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What We Bring of Ourselves to our Teaching

Wendy Hampson, Graduate Program in Psychology
and CST Graduate Teaching Associate

"Hi, my name is Wendy Hampson." That's my usual introduction when I meet somebody new. Depending on the situation however, what follows might be one or several of the following descriptors. I'm a graduate student, I'm training to be a clinical psychologist, I'm from the Caribbean, I'm a runner, I have a shoe fetish, I'm an extrovert, I love the color red. Of course I could go on and on.

I've listed these descriptors in order to demonstrate that we are all complex and multi-faceted, with a plethora of past experiences, skills, and preferences that make us unique individuals. Some of you may be wondering, how this relates to teaching? Well, let me explain. For this TA issue of Core, I developed the following three-part theme:

1. What is your background (e.g. identities, ethnicity, family, personal experiences)?
2. How does your background impact on how you learn to teach?
3. How do the answers to the two previous points influence you when you teach?

The idea for this theme began as I thought about the teachers who have had the greatest impact on me and who had inspired me to want to teach. These teachers differed in their teaching style, age, gender and ethnicity. Yet despite their differences, they all shared one commonality. They were great teachers!

This led me to question why I thought they taught better than other teachers. Eventually I came to the conclusion that these great teachers had effectively used their backgrounds, experiences, passions and views of the world in their teaching. Some may argue that bringing your own views and experiences into your teaching isn't unique; in fact, it can be argued that it is almost impossible to avoid. But what I realized about these excellent teachers was that they were able to use their unique backgrounds to bring the content of their subject to life, to connect it to themselves and thus allow me to connect with, and find my own meaning from the content. These great teachers helped me to mediate my connection to and understanding of the course content.

The first teacher that I remember who made this connection for me was my grade four teacher, Mr. Deon. His love of ancient civilizations and prehistory was infectious. Today, because of his influence, they are still interests of mine. Mr. Deon's passion and creativity were reflected in his unusual ideas for class assignments. For example, while doing a unit on ancient Rome, we elected a class Senate and put on a production of Julius Cesar for the school. Mr. Deon's love for teaching and his ability to impart his own personal love of the material inspired me to teach.

In more recent years I had the opportunity to attend classes taught by my supervisor, Harvey Mandel, as his TA. I think I learned more about Abnormal Psychology in his

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TA issue

is made possible through the combined support of CUPE Local 3903 and the Centre for the Support of Teaching

In this issue

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class than I did when I took it as an undergraduate. Professor Mandel's ability to effectively use personal stories and experiences in his teaching brought the subject to life, giving a face to the many disorders discussed. His sense of humour was instrumental in helping to alleviate the inevitable feelings of discomfort experienced by students because of the nature of some of the lecture topics. He allowed students to appreciate the challenges of the people diagnosed with these disorders, while at the same time maintaining a sense of their humanity.

During the past year in my position as one of the Graduate Teaching Associates for the Centre for the Support of Teaching, I've seen, heard about and read many examples of good teaching practice. I have had an opportunity to talk with many TAs who are, like me, teachers in training. Many of those conversations have focussed on pedagogical skills and how we can fine-tune them to better fit our own style of teaching. My teaching experiences have been in the discipline of psychology. It's a subject that lends itself easily to personal anecdotes, jokes and references to my own experiences of the world of human behavior, thought and emotion. However, I also believe that even if I were teaching statistics or physics, the unique aspects of my background would still emerge and serve as a way to connect the students with the content.

