We are really all the same under the blue sky.”

My Transformative Summer Vacation

By Christine Power

In my circle of friends, the first hint of spring usually sets off a frenzy of vacation planning. They spend hours poring over travel brochures, guidebooks, and Internet reviews in a quest to plan a worthwhile summer holiday. By May, plane tickets are purchased and hotels are booked. For most of them, Ireland, Italy, the Rocky Mountains and Mexico are just a few weeks away.

Choosing a Vacation Destination

Married to a fellow history teacher, I’ve always found it easy to fuse my summer vacation with my secondary social studies curriculum. For years, our vacations included a visit to at least one historic landmark to peruse obscure museum shops for curriculum supplements. At the end of the trip we would find ourselves transporting unusual books, pictures, and other artifacts home for classroom use. What made last spring different for me was that I wanted to plan a vacation that would actually transform, rather than embellish, my teaching. I knew that this task could not be accomplished simply by jumping on a plane, instead I had to take on the most arduous journey of them all--one of self-reflection and evaluation.

Making the Itinerary

Years ago, during my third or fourth year of teaching, I began reflecting upon my educational practice. Having mastered the pitfalls that commonly derail new teachers such as classroom discipline and paperwork management, I focused on my effectiveness as a teacher, specifically, my ability to promote student understanding.
After much reflection, I could see that I was plunging my students into a time warp. During a 50-minute class, my students relived the teaching methods used in the Reagan Era when I was a high school student. I depended on lectures, notes and documentaries. The homework I assigned was comprised of chapter questions out of the textbook or, even worse, photocopied worksheets. I was educating my twenty-first century students in a twentieth century manner.

During the next few years, by attending workshops and conferences and taking a leave of absence to pursue a graduate degree, I began to improve as an educator. I was drawn to the latest in educational research and inspired by the impact of recent innovations in educational technology and curriculum design, particularly the Teaching for Understanding model created at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I grew excited about the work of Richard Murnane and Frank Levy, authors of Teaching the New Basic Skills and the research emanating from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills organization, both of which focus on encouraging the development of basic skills needed in the current century.

Throughout this period, the pragmatist in me grew concerned that, although I was inspired by a variety of theories, I would not be able to apply them in a real world context. Although I had only been a teacher for a few years at the time, I found that most professional development programs possess an inherent disconnect between theory and practice. My reservations were quelled when I began to assist in the development and implementation of an innovative professional development program in MetroWest Boston called LIFT² (Leadership Initiatives for Teaching and Technology).

The LIFT² program aims to improve education in secondary science and math classrooms. The program is unique in its fusion of online learning, summer externships in business and industry, technology instruction, and a focus on curriculum development that encourages student understanding. The hybrid format of online and face-to-face instruction was what captured my interest. On a weekly basis, I witnessed how regular online interaction could support classroom instruction. The flexibility of the online program allowed learners to move beyond the time/space/resource confines of the classroom. The impact on the participants was amazing!

I realized how I could best serve students in my history classes -- technology could bring the graduate school theories swirling in my head into reality. I grew excited with the thought of no longer being a slave to the end of period bells or dated materials in my classroom. I grew giddy with the thought of the multimedia visuals and in-depth discussion forums possible with the use of the Internet and with the thought of introducing problem based learning simulations and interactive learning games. I realized that a teacher created website could be the answer to my dreams--but unfortunately I had absolutely no knowledge of web design.

Setting off on the Journey

Deciding to begin where I was most comfortable, I put the frightening thought of web design on the back burner, and I tackled the daunting task of curriculum design. Each day I sat at my desk and reminded myself that I needed to break away from my comfortable 1980’s style of teaching that would focus on "covering the topic." Student understanding had to be the central focus of my design.

The mission of the Massachusetts Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is to promote quality teaching and learning in Massachusetts by fostering instructional and curriculum leadership. The purpose of MASCD Perspectives is to share diverse experiences and perspectives of educators across the Commonwealth and to stimulate discussion and further thought on educational topics relevant to this mission.
I wanted to plan a vacation that would actually transform, rather than embellish, my teaching.

