Clark Taylor

Freedom for Learning describes the entry program for new students, called Assessment, at the College of Public and Community Service of the University of Massachusetts at Boston. CPCS serves a diverse population of urban adults. Its curriculum integrates liberal arts and career education in a competency-based format. The Assessment program orients entering students. It helps them plan individual degree programs, assess prior learning for credit, develop speaking skills, explore their own culture and the culture of others, and become confident, self-directed learners. The article advocates programs of this nature for entering adult students in other institutions.

Freedom for Learning:

The Case for Entry Assessment

Introduction

A potential new student interrupted my unpacking of boxes for a move into a new office. Ed was struggling with the question of whether to continue his studies in the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, or transfer into CPCS, its innovative College of Public and Community Service. He was well on his way toward completing his degree, yet he had learned enough about CPCS to give it serious consideration. Not knowing anything more about Ed than he was able to tell me in the confusion of my partially unpacked office, I reinforced what he had heard about CPCS, and added my feeling that, after twenty years' work at the college, I was still excited about its impact on students and the quality of its program. When he left, I did not know what he would decide.

A few weeks later I saw him on the stairway. On learning that he had decided on CPCS, I asked how he was finding it. "I feel like I died and went to educational heaven!" was his response. By the time of our conversation he was comfortable with the program and style of the college as a result of his participation in Assessment, the required entry course at CPCS.

Who are the CPCS students who find their way into the Assessment Program? Most come to take advantage of one of the college's career majors, which include community planning, criminal justice, gerontology, human services, labor studies, and legal education services. They are adults ranging in age from the twenties to the seventies, with an average age of about 38. They are racially and ethnically diverse, hailing from all of Boston's diverse neighborhoods, as well as the metropolitan area's inner and outer suburbs. They represent a fascinating array of activist and public sector roles — community organizers, labor leaders, police, human service workers and advocates in a va-

riety of settings — along with some who are reentering the employed world after years away. From its starting population of 300 students, CPCS has grown into its full mandate and enrolls nearly 1,000 mostly undergraduate BA students, but including graduate students in Human Services and Dispute Resolution.

CPCS sets out to create a new kind of consciousness about learning, and about how learning is directly linked to effective urban public and community service. Responsibility for awakening that consciousness falls to the college's signature program, called Assessment. Offered as a required entry course, Assessment calls on students to develop Learning Plans, based on their goals, and to anticipate a variety of learning strategies for reaching their goals.

A note on terminology is in order. CPCS uses the word "Assessment" both as the name for the course and as the title of the first competency the students address when they enter the program. The Assessment competency is sub-titled, "Who Am I, and What Do I Plan to Learn?" Along with the Assessment competency, the Assessment course addresses two other competencies, "Speaking I" and "Cultural Awareness," which will be described below.

The goal of the Assessment course for students as learners is spelled out in a statement I distilled from the experience of the program when I became director four years ago: "Assessment seeks to enable students to become confident, competent, self-directed learners, who affirm diversity and are on their way to becoming critical thinkers." When they enroll, CPCS students are a very diversely-prepared group of people. Some have strong school skills, but lack experience in the employment/agency world. Others have "street smarts," but have less skill and confidence in the usual school skills. The intent of the Assessment program is to meet them where they are, help them feel good about their strengths, and provide a safe, supportive, but challenging environment where they can become strong self-directed learners.

The goal, in effect, is to provide freedom for learning — freedom based on students' goals and a variety of choices regarding their curriculum plan. It takes place in a supportive community of learners: a group of 15 to 20 students, led by a team consisting of a faculty member and a group of students. Starting with the students' own experience, for which they are the "experts," the Assessment program, through group discussion and oral presentations, weaves together the diverse experience of the group members. Several key academic concepts, including "social role," "competence," "experiential learning," and "culture," form an intellectual structure through which students meet the curriculum and each other.

In this paper I will describe the Assessment program, note problems the program has faced, and make the case for incorporating an Assessment-like program with its key elements in metropolitan universities even in more traditionally structured curricula.