As teachers we serve as agents to help motivate our students' interest and desire to learn. One of the ways we accomplish this is by revealing ourselves. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating the revelation of all aspects of our personal lives to our students. In clinical psychology, self-disclosure (revealing personal information to clients) is something that is used cautiously and sparingly. In fact, in our clinical training we are taught that we should only self-disclose if the information will benefit the client. I think that when teaching a similar rule should apply. If some aspect of my experience, background or views about the concept I'm teaching will provide a higher level of insight for the students, then I think its appropriate to mention. I think that this engagement of the students is key to good teaching and I would go so far as to say that its what sets good teachers apart from great teachers. In the pages that follow you will have an opportunity to read articles written by TAs who explore aspects of their unique backgrounds and the impact it has had on them as they learn to teach. I hope that you enjoy this issue and that it causes you to reflect on the unique aspects of your own teaching style.

great teachers had effectively used their backgrounds, experiences, passions and views of the world

"Is this course supposed to turn me into a feminist?": The challenges of teaching Women's Studies

Sabine Hikel, Graduate Program in Political Science

This is the first year that I've been a TA in a women's studies course. Although TAing in political theory for the three years before that definitely equipped me with a variety of pedagogical skills, I was not entirely prepared for some of the challenges of teaching young women about feminism. One of the big challenges is, of course, students' resistance to feminist ideas. However, the biggest challenge has not been to recruit these young women to feminism, or to convince them of the strength of feminist ideas. No, the biggest challenge has been the fact that many times, I agree with my students about their critiques of feminism. When students ask why there are not more positive representations of women or why we don't teach more about women's resistance to oppression, I don't know what to say because these are things that I want from my feminist movement, too.

However, it seems impossible to reveal my sympathy to their position without 1) undermining the professor, 2) having to explain why the women's movement is in the shape it is in, 3) feeling like a traitor to a feminist movement that has benefited me in innumerable ways, and 4) worrying that if I admit my own misgivings and criticisms of the feminist movement, students will throw the baby out with the bathwater and reject feminism altogether. My strategy so far has been to show them that I am listening to their frustrations, regardless of the nature of the complaint. What I have realized is that listening to students must be the starting point of teaching. My teaching motto, borrowed from Linda Briskin, a York professor, is the best piece of teaching advice I have ever received: "start from where the students are." The only way to do this, of course, is to listen to them. Even when the inevitable complaint of male-bashing surfaced in my tutorial, I fought the compulsion to simply tell the students that they were wrong. Instead, I let them know that I was unaware that this had occurred in the course, but I invited them to identify, in tutorial, specific moments of male-bashing so that we could talk about it.

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Being Different as an Enriching Resource

Ayse K. Uskul, Graduate Program in Psychology

Last summer when I heard that I had been given a teaching ticket position in Atkinson to teach personality psychology, many first-time teaching related concerns bombarded my mind; such as which book to choose, how to structure the course, how to get my lectures and power point slides prepared on time. It was going to be my first teaching experience in a classroom filled with 120 students and I was definitely anxious, if not petrified. Part of my alarmed state of mind was rooted in my concerns around how I was going to perform as a teacher who obviously was not a Canadian. I speak English with an accent; I have a limited vocabulary compared to an average Canadian when it comes to topics outside of psychology; I am not very familiar with Canadian political and cultural history; in a nutshell I knew that I was going to be performing in front of a large group of people with whom I did not share a common background. In this piece I will share my experiences of teaching a course as a non-native English speaking non-Canadian person.

I try to make diversity a valuable source for learning

After sorting out the source of my anxiety before I started to teach the course, I decided to tell myself the following: I will feel comfortable in my skin; in who I am, where I come from, and the way I speak English. I told myself that the fact that I am not a perfect speaker of English, that I may not be able to give a course-related example referring to the most well-known rock star in North America, or that I may not find the most appropriate idiom to fit my sentence at a particular moment does not mean that I cannot be a good teacher. In my opinion, a good teacher communicates ideas clearly, creates an environment where students feel valued, contributes to the learning process and fosters understanding of diverse opinions and ways of learning. To reach these goals as a teacher in psychology, being an expert in English idiom use is not essential.

I emphasized something else in my conversations with myself before I started teaching: I wouldn't have been given this teaching position if others thought that I wouldn't be able to fulfill it competently. I also reminded myself that I was a human being like everybody else, and as such, cannot be expected to be perfect in everything I do. And believe me, although it may be a hard lesson, our students will recognize the fact that we are human. So while I was teaching this course, if I made a mistake or didn't understand a word used by a student, I asked them. In my opinion, the fact that they were being asked for input helped the students to own the space to a greater extent and encouraged them to contribute more frequently to class discussions.