As the mercury rose and fell during the month of June, so did my frustration with my summer project. The more that I focused on student-centered curriculum, the more I realized how little I could salvage from my early days of teaching. In order to truly revolutionize my teaching, I had to start anew. More than once I walked away from my laptop, frustrated that I wasn’t closer to attaining my goal; I was also jealous of the escapades of my fellow vacationing teachers. Surely they weren’t spending weeks agonizing over performances of understanding and generative topics! By early July, the air in my non-climate-controlled house was saturated with mid-summer humidity and the heavy stench of defeat and remorse. I found myself questioning my decision to spend my summer in such a torturous manner when suddenly, on a hazy, humid, July afternoon in Massachusetts, the ideas began to flow. My courses began to take form.

By the end of the month, I had created a base curriculum using a technology-infused Teaching for Understanding model. Instead of being mere recipients of information, the students would use technology as a tool to create their own learning environment. I created units that required students to learn how to use various software programs and hardware such as digital cameras and projection devices. For example, one project was a digital photo essay where students became photojournalists to compare their community to one in Ancient Rome. Another unit called for a student created web quest, where the students would create Internet web pages focusing on the Medieval Crusades. Besides being a learning experience for my current students, I could see that the web quest would also be educational tool for my future students. These projects would not only enrich time periods too remote for my millennial students to relate to, they would prompt them to be proactive in their learning and give them a true voice in each project’s final outcome. I planned to require community involvement called The Good Citizen Project, requiring students to take their learning outside of the classroom in the form of community service, political involvement or letters to local media and prominent leaders. For years, I had struggled with the dilemma of how to bridge students’ classroom experience with their community. Now I could use technology to solve the time, space, and resource issues I faced in the classroom.

By August, I had developed a series of technology-infused units without a manner in which to convey them to my students. Time was running out, and I was forced to tackle the most difficult aspect of my summer journey—the creation of an online environment to encourage meaningful learning inside and outside of the classroom. As I had witnessed in the LIFT program, an online environment not only promotes meaningful learning outside of the classroom, it also develops online literacy—a skill integral to survival in the 21st century.

Although I was stressed by my ignorance of web design, I found solace in the tranquil, air-conditioned confines of my local public library. There I found the well-worn web design book that would shepherd me through the final weeks of my summer vacation. Through a process of trial and error, I was soon able to create a rudimentary web page. Bolstered by my initial success and the fear that my project would not be ready by the opening day of school, I worked tirelessly to convert my designs into a web format. The excitement of seeing my web page grow sustained me through the waning days of August and, by September, my web page—www.powerofhistory.com—was a reality. On Labor Day weekend, my husband and I celebrated on Cape Cod—I, happy to see the completion of my summer project, and he, happy to have his wife back.

Reflecting upon the Journey

Although I did not visit an exotic locale or experience an unusual culture, this vacation time was one that I will long remember. The weeks spent away from my classroom allowed me to design changes to improve my future work. They provided me the opportunity to become a student again, inspiring me to conduct classroom research, to explore the intricacies of effective lesson design, and to learn the intricacies of web design.
I continue to develop my knowledge as I learn along with my students. The students give me feedback on the effectiveness of a unit and submit suggestions to improve projects for the future. More important, they witness my desire to continue to learn long after my traditional schooling has ended.

I realize now that my personal journey was unusual and not typical in education. With the intense pressures placed on teachers today, I cannot blame most for enjoying the eight-week respite they rightly deserve. However, administrators and school districts can be catalysts to inspire teachers to embark on enriching summer improvement experiences. Although the most obvious enticement would take the form of district- or school-sponsored paid professional development opportunities, other non-monetary incentives are possible. Something as simple as positive feedback and acknowledgment from the administration does wonders to inspire teachers to perform to the greatest of their abilities.

With the warmer weather around the corner, I will once again be bombarded with enticing vacation opportunities. The UK? Perhaps. Italy? Maybe. A summer course? Possibly. Whatever I choose to do after looking at the glossy travel and educational brochures, my experiences of last summer have profoundly changed me. Although summer vacation is viewed nearly universally as period of personal renewal, I see it now as a period of professional renewal as well.

Christine Power has taught social studies at Medfield High School in Medfield, Massachusetts since 1997. In addition, she is a coach for the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s WIDE World online professional development program. Christine can be reached at Christine_power@post.harvard.edu.