CPCS In Its Time and Ahead Of Its Time

The College of Public and Community Service (CPCS) was created at the University of Massachusetts at Boston in 1972 to make the university more effective in serving the urban community. The ideas embodied in the charge to its planning group were a litany of the creative notions of the sixties, proposed by progressive faculty in existing college units, but not adopted by the majority of their more traditional colleagues. These ideas included: competency-based education, career education blended with liberal arts, a strong measure of field education, an interdiscipli-

nary curriculum, a mixed faculty of academics and career practitioners, and a diversity of adult urban students. Clearly intended, as well, though not written in the original litany of ideas, was the conviction that adult students would be motivated to become self-directed, lifelong learners.

By far the most challenging task faced in creating CPCS was to frame an interdisciplinary curriculum in outcome terms, complete with criteria and standards that would form the basis for evaluation of student work. The effort was extraordinary, but successful enough to launch the college in the competency-based strategy from which it has not turned back. In order to graduate, students demonstrate knowledge and skill according to the criteria and standards of a number of "competency statements," selected by them to form their personal degree plan based on their own academic and career goals.

Competency statements incorporate the following elements: 1) a name of the competency to be demonstrated, 2) a rationale stating how it is situated in the curriculum and relevant to public and community service, 3) a concise "can-do" formulation of the competence to be demonstrated, 4) a set of criteria setting forth what must be done to demonstrate the can-do statement, 5) standards indicating, in some cases, levels at which the criteria must be demonstrated and/or conditions that must be met in demonstrating the competency, and 6) examples of ways in which the competency may be demonstrated and evaluated. The latter typically include examples of how students can be evaluated by means of a CPCS course, directed study, or evaluation for prior learning, where appropriate. The criteria mentioned under (4) constitute a key element. They call for the exercise of professional judgment on the part of faculty or other qualified evaluators. The implied, operative set of standards must be established in the practice of evaluating actual student work, by faculty evaluators who compare the judgments they are making based on stated criteria. Over time, thus, these standards become internalized in the thinking and practice of the actual evaluators involved in assessing work for particular competency statements. Students who meet the criteria and standards "receive the competency," while others get a "progress report," indicating what they still needed to do for that competency. Grades are not in the picture.

Those of us "present at the creation" of CPCS soon realized that we needed a structured way of orienting students to the very different CPCS curriculum and the exciting potential of self-directed learning. Students also needed help to assess their prior experiential learning. To be able to do the latter was one of the attractive promises implied in the idea of competency-based education. If students were to take advantage of a learning system linked to their own goals and learning strategies, and taking optimal advantage of their prior experiences, they would need a supportive, yet challenging setting in which they could appropriate new individual and collective learning habits. Assessment has evolved to provide that setting.

With substantial fine-tuning over the years, the Assessment Program has continued as a major innovation, and become the key innovative program of the college. Based on more than twenty years of experience, CPCS is convinced that the Assessment process — enabling students to become confident, competent, self-directed, diversity-affirming and critical-thinking learners — justifies the necessary up-front investment. This child of the sixties has, we believe, proven itself to be a pioneer for adult students in the nineties and beyond. The next section provides a description of the program as it is experienced by students and faculty today.

Assessment Today

Structure of the Assessment Course

On arrival their first day, students entering CPCS receive a large notebook (the Red Book) containing all of the college's competency statements from which each student will create a plan for the degree. They also receive a manual explaining the program. They are directed to classrooms where they find themselves in a group of 15-20 people, intentionally formed to be as diverse as possible. Their first awareness that things will be different comes with the discovery they will have both a faculty person and an advanced student serving as a "student Assessment adviser" — someone who has been able to make the curriculum work well for her or himself, and can help new students find their way. Second, students find the semester will be divided into three segments: orientation, work on the Assessment competency, and exploration of culture through addressing the Cultural Awareness competency. Third, they learn they will be able to demonstrate three competencies in the program, the two already noted plus Speaking I. Finally, they are introduced to the Assessment Program as a supportive setting where collective learning is introduced and practiced. These structural elements will be discussed in turn.