My experience has taught me that creating a humane, comfortable, and understanding environment benefits both students and the teacher who may have concerns about language use or lack of familiarity with the culture. Encouraging students on the first day of class to feel free to seek clarification whenever needed was of great help for me and for my students. Similarly, asking for regular feedback about my teaching and the level of clarity of the concepts discussed in class provided valuable ideas for improvement in my teaching and enabled me to address students' concerns early. This feedback from students took the form of a one-minute paper or short feedback questions. I was impressed by the quality of constructive feedback they provided, it helped me to reconsider certain issues in my teaching style and continue with others that they found useful.

Some of my friends who are also international graduate students worry that they may experience some serious language problems once they start teaching, because their students may feel that they have an unfamiliar accent. I believe that if this is a real concern it should be addressed seriously. We all know how frustrating it can be if a teacher cannot communicate his or her ideas clearly to the students. This can be a more serious problem especially for students for whom English is a second language. As a person who strongly believes in the value of asking for feedback, I would definitely recommend talking to a couple of friends or faculty whom you believe would give you sincere feedback on your language use and accent to see if your concern is genuine and if it is one that needs to be addressed. Due to my own concerns in this area, I served as a guest lecturer in other classes and asked for feedback both from students and the course director prior to teaching my own class.

I also suggest that the effective use of visual aids such as slides, films, chalkboards and handouts can be helpful ways of complementing spoken information. Seeing certain words written as we speak can help students figure out how we pronounce them and help then accommodate to our accent. Last, but not least, having a good grasp of the subject matter and having been well prepared for lectures definitely helps you feel more comfortable in the classroom.

I try to make diversity a valuable source for learning by referring to my own cultural background

In my opinion, the fact that York is very multicultural compared to many other post-secondary institutions in Canada makes the lives of not-long-ago-arrived non-Canadian teachers easier. Students don't expect to see white North American teachers and are accepting of diversity. Students themselves are very diverse and those who are new immigrants to the

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Mark in your calendars...

TA DAY
September 2, 2004

A One-Day Conference of Professional Development for Teaching Assistants at York

(Being different... from page 3)

country may even feel more comfortable in the presence of a teacher who shares a similar history with them. In my course, I tried to make diversity a valuable source for learning by referring to my own cultural background and professional experiences as a source of information and used examples that added interest to my teaching. Similarly, I asked students to contribute from their own diverse backgrounds so that being 'different' became a resource for enhancing classroom discussions.

I believe that as a teacher being different from the student body can be enriching and inspiring in a classroom environment rather than a shortcoming. I myself enjoyed bringing new perspectives into my teaching and learning from my students who had so much to contribute to the learning space that we created together. I have a sense now after having this teaching experience that students appreciate teachers who are comfortable with who they are.

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I realized that listening honestly and openly is the moment when teaching becomes truly activist—and feminist. Taking the views of a young woman seriously lets her know that her voice counts. Next term, I hope to learn more about the students' views and in turn to have them learn more about how they can define their own variety of feminism. To facilitate this, I will ask each of them to bring to tutorial songs, books, magazines, or visual images from their lives that they think are feminist. In doing so, I hope to foster a necessary discussion about modes of resistance that are out there, and how we can bring that resistance into our own lives.

Who Am I and How Does It Impact My Teaching?

Greg Kennedy, Graduate Program in History

I remember clearly the sense of heathen joy that filled me as I savoured a bite of hot lasagna. Lasagna was a very rare hard ration, and to have the time to cook it was a simple pleasure rarely enjoyed in the fetid swamps and dusty plains of basic training. Best of all, I had found a few moments of peace away from the bustle of camp in which to eat my supper, or breakfast I suppose, as it was early morning.

Basic training is about military indoctrination, but it is also a journey of self-exploration. For a city boy, just sleeping on the ground and working in the true dark of night were challenges. The black and green face that looked back at me from my small compass mirror looked worn, dirty, and above all strangely recognizable. There was an edge to my features, marked by weeks of physical and mental exhaustion, harsh coughing spells, and previously unknown determination to endure.