No Teacher Left Behind

By Lynn Ditchfield

As an educator for the past 34 years, I have come to believe that being a lifelong learner is the key to staying enthusiastic, to stimulating intellectual curiosity, to bringing creativity to the classroom, and to remaining empathetic as a teacher. I have only recently realized that a teacher’s professional development can have a profound impact on school culture, community development, and the progress of the field of education. Looking in the mirror and noticing every gray hair and the new lines forming on my face, I contemplated the question: What do I want to be when I grow up? Most of my adult life I had been an educator, and most of that time I had spent in one school. Was I stuck? Was I in crisis? I couldn’t just leave and become something else. I had invested my life in the profession but suddenly I was questioning my level of satisfaction.

For many years I had taken courses, workshops, institutes and seminars. I had received grants to attend wonderful programs and spent a semester as a Fulbright Exchange teacher in Argentina. Each experience was more stimulating than the next. I managed to share new knowledge through workshops or presentations or by organizing cultural exchanges and correspondence. But suddenly I felt swallowed up by what I perceived as a backwards trend in education. Emphasis on high-stakes testing was gnawing away at creativity in the classroom.

Sabbaticals need to be a common practice rather than a privilege.
Challenging national teacher standards and frameworks were being crushed by what I saw as meaningless measurements. I began to feel that education was being associated with a band of automaton disciplinarians programmed to teach to a standardized test. I felt trapped in educational neverland.

Finding a Path

In an attempt to center myself, I looked to my past for the answers. My passion for theater started early on and peaked from 1970-1975 when I was part of a professional women’s improvisational theater troupe in Washington, DC. Part of our mission was to do educational workshops and theater exercises with a variety of community groups. It was the time of guerilla theater, social change, and innovation in the arts. It was exciting to be active and creative during that boom time in grass roots theater. I continued to do community theater, and directed a children’s theater group for years after my family and I moved to Martha’s Vineyard in 1981.

For many years I tried to weave creative approaches through theater and the arts into language learning in my high school Spanish classes. My students learn more and are actively engaged in learning when they are encouraged to express their voice through creative projects like making a film, performing and writing a play, writing poetry and stories, painting murals or constructing a piece of their own creative design. As a teacher and learner, I also feel energized by creative activities. Finally I identified my need to go back to my passion in the creative arts. Being an educator during times such as these requires maintaining a clear vision despite the restrictive atmosphere. My vision had become clouded.

With coaxing from my husband, who got tired of hearing about my disillusionment with the direction of the field of education, I applied for a sabbatical and began to research advanced degree programs. I found the ideal course of study at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in the Arts in Education Program.

Emphasis on high-stakes testing was gnawing away at creativity in the classroom. I felt trapped in educational neverland.

Back to School

This was the first time in my life that I could immerse myself in my studies. I had completed my first master’s degree while working and raising children. I remember typing out research papers in ten-minute spurts between diaper changes. Now I was on sabbatical and my children were grown. My only responsibility was to make the gigantic payments for school worthwhile. It was both exhilarating and daunting. Brilliant and charismatic professors making profound changes in the field of education were available to me. Jessica Hoffman Davis, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Eleanor Duckworth, Gilberto Conchas, Pedro Noguera, and Steve Seidel became my mentor teachers. The other students were stimulating and working on fascinating projects in education. I was being challenged constantly. After the initial shock, I loved it.

One of the challenges for me was age. The average age of the graduate students was 29, and I was 56. Because of my years of experience, I understood concepts differently than my younger colleagues. Sometimes this vantage point made me tenaciously skeptical of ideas that seemed too theoretical and removed from day to day experience in the classroom. In time, however, through discussions, debates, and study, I was able to apply the theories to my practice. For example, by enlisting the help of former students and several professors, I wrote a case study with accompanying video showing how theater and film can be used as an effective strategy to counter the high dropout rate among Latino students in the US.
I needed the challenge of immersion and reflection to get me “unstuck.” I was hungry for the intellectual climate, and eager to grapple with people at the forefront of educational innovation and visioning. I was ready to reconnect with the essence of learning and teaching that had originally drawn me to the field.