Teaching staff in each section: The two teaching figures are the faculty person and the student adviser. Faculty agree to teach 16 class sessions in the 14 week semester, and to attend four training sessions. The extra two class sessions are in the first two weeks during the intensive orientation period. Faculty committed to Assessment have been willing to put in the extra time through the years because they know the program is so important to student success in the college, and because they get to know students at a deeper level who may later be enrolling in their courses. Student advisers apply for the role, for which they receive a modest stipend. Usually they must have completed half the competencies necessary for their degree and be recommended by a couple of faculty with whom they have studied. On the basis of these recommendations and an interview with the Assessment administrator, they are paired with a faculty person with whom they are likely to work well. They are expected to attend all the class sessions and as many of the training sessions as their busy schedules allow. Both faculty and student adviser are expected to have individual meetings with students, as requested and seen useful by the students in the class.

Time segments through the semester : The three time blocks include the first two weeks of intensive orientation, the next five weeks of work on the Assessment competency, and a seven week period of addressing the Cultural Awareness competency. At the end of the second week, students register for additional courses, designed for Assessment students, which they will take through the rest of the semester. There is inevitable overlap among the time segments in that orientation continues throughout the semester, and often students continue work on the Assessment competency after the group has moved on to Cultural Awareness. Work on the Speaking I competency bridges the Assessment and Cultural Awareness segments of the course.

The Three Competencies

The Assessment competency: The Assessment competency, subtitled *"Who am I, and what do I plan to learn?"* is designed to enable students to plan an academic program that directly addresses their goals, and to analyze how the learning

from their prior life experience may help them demonstrate competencies applicable to their degree.

A key objective for the Assessment competency is to help students internalize motivation for learning, to put them in charge of their own learning program. The obvious starting point is to draw attention to their own goals as the basis for their planning. With that in mind, the first assignment is often to write out the student's career and academic goals. The goal statement, which can be changed at any point, later becomes part of the Learning Plan, which defines the student's individualized curricular program for the whole degree.

At the beginning of the five-week Assessment competency segment of the semester, students are asked to identify and analyze two of their social roles, of which one is to be an "achieved" role, and the other an "assigned" role. A reading and discussion in class help them understand the general concept, and some brainstorming brings a flood of examples to the chalk board. For the "achieved" category individuals are asked to identify a work role, or some other role which reflect their own choices and achievements. The "assigned" role could be one into which they were born, as, for example, "oldest son in an Irish Catholic working class family". They can also choose a role ascribed to them by strong cultural expectations or one assigned by chance, such as, for example,"someone widowed." Some fall into a gray area, and can be analyzed in either category. The definition of the concept is not intended to be narrow, but rather open enough to enable student creativity in analyzing their experience, while still within a recognizable range of the defined academic concept.

The original purpose for this exercise was to help students see the connections between their life experience and learning that may be demonstrated for credit ("competencies," in the CPCS language) toward the degree. That purpose still holds. But in the process of discussing their roles, and speaking about them to demonstrate part of the Speaking I competency, students not only discover the rich human diversity of the group, but also experience themselves as learners in new ways. Life stories are set in the framework of an academic concept and become part of the curriculum.

In one Assessment group the social roles described included a variety of characters from the criminal justice system, including not only a court officer and several police, but also individuals who had been arrested and incarcerated. One individual was at that time involved in a process of civil disobedience through distributing illegal clean needles to drug addicts. Others had been victims of domestic violence, or lived in neighborhoods where poverty and discrimination had made relations with police very tense. Learning was many-faceted.

Following on the heels of the work on social roles, and overlapping with it, students are guided to make appropriate choices to fill out their Learning Plan Worksheet. In their Red Books they find the necessary forms, which already indicate the required competencies each must demonstrate, along with indicating, with blank "boxes" in the matrix, where students need to make choices. A first step is to locate transfer from prior college course work. Students arriving at CPCS with appropriate associates degrees receive twenty competencies in direct transfer, and are directed to work with the Associates Degree Learning Plan Form, which indicates what required and optional competencies they need to complete to earn the degree. Based on their goals, students then make choices in the indicated areas on the Learning Plan Worksheet. Many of the competencies are defined in generic terms as regards content, so students can plan to pursue individual academic inter-

ests in a variety of areas in the curriculum. And they are challenged to consider alternative ways they can develop the understanding and skills, for which taking a course is one option, but they may also consider directed study, independent study, intensive workshops offered away from campus, community work under the supervision of highly qualified leaders, etc. Once they have made their choices, they are asked to write a rationale, which argues how the competencies and learning strategies they have selected will enable them to reach their stated goals. Faculty then evaluate the work to ensure the choices fit available options consistent with CPCS and University regulations, and that students have made choices coherent with their goals.