On that particular night, well towards the end of the summer, I had just finished leading a reconnaissance patrol, and had set aside the anxiety of waiting for my assessment to indulge my stomach. My section commander soon found me and wordlessly handed me a sheet of paper. It noted that despite a very flawed plan, I had, through confident presence and force of will, effectively led the section to the completion of the task. I calmly thanked the man for his evaluation, internally quieting the sudden joy that came with the realization that this meant I had passed the course and home was around the corner. He shrugged and turned away so that I thought he would leave, but then he paused and looked at me carefully. For the first time, he spoke to me with no apparent mockery.

"You have been evaluated this day as a candidate; from now on, as an officer, you will be evaluated for the rest of your life by those who follow and depend on you."

Academic life is fundamentally about evaluation: essays, exams, projects and participation. Evaluation opens doors – and closes them. TAs play a critical role in evaluation, often performing the lion's share of marking and grading, and providing feedback on essays, exams, and tutorials.

Understanding that as TAs we are leaders is important. The students do not need a friend; they need an accessible, professional figure who actively assists them in developing their writing, studying, and discussion skills. The nature of the relationship, hinged on evaluation, is so infused with an unequal power dynamic, that any attempt at being their friend simply is, and will be perceived as, false. On the other hand, especially in a large university setting, there is a tendency to remain aloof that results in a distant, mechanistic approach that is equally unproductive.

The beneficiary of an excellent undergraduate program at a small university, I had never had a TA before. When I became a first-time TA, I was primarily concerned with the accompanying pay

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Memories of Classrooms Long Past

Jon Sufrin, Graduate Program in History

I am the son of two teachers. When I think about my own identity in the classroom, who I am proceeds not from ethnicity, class or religion, but from growing up around two people who never thought about their teaching as a "career" but as an exercise in reaching students as individuals.

It is difficult for me to picture myself as belonging to some of the more traditional categories we use to identify ourselves. I am a white male, brought up in a suburban, middle class household. My parents had what probably would have been called a "mixed marriage" at the time; my father came from European Jewish stock and my mother was an Irish Catholic. Both were thoroughly assimilated Canadians and always stressed that our own identity was something we could choose— there were no sacred cows and few family customs that shared links with wider conceptualizations of religion or ethnicity. If anything was stressed, it was the virtue of tolerance and accepting people for who they were. In this, my parents were likely informed by their own experience as a couple as they struggled for acceptance from their own communities, but we were largely protected from any conflict of this nature as children.

What my parents were, however, were teachers. That is how they identified themselves, and how I learned to identify them to others. My father worked in a special education class in a technical school - he ended up with all the problem students that no one else wanted. My mother was a primary school teacher. Neither had a formal post-secondary degree, just a year of teachers college.

I was lucky enough to be invited into their classrooms on a regular basis. There, I saw something quite different from my own school experience. My parents understood that their students wanted to learn. They approached their classes looking to make a connection with their students, searching for ways to engage their interest. They were genuine in wanting to help each person in their classroom. At a basic level, their goal was to identify a student's learning barrier and then help them overcome it. They sought to encourage learning for its own sake. As a guest in my parents' classroom I was always startled by the level of engagement the students had. They wanted to participate— not just one or two, looking for marks, but a consistent majority had a contribution to offer.

More than this though, my parents, who were by the time I was a teenager both members of the Canadian cultural mainstream, brought notions of inclusivity and tolerance to their classrooms that were extremely obvious. My mother taught in a Scarborough elementary school that had a significant proportion of ethnic minorities attending. Rather than trying to impose a culturally dominant narrative on her students, she encouraged them to express their creativity and learning within their own cultural narratives. In other words, she reached them on their own terms, not on hers. Students were encouraged to educate their peers about their own customs and often presented on the customs of their own cultures. And like my Mom, my Dad never judged a student as anything but an individual. Hopeless cases were sent to his classroom, kids that had fallen through the cracks of the school system. I will not pretend that my father reached every one of them. But he was successful far more often than most and the number of near-dropouts who emerged from his tutelage to go on to post-secondary education is simply astonishing.