As an older student I was also able to reflect on years of practice while learning new technologies and new contexts. I read in that year more than I have read in a decade. I wrote papers, and journals, fieldwork reflections, social science portraits, and case studies based in qualitative and quantitative research. I savored the works of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Maxine Greene and related work I had done in my classroom to their philosophies and current research. My perspective broadened. I examined the gestalt of education. I studied with people of all ages and nationalities and felt wiser and honored by their appreciation of the experience I offered. I felt nurtured and valued. I surrounded myself with professors and students committed to social change, progressive education, and promotion of the arts as the soul of learning. I began to recognize the significance of my own experience and to reflect more deeply on what was important for me as a person and for the field of education.

**Sharing My Expertise**

Coming back to the life of a classroom teacher was not easy. It was hard to return to the role of nurturer after being on the other side. Like my colleagues I soon found bags under my eyes. Although I had slept fewer hours as a student, spending several “all-nighters” to write papers and prepare readings, my days were far more draining and exhausting as a teacher. By second semester I needed to find a way to share what I had learned, to break the isolation characteristic of our profession, and to make a connection with teachers who were seeking new directions. Fortunately, at the same time, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction planned to initiate a new program of graduate courses for Island teachers through Fitchburg State College. I agreed to offer a course entitled *Critical and Creative Integration of Media and the Arts in the General Curriculum*.

The course was demanding. I got permission from Jessica Hoffman Davis, the director of the Arts in Education Program at Harvard, to model my course after hers because I had found it to be inspirational. I incorporated arts and media related exercises in each class from my stash of activities that had worked well in my classroom. Community artists came to class to address one of the four themes of the course: (1) What is art? What is an artist? What is voice, agency, identity; (2) How do the arts foster learning in the schools? (3) What is the impact of the arts in the school and the community? (4) What is the impact of the arts on society? Assignments included regular journal and creative process folio reflections on the readings and class discussions, presentations, and final written projects.

The eight teachers who took the course were dynamic women. They were a mixture of new and veteran teachers, first grade to high school teachers, special needs to world language teachers, arts and non-arts teachers, African American, Latino and white teachers, all diverse but united in our passion to advocate for the integration of the arts in the curriculum. During the twelfth and final week of the course I sat for hours engrossed in their final papers. Their observations were the reflections of educators struggling for new ways to enhance the curriculum and make a contribution to the community and the field.
Each teacher found a different way to ground the theories and readings in her own classroom practice. Three teachers wrote grant proposals for a community wide arts council, a museum within the school, and a Capoeira (a Brazilian martial art and dance) academy that would be offered as an after-school program. Three teachers wrote observations to be developed for publication in periodicals. As research practitioners they examined the impact of visual thinking strategies with teens, digital storytelling and life river theater exercises for a special needs class, and the use of drawing images with writing tasks for first graders. Two students wrote a proposal designing an evening of the arts celebration that they will organize in their elementary school. Reading these projects was energizing. I witnessed the depth and value of our time together. Our group plans to continue meeting informally to encourage each other’s ideas. We are also making a display of some of the work created during the course to exhibit in the schools. Next year I hope to get a grant to film the teachers in action working with mentor community artists and scholars to inspire other teachers to integrate the arts.

Until the next existential crisis, I feel satisfied and grateful to be part of a vibrant and ever changing profession. I see that my own journey of seeking professional development was one link in a long chain with potential impact for many. I am thankful too that I had the opportunity to take a sabbatical, and I realize that sabbaticals need to be common practice rather than a privilege. Professional development for teachers is an investment in our youth.

Lynn Ditchfield chairs the Department of World Languages and teaches Spanish at Martha’s Vineyard Regional High School. She recently finished her second master’s degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, focusing on the Arts in Education Program. She has produced and directed bilingual plays, a soap opera, and a film. She has also served as a Fulbright Exchange teacher in Argentina.

For further information on the continuous learning offered through the Harvard Graduate School of Education, go to www.gse.harvard.edu or call 617 495-3414.

For further information on the Fulbright Program, go to http://www.iie.org or call 212 883-8200.