With a completed Learning Plan in hand, students are then asked to analyze their prior experiential learning for possible application to competency demonstration. This process was begun in the analysis of social roles, for which one dimension is to discern learning from the roles which might be applied to competencies. In the more comprehensive analysis of prior learning, however, students engage in interviews and intensive examination of the range of their experience to see as many areas as possible where their prior learning can be applied. They are asked, first, to list all competencies on their learning plan for which, on the basis of preliminary appraisal, they might have applicable prior learning. They then analyze individual competencies, criterion by criterion, to discern what could be demonstrated through what they already know, and what new learning they might need at specific points to complete their ability to demonstrate that competency. They need not exhaust this process in the Assessment semester, but they are expected to gain the capacity to work on their own. Students vary markedly in the amount of prior learning they can bring to bear. The goal of faculty and student adviser is to ensure each one is prepared to take full advantage of their prior learning to the extent they choose to draw from it in moving toward their degrees.

Putting it all together — social roles, Learning Plan, and analysis of prior experiential learning — students have a new sense of themselves as learners. Optimally they understand themselves as in charge of their own learning process, including the rate at which they can progress, strategies they can use for learning, and choices they can make regarding subject matter when they address the competencies they have selected to pursue their own goals. As they internalize this opportunity for self-direction, they tap into a new dimension of freedom for learning.

At the conclusion of this segment devoted to the Assessment competency — in principle after five weeks but often somewhat later because of extra time needed to complete their work — students submit their work for evaluation of the Assessment competency to the faculty person in their section. Assuming they have worked together with that individual through the weeks, assisted by the student adviser, the actual submission of the work is usually not a stressful experience, but rather the culmination of a process.

The Cultural Awareness competency: In 1989 CPCS' decision to deepen its commitment to making knowledge and appreciation of diversity a central feature of its curriculum, led to the inclusion of an already-existing Cultural Awareness competency as a required part of the Assessment Program. This step added both an important level of intellectual challenge and an exploration of cultural diversity. In broad overview terms students are asked to name and analyze their own culture(s), and to engage in sensitive and open cross-cultural communication with people from other cultures. Each one is free to name her/his own culture, but must relate it to an acceptabledefinition of culture. Readings are distributed that provide definitions

from different sources. Students are then asked to identify key characteristics of their culture, how they have adapted the culture to fit their changing life circumstances, and finally how they responded when their culture was challenged. To deepen their understanding of the culture they have selected to analyze, they are asked to find and reference appropriate library sources.

Even groups that have developed trust and comfort with each other dealing with social roles and curricular planning, find reasons for caution when asked to speak openly about their cultures. The group described above that had good insight and humor in discussing the criminal justice system, generated a testy first round of discussion on culture. Two individuals at first refused to speak about their own cultures, and supported each other in their refusal. Both African-Americans, they were reluctant to speak openly about the culturally-related discrimination and outright oppression they had experienced — within a group that included representatives of roles they had experienced as repressive. Discussion of that tension was productive, with a recognition that honest sharing can be painful, and that people are free to withhold as they choose. Accepting the feelings at hand led to insightful discussion at the comfort levels acceptable to the individuals involved.

Faculty, in fact, are encouraged, in the written teaching materials they receive and in training session discussions, to stimulate insight that moves beyond superficial and stereotypical discussion of culture. The point is not only to develop respect across differences, but also to recognize societal patterns of bias and to come to understand how dominant and subordinate power relations play out in cultural formation and behavior. Student experience in their cultures of origin or current lives offer powerful grist to this kind of consideration.

