

*Service-learning in teacher preparation at Gustavus***“The bullying project”***by Debra Eckerman Pitton, Ph.D.*

Teacher preparation programs have long known that they cannot do it alone. Developing opportunities for pre-service teachers to participate in K-12 classrooms throughout their education program is the goal of all teacher education departments and an expectation for any accredited institution.

The education faculty at Gustavus has long maintained a relationship with the St. Peter School District. While these exchanges have been wonderful learning experiences for Gustavus' pre-service teachers, I wondered if these opportunities were in any way helpful to the school district. Having learned about the potential of service-learning from ongoing faculty development experiences, I set out to try to improve the relationship to benefit both the college students and the middle school students.

Service-learning is based on the premise that the experience will provide mutual benefits for the student and the community being served. A true service-learning project would require my students to address the needs of our school partner as a part of my course. This meant lots of changes for me as the instructor. With support from Noreen Buhmann, the College's community service director, and input from the school district administration, I began to look for ways that the education students could enhance their learning by providing a service to the school.

Initial conversations with middle school administrators and counselors raised the question of whether their middle school students were aware of bullying within the school, and if the

problem was as widespread as some people thought. The district was instituting an anti-bullying policy, and while students were to be briefed on the policy requirements and expectations on the first day of school, there were