Watching my parents teach I came to admire them for their dedication and success in the classroom, and there was seldom any doubt in my mind that I would follow in their footsteps one way or the other. Like them, I approached the classroom without much formal education in teaching, only an idealistic desire to reach my class— all of my students were going to do the reading and like it and have great discussions about it. And, of course, like most of us, it did not take very long for my idealism to be challenged.

I encourage my students to bring their own identities into the class and use them in understanding the material.

But fortunately for me, I could look to my parents' example. Faced with a student body no less diverse than theirs, I encourage my students to bring their own identities into the class and use them in understanding the material. This encourages students to see the material as relevant to them, thereby stimulating their interest. And keeping the class open and inclusive has the further benefit of encouraging students to grow beyond binary

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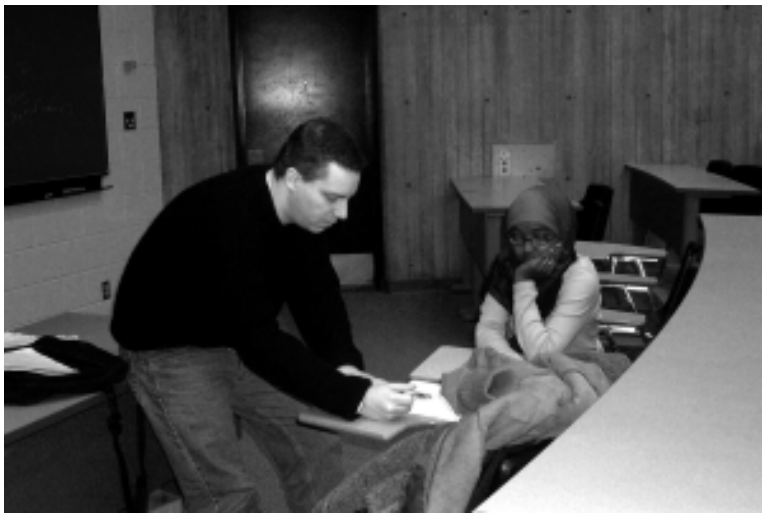

CST Resource Centre

Individuals wishing to improve aspects of their own teaching, enhance their teaching strategies and assessment techniques, or refine their courses will find helpful resources in the CST resource library – a specialized collection of books, articles, periodicals and reports on new developments in teaching in higher education. Material may be borrowed by faculty and teaching assistants. The collection includes such topics as:

- *Active learning*
- *Lecturing in large classes*
- *Improving teaching skills*
- *Critical skills*
- *Assessing student learning*
- *Evaluating teaching*
- *Course design*
- *Teaching and technology*
- *Diversity and inclusivity*
- *Teaching dossiers*

Instructors are welcome to drop by the Centre for the Support of Teaching to browse through the resource collection. We are located at 1050 TEL Building and are open from 9:00am - 4:00pm, Monday to Friday.

(Who am I... from page 4)

cheque and my own research. I had a vague picture that a TA was like a high school teacher who led discussions. Needless to say, the news that I would be doing all of the marking for my group of fifty students came as something of a shock. If that was not enough, I was directed to cover historiography in my tutorials, as their major essay for the course would be historiographical. Historiography is the study of what other historians have said about an issue. Historiography calls upon the undergraduate to wade into many major books and articles and then compare, contrast, and evaluate their arguments. During my own undergraduate program, I had taken a required history course that introduced us to historiography slowly and we worked our way up to a major paper. Here, the professor was not involved at all and instead the students were simply expected to do a historiographical paper, while simultaneously learning about 16th Century Europe!

After the first difficult and awkward classes, I realized that these students depended on my leadership to learn as surely as army recruits depend on their instructors to pass on skills and knowledge. The methodology taught by the army could in many ways be applied to the classroom. I also considered the importance the army placed on the instructor's personal energy. Students, after all, were often tired and not necessarily enthusiastic about the subject matter. Dynastic politics could be a very dry subject and it is difficult for students to identify with such a different time and context. The interest I demonstrated in the course was critical to success. In effect, I had two tasks. I had to teach a whole new set of writing and research skills related to historiography, as well as try to connect the MTV generation with the intricacies of early modern Europe! I also realized that even as I graded their work, I too would be evaluated – on my fairness, my style, my accessibility, and my professional competence. My section commander was more right than he had known and now I needed a plan!