The Speaking I competency: From the first, CPCS was committed to the idea that its graduates should have strong essential communication skills, including reading, writing, math and public speaking. The college "department" primarily responsible for teaching and evaluating those skills is called the "Center for Applied Language and Math." Assessment, however, has taken on the task of teaching to and evaluating the Speaking I competency, which involves descriptive discourse, the public sharing of information, in an organized, effective way. The competency involves making two speeches. Students then reflect on and critique their own efforts based on feedback from other students. Finally they are to critique the speeches of two others in a detailed way. Speeches are given in class, followed by both written and oral reactions from the other students. In the typical Assessment section, one of the speeches will be on a social role, the other on some aspect of the student's culture.

The Speaking I requirement to make two speeches has served to structure an open consideration of diversity in the group, first at the more personal level of social role and later, as the group gains more internal comfort, at the more complex level necessary to a serious consideration of the concept and experience of culture. This beneficial link between the social roles aspect of the Assessment competency and Cultural Awareness competency was serendipitous.

One difficulty under these circumstances is to maintain a focus on the criteria and standards of effective public speaking when students are presenting such important and, sometimes, intimate details of their lives. This challenge has been discussed on a fairly regular basis in Assessment training sessions, where faculty share wisdom about how best to teach to the competency, and support each other in the necessity and techniques for firm evaluation. A balance of values is important here, between the act of speaking and the weaving together of the group and its collective growth through the sharing of experience.

The Supportive Setting of the Assessment Course

The final dimension of Assessment structure is provided by the relatively small size of the sections where face-to-face interaction and group exercises are introduced to create a home base atmosphere where collective learning is encouraged and practiced. While a few students could do the essential required activities of the Assessment and Cultural Awareness competencies with relatively little faculty guidance, and find another place to demonstrate the Speaking I competency, they would miss the rich, collective learning and content from the life experience of the other students. And the rest of the students would miss the experience and potential support of those who enter with the stronger school skills. Put in a positive framework, a basic purpose of the program is to provide a safe, supportive environment where all students feel free to explore new ways of thinking about themselves as learners, where their own life experience is valued, and where they can explore that experience through the lenses of recognized academic concepts.

Freedom for Learning

In a diverse adult urban education setting like CPCS Assessment, a typical section will include people who have suffered from the whole range of class, race, gender, sexual preference and handicap discrimination and oppression. And there are typically those who have been on the other side of one or the other of the oppression categories. In much of his work, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has stressed that engaging such groups in reflection on their own experience in the context of their cultures and the need for effective cross-cultural communication can, in successful sections, become a microcosm of the practice of education as the practice of freedom — or, in the image I have given this article, freedom for learning.

Assessment provides a setting where, in the classroom itself, students act and reflect in their relationships with each other as they come to grips — often in humorous light-hearted ways, but sometimes with a depth of intensity — with the diversity of the group. Garnett, a CPCS student originally from Trinidad, now ready to graduate and go on to graduate school in special education, recalls Assessment three years ago with great enthusiasm. In particular, "I remember such a diversified group of people. We went through it not having any racial barriers. We were one on a level at some deep understanding of each others' situation." Ed, the student featured in the first paragraph of this article, wrote to me,

"There is something very healthy about students from different cultures openly discussing their cultures with their classmates. . . . We all, I think, have prejudices on some level, even though they may be very subtle. My Assessment class . . . created a safe environment for these intercultural issues to be aired. This is a process that traditional education ignores completely, although as we look around us at society, the need for such a process is so painfully obvious."

In its movement from discussion of a diversity of social roles to consideration of diverse cultures, Assessment has the potential to touch on issues of dominant and subordinate roles and cultures, with the implied need for action and reflection, which can take place, in part, in the classroom. In the Assessment section Garnett was part of this was fostered, in one exercise, with whites and people of color meeting separately to discuss their experience in culture, after which the groups came together to analyze the positions they had developed.

Freedom for learning, thus, reaches for an internal motivation in the educational process that is grounded in students' experience and goals. By focusing on,

and highlighting that experience in an academic setting, Assessment seeks to stimulate and enhance the qualities of confident, competent, self-directed learning. By engaging students in consideration of culture, beginning with their own experience, the program calls into view the myriad of social issues and inequalities in this society, with a view to cultural action, i.e., helping students affirm diversity and to develop the critical thought capacity to begin to address the problems.