MCAS, Rubrics, and Writing

By Pam Shirkoff

What do the singer Madonna and I have in common with respect to our 2004 summer plans? We both spent four days at the Worcester Centrum during the last week of June. While the “Material Girl” was singing to her fans each night, I spent each day gathering useful writing material and strategies to bring back to my fifth grade classroom as I attended a workshop to learn to score the 2004 MCAS Seventh Grade Writing Test.

The scoring institute was a way for me to learn first hand how the state scores MCAS, and, in particular, how student writing is evaluated. In March of 2004, when my seventh grade son began taking the MCAS, I was applying to the Massachusetts Department of Education to learn to score the test. I realized with some irony that the spectrum of emotion I was feeling about scoring the test likely paralleled the way my son felt when he took the test. In a way, I would be experiencing the same test; only I would be on the other side of the table.
Meeting at the Centrum

The third floor of the Worcester Centrum was a myriad of activity. Some people were talking in small groups, while others were waiting in line to pick up materials or get coffee. Some were simply staring out the large glass windows into the sunlight, perhaps dreaming of a lost day at the beach. I followed the flow of people to a sign-in table, where I received my nametag and table number, and then found a seat in the auditorium. After some opening remarks, we were instructed to find our table number in one of three large rooms, clearly labeled by grade in the brightest lime green color. After shuffling into the room with the approximately 400 other teachers assigned to score the seventh-grade writing test, I found myself sitting at a table with eight middle school English teachers from across the state. Our table leader was from Wilmington, and other scorers were from Wellesley, Woburn, Pepperell, Somerville, and Waltham. None of us had ever been involved in the MCAS scoring process, so we would be learning the monumental task together. Only our table leader had previously scored seventh grade MCAS writing. He did an excellent job motivating and inspiring our group, effectively setting the tone for our work. We were committed to our serious task, but we had many opportunities to share a laugh during the four days of the institute.

Anchor Papers and the Task at Hand

We spent the first two days learning how to evaluate the students’ writing in an unbiased, non-judgmental way. First we were presented with a group of “anchor papers”, student writing which represented scores from 1 to 6; a “6” paper was excellent; a “1” paper needed significant improvement. The anchor papers were chosen because they modeled writing at each scoring level based on clear evaluation rubrics. The packet of anchor papers included samples of writing at the high and low end of each level, allowing us to differentiate further between papers. We discussed the criteria for earning a score at each level. Through these discussions of anchor papers and the scoring criteria for each level, we learned to assign scores based on similar writing characteristics. Scorers were able to compare ratings and discuss why we rated a writing sample the way we did. Our table leader had a correct score for each piece, and the scorer was deemed successful if the rating was within one numeric differential from the “correct” score. As we re-read the anchor papers daily, to remind ourselves of the characteristics of each level of writing, we became more confident of our individual evaluations of the writing samples. The work was both challenging and informative. Like any new endeavor, the new information presented on the first days seemed overwhelming at times, but I quickly found myself adapting to the schema of evaluation. Scoring MCAS was a new process for everyone, I kept telling myself, and we would make mistakes, but ultimately, we would all become more effective scorers.

The institute provided me with specific examples of what makes good MCAS writing, and I began to see how the experience was going to help me in my own fifth grade classroom. I became more aware of common elements of excellent writing worthy of the highest emotion.

I realized with some irony that the spectrum of emotion I was feeling about scoring the test likely paralleled the way my son felt when he took the test.
scores – supporting details, greater length, rich vocabulary, the value of using similes and metaphors. I saw that the better student writers sometimes quoted a famous person or applied their writing to real world lessons. Students also scored well if their supporting details included personal experience. I recall one paper from a student whose goal was to become an obstetrician. The paper began with “It’s a boy!” The student then wrote an imagined personal narrative about what it would be like to realize her future goal before taking the reader back to the present. The writing was clever and creatively written and scored a “6”, the highest rating. In scoring the essays, I garnered a concrete list of writing elements that I would use to improve the writing of all of my students regardless of their abilities.