So I tried to keep it simple in our discussions. We emphasized main themes more than simply memorizing names and dates. I used maps and pictures to give a tangible sense of the places and people we studied. Above all, I tried to link the questions and problems of that previous age with similar ones of our own. This resulted in some memorable moments when we compared the political scene of dynastic rivalry with the National Football League and the escalating violence of the French Revolution to the escalating sexuality of music videos! I tried to familiarize the students with historiography through assigning small readings that were examples of the method, and small exercises that encouraged them to interact with their readings in a more critical way. None of these ideas were difficult or earth-shattering, but I saw the results in improved papers and exams.

Thinking about TAs' central role in the formative experience of undergraduates often humbles me. I remember the odd feeling I had when I looked at my first students' final grades. To think that a year of effort, dialogue, and exploration could be reduced to a single page of numbers! A university education is about learning a discipline but is also a journey of critical revelation about the world. As TAs we are one of many guides on that journey. Our grading opens or closes doors. Our feedback and motivation can inspire or discourage. It is tempting and easy to limit ourselves to confirming facts toward an exam standard with no human meaning. One thing is clear: to keep the Humanities relevant to our students, we need to connect our disciplines to contemporary society.

Often the very fundamentals of learning seems concentrated in the hands of the select few; the overworked, the underpaid, the untrained, and the unappreciated – the TAs! It doesn't seem very fair, and it's probably not. Here we are on the ground with the students with a difficult mission. Junior army officers have been making do for centuries. Adapt and overcome – or don't do it! With this amount of responsibility, there is no middle ground.

Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn: A Volunteer for Both

Ozlem Ezer, Graduate Program in Women's Studies

When I was assigned a position as a TA in sociology at York last year, it was a challenging "experiment" because it marked several "firsts" for me. The assignment came during my first visit to North America. At that time, even the simplest daily facts of life were overwhelming to me and I had to learn literally everything. It also marked the first time that I had to lecture in English to mostly native speakers. Thankfully it was not my first time teaching because I had already been a TA in Istanbul, Turkey, where I was born and raised. It was also not my first exposure to speaking English because I had been learning it in Turkey since I was thirteen years old. I really enjoyed learning the language and I realized that it was a great way to get to know a different culture and to connect it to my own.

Until I decided to write this article, I had not really thought about why and how my background has impacted my perception of teaching. The reason for this was probably because I preferred to ignore the challenges and instead just let myself adjust to my new life in Canada. I'm not sure exactly how being Turkish has affected my teaching at York. Instead, I think my personal experience of meeting people from other nationalities has greatly affected my teaching. I traveled a lot during my undergrad years; I volunteered in several international work camps and attended international festivals. Not only did this gave me a chance to practice my English, but more importantly, I think those experiences also gave me self-confidence and comfort with being with multicultural groups of young people such as the ones I taught at York. The organizers of the festivals always began the program with warm-up activities and I've adopted some of these activities for use in my own teaching for the first day of class. Those experiences were very important to me and I recommend participation in similar types of programs to my undergrad students who want to choose teaching as a career.

There are no teachers or professors in my family so I had to learn everything about teaching for myself from scratch. I did this by choosing my favorite teachers as role models and talking to them as well as observing them as they taught. While teaching at York, I found myself looking back and trying to remember the details of the teaching practices of my foreign professors at the university in Turkey and their efforts at communicating with us. Being an international TA at York, gave me the opportunity to appreciate their challenges while teaching in Turkey.

the way I use my eyes and hands can help to convey my intentions as a teacher especially since I am not a native speaker