Problems and Issues

By and large, the program has been effective in empowering students through the years, but the qualifier always has to be, "in the sections that work well. . . ." Even those that "work well," however, have been subject to pressures and problems.

Assessment at CPCS clearly aspires to a great deal, giving rise to a problem that flows from the basic goals of the program, which sometimes seem to overload it. A given is that students arrive with vastly differing levels of school skills and self-direction, and with profoundly different experience in areas covered by the curriculum. Enabling them to understand the CPCS curriculum, turn the corner to self-directed learning, plan a learning program, make speeches and grapple with diversity, takes varying amounts of time from one person to another, and with different groups, depending on the makeup and "chemistry" within them. There is tension, as well, between the need to create individualized Learning Plans and the program mandate to build a coherent learning community. This "overload issue" is often the subject, planned or spontaneous, of training sessions with faculty.

Second, enabling this kind of freedom for learning takes a unique sort of faculty, and not everyone has the background and skill to make it happen. In the early years of Assessment the college took the position that all full time faculty should teach in the program on a rotating basis. The purpose was that all would meet incoming students, and experience the agendas they bring regarding their goals, program choices and eagerness to have their prior learning evaluated. Teaching Assessment was likewise thought to be an excellent way to stay abreast of changes in the program.

It soon became apparent, however, that some faculty simply should not teach Assessment, because they had neither the necessary skills nor an interest in developing them. On the other hand, a core of faculty were very well equipped and received great satisfaction from participating in the program. The challenge then was to continue to develop the effectiveness of that group, and to add to it when possible. In fact, the college has never filled all teaching assignments with fully effective teachers, though, of course, that is the goal. Where faculty are known to fall short, strong student advisers are paired with them. In a few sections over the years students themselves have organized to demand better service.

Third, as a relatively open admissions unit in the university, CPCS enrolls a wide spectrum of students, some of whom have unusual difficulties in the program. One such group has been those with less developed reading, writing, math and conceptual skills. Over the last several years the college has taken this problem head-on, and created an Integrated Studies Program (ISP), which offers intensive work in the essential skills, including the practical use of computers. ISP is closely coordinated with Assessment. Another population group that experiences more difficulty at CPCS is the set of younger, often recent community college graduate, students, many of whom enroll to take the Criminal Justice major. Many, but by no means all of them, have come from traditional education backgrounds and have had

relatively little life experience relevant to the College's curriculum. Some of these find it hard to participate actively in building Assessment as a learning community, and don't feel the whole-person orientation to learning meets their needs. Their passivity, relatively shallow participation and, sometimes, just plain fooling around, interfere with the experience of others. This issue also surfaces as a regular topic for discussion in faculty training sessions.

Finally, as a state institution, the university has suffered severely as the public sector has come under attack in Massachusetts. As curricular centers (departments) have come under pressure to "cover" their programs, the number of full-time faculty available to teach Assessment has gone down over recent years. What thus seemed like a major loss to the program, however, has turned up an excellent resource — graduates of the program who have gone on to get masters degrees and are therefore eligible to teach in the university. Six such persons have now taught at least one semester. Their enthusiasm, energy, and overall effectiveness, have made a major contribution to the maintenance and evolution of the program.

Conclusion: The Case for Entry Assessment

Costs of a program like Assessment at CPCS can easily be identified in terms of a new course up front, staffed by teams of faculty and students. These costs, however must be assessed against the benefits students and, indirectly, the program as a whole, receive from the investment. For students the gains are obvious and can be quickly summarized. Given the innovative nature of the CPCS competency-based, field-oriented nature, newcomers simply couldn't function without Assessment's orientation and support dimensions. But also, and profoundly, from the first students find their concerns, their goals and what they already know to be valued by the university. Those who bring strong school skills and the successful experience of self-motivating progress toward goals readily see how they can use the resources of the program to move ahead at their own pace to reach their goals. Others, more insecure in their approach to learning, find themselves in a supportive setting where they can explore what they know best, their own experience and personal history — at the same time they are challenged to become self-directed, confident learners.