Summer Learning and Implementation

Driving away from the scoring institute each evening, I thought about how I was going to implement what I had learned when I returned to my classroom. When September arrived, I was energized to work toward my goal of improving student writing. My first priority was going to be to provide my students with models of writing at all levels that they themselves could rank. I have found that many of my fifth graders write at a skeletal level, with very few supporting details to back up what they have to say. They write general statements but do not expand on them for clarification. The summer institute helped me to guide my students to extract supporting details from models of stronger writing; my students have improved in solidifying and explaining their writing through the use of examples. As a class, we talk about a rubric for an assignment and evaluate two or three anonymous pieces of student writing. We discuss what makes one piece of writing better than another. We develop sentence length and variety. We practice using conjunctions or transition words to combine two short sentences into one longer sentence. I incorporate the important elements of writing into the students’ focus correction areas, their special target goals for their piece of writing. As I model writing on the overhead, I verbalize my thought processes. I want my students to realize that writing is a process that takes revision and is not completed on the first draft. All of these ideas take time and perseverance, but, after experiencing the MCAS Scoring Institute, good writing instruction seems more concrete and attainable.

RESOURCES

For additional resources to guide the continuous learning of educators, go to ASCD.org.

You’ll find resources to help improve schools, support teaching, raise achievement, and enhance learning. Among ASCD’s newest resources are these:


Gabriel, John G. How to Thrive as a Teacher Leader.


Kobrin, David. In There with the Kids, 2nd Edition: Crafting Lessons that Connect with Students.

Littky, Dennis with Grabelle, Samantha. The Big Picture: Education is Everyone’s Business.

Marzano, Robert J. Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement: Research on What Works in Schools.


November 2005
SUSTAINING EDUCATORS

1. What makes a good workplace for adults? What working conditions promote professionalism?
2. What sustains educators through various stages of their careers?
3. How do we support and retain those who are new to the profession?
4. What does “collegial” look like in action?
5. How do we create collaborative cultures that support adult and student learning?
6. What is the role of communities in helping to sustain educators?
7. How can educators reflect on their practice with each other in non-judgmental and supportive ways?

January 2006
MOTIVATING STUDENTS

1. How do we help students to envision their futures?
2. How do we promote a better understanding of learning styles – by students about themselves and by teachers about students?
3. How do we improve our work with parents to break down barriers to student success?
4. What is the effect of the school calendar on student motivation?
5. How do we integrate/build student interests/voice into the curriculum?
6. How do we make our schools and curriculum relevant to students’ experiences?
7. How does cultural proficiency support student motivation?

Call for Articles
MASCD is calling for articles for its November and January issues of Perspectives. All Massachusetts educators are invited to contribute articles. Articles should address the designated theme and one or more of the focus questions for that theme. Should you wish to contribute an article to an upcoming issue of Perspectives, contact Elaine M. Pace, Publications Chair, at epace614@adelphia.net.

Join the Next Generation of School Leaders
# MASCD Programs

Visit mascd.org for details and registration!

## Literacy Alive: In, With and Through the Arts

**Dynamic Strategies for Classroom Teachers K-6**
Lesley-MASCD-Young Audiences Institute at Lesley University, Cambridge
July 12-13, 2005

## Fall, Winter and Spring Institutes

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<td>Sheltered English Immersion</td>
<td>Jen Soalt, Teachers21</td>
<td>October 14 &amp; 28, 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping Learning Communities</td>
<td>Jill Mirman, Teachers 21</td>
<td>January 13 &amp; 27, 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transforming Learning Communities</td>
<td>Matt King, Teachers21</td>
<td>March 10 &amp; 24, 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walk Throughs</td>
<td>Peg Mongiello &amp; Jerry Goldberg, Teachers21</td>
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<td>Peer Coaching for Teacher Leaders</td>
<td>Lyndy Johnson, Teachers21</td>
<td>January 18 &amp; February 1, 2006</td>
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## Dine & Discuss

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<td>Reality Check: The Principalship</td>
<td>October 19, 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fit for Learning: A Call to Action</td>
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All Dine & Discuss events are $25 members / $50 non-members

## Mentor Award

MASCD is pleased to announce that two teachers have earned the 2005 Mentor Award:

Shelley Blanchard, Special Education teacher at Massachusetts Hospital School, Canton
Desdie W. Eberman, Grade 8 Social Studies teacher at South Middle School, Braintree

The award recipients will be profiled in the fall issue of Perspectives.
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