One of the key points that I have learned from my past teachers is to be cheerful and attentive from the moment I step into the class. This helps to create a more positive and motivating atmosphere for the students. I am also always aware of body language. That's not something that was taught to me, its just part of my personality and my culture. I know that the way I use my eyes and hands for example, can help to convey my intentions as a teacher especially since I am not a native speaker. I also try to use universal human experiences in the form of anecdotes and jokes that relate to the reading material. By doing this, I remind myself and my students that we all have many things to share as humans regardless of ethnicity, nationality or religion. At York I taught "Families and Social Change" a course which enabled me to establish good dialogue with the students. For example, when we discussed the topic of interracial/cultural families, I made myself a "case study" by using a short documentary film about my husband and I. When I taught English and literature to socially diverse groups in Turkey such as teens from wealthy families or teens from the shantytowns in summer camps I used the same methods with them that I later used with my York class. These experiences taught me invaluable lessons about how to teach students from different backgrounds.

In my teaching experience at York, I consider language skills to be a very important factor. I feel comfortable with English and this is probably reflected in my teaching. It is extremely important for me to try to improve my language skills every day. It help to enhance our explanations of concepts to the students. Although it was very hard for me to follow the popular topics such as those in the media, slang and national or local references, I force myself to learn many things that fall outside my usual scope of interest. As an international TA one has to be realistic and realize that it is impossible to learn everything if you have just moved to Canada, regardless of how motivated you are. My advice to international TAs is to be honest with students. This works well for me because it allows me to accept and even laugh at my mistakes and to overcome my hesitations about using new terms and words. These are experiences that are common when one is in a new country. It is important to remember that students don't expect you to know everything. If you let them know you are new to the country and the culture, they will appreciate your efforts. I hope to remain both a teacher and a learner across cultures, throughout my lifetime.

Congratulations UTP Grads!

The Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Centre for the Support of Teaching extend their congratulations to the following individuals who have completed the University Teaching Practicum since our last report in *Core* (November 2002):

Tony Berto, Theatre
Sarah Campbell, Art History
Christine Carson, Visual Arts
Maryanne Fisher, Psychology
Carwyn Jones, Interdisciplinary Studies
Alex Latta, Political Science
Ellen Miller, Philosophy
Ismael Montana, History
Suzanne Nacha, Visual Arts
Lorelei Silverman-Gavrila, Biology
Rosalind Silverman-Gavrila, Biology
Ayse Uskul, Psychology
Kelly Young, Education

The University Teaching Practicum is a self-directed program of professional development in university teaching for graduate students. Through this program participants engage in a process of in-depth learning about their own teaching – reflecting on their practice, analyzing their approach, applying new strategies and techniques, and documenting their experience. At the same time, they have opportunities to deepen their understanding of pedagogical principles and of student learning theories, and to participate in discussions on all manner of issues related to teaching and learning.

For further information about the University Teaching Practicum, please contact the CST.

(Memories of classrooms... from page 5)

thinking to understand the legitimacy of different narratives, perspectives and interpretations.

At the same time, I learned from my parents the importance of flexible classroom methodology and an ability to keep the end goal— the students' growth— in sight. They understood that

I learned the importance of flexible classroom methodology and an ability to keep the end goal - the students' growth - in sight.

teachers have to communicate their own desire for their students' success. I often wondered, as a child, why students were so open and communicative with my parents both in a formal classroom setting and in asking for help. (I sure wasn't at home!). As a teacher myself, I've come to understand that this happens when you make it clear to students that you are there to help them succeed, not judge them if they fail. I work with students using their own progress as a measurement of their achievement. A student who goes from a D on their first paper to a C+ on their final one IS a success story. That feedback needs to be communicated to them, because it is a sense of accomplishment that will prompt a student's further effort. I learned from my parents to see the growth of each student within its own context, rather than judging it (and myself as a teacher) by an absolute standard of success or failure.

Like my parents, my identity as a teacher proceeds from believing that I do not teach for my own benefit, but for my students' development. When I leave class only to hear students still discussing the material within the frame of their own discourse, that's when I know I've accomplished something. And that sense of achievement stems from remembering my parents in the classroom, recollections that influence the here and now, far beyond the original contexts in which they were first experienced.

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