Both groups, those with strong school skills and those who have come from inadequate school backgrounds, are together in a collective setting, the Assessment class, where the diverse experience of its members provides a varied subject matter for learning. Since there are no grades, students are able to work cooperatively in learning without the fear of being judged negatively in comparison with the others. Given these elements, those with the strong school skills often find themselves impressed by, and able to learn from, those with less secure skills, but who have had more experiential learning in areas relevant to the curriculum. The latter, in turn, finding their alternative learning valuable, are freed up to develop confidence for acquiring the skills denied them in inadequate schooling experiences, and to be enthusiastic in learning as they move through the rest of their degree work.

Benefits for the program as a whole are also clear. Students who leave Assessment with a confident sense their education is grounded in their own experience and linked to their goals, and who have developed that confidence in a collective setting, are hungry to build on what they have learned. Faculty ready to make the connections, to link the new subject matter to the experience of the students, and to draw on what they already know, find a group of aggressive, ready learners. Faculty, on the other hand, who persist in a traditional lecture, expert-to-blank-slate

mode of teaching, may find themselves with a rebellion on their hands.

The latter possibility points to the need for ongoing faculty development focused on the theory and practice of teaching. That need, stimulated by an entry Assessment Program of the CPCS type, can be seen as another benefit, energizing faculty open to change to rethink their work with students. The regular series of four faculty development workshops each semester provides an excellent platform for stimulating faculty to share teaching ideas and to grow in their own confidence and competency to be effective in this demanding kind of teaching. What they learn in these discussions has inevitable impact on the rest of the teaching they do.

Clearly, however, the prime benefit is the increase of internally motivated students. Those who study in effective sections will have located their education as directly connected to their experience and goals, and will have struggled with issues of cross-cultural communication in ways that have heightened their sense of societal tensions and possibilities. These are clearly prime objectives of effective education for metropolitan universities.

Having made the case for Assessment using the CPCS context, I want to argue that such a course has great potential as well for discipline-, course-, and grade-based systems. The model of a home-base setting where one's life experience is mobilized as a relevant source of learning, has importance for most students, especially commuting urban students. The academic concept used as a vehicle for sharing need not be social roles, as it is at CPCS, but may be drawn from some aspect of urban community life. The key is to break the alienation and anonymity of students' lives by helping them see that where they come from and what they already know is valued by the academy, and that a learning community that links their lives with academic concepts can become a bridging reality for them. Asking them to articulate their career and academic goals, along with how the curriculum can help them reach their goals also has the potential for making them far more proactive about the choices they will make than if they simply fill in the requisite number of gen ed and major courses.

The question of competence and "competencies" is a fascinating one for the course credit and grade-based system. Key questions are inescapable. What intellectual/academic skills does the current curriculum seek to foster — and why? Can they be articulated clearly enough for incoming students to assess where they are and where they are headed? Can issues of self-directed and life-long learning be focused in such a way that students become interlocutors of faculty regarding teaching-learning strategies? Can departments and programs become clear enough about the outcomes they seek that students can present relevant life-experience learning for credit evaluation?

The case for affirming diversity and seeing effective cross-cultural communication as a source of learning and growth need not be made for readers of this journal. It is assumed. The CPCS Assessment model suggests that it be featured in the entry curriculum, and based in a learning community fostered through the sharing of life-experience of the students. Again and again students attest to the profound insight they have gained in learning from the diversity of students and the life-long benefit they gain from learning to communicate across cultural differences.

The case for entry Assessment of the sort offered at CPCS, then, is based in the aspiration all of us in metropolitan universities have for well motivated, self-directed students, who see their education as directly related to their own goals and aspirations. Likewise, the commitment we have to enabling students to be affirming of the diversity in their life situations and effective in cross-cultural communication,

is arguably best addressed soon after initial enrollment, so our institutions can become models for the badly fractured urban metropolitan areas where we are located. The CPCS Assessment program, now with more than twenty years' experience, here offers the elements of its program for consideration and dialogue, with the full expectation we have much to learn from what other metropolitan universities are doing to address the needs of diverse adult students.

Suggested Reading

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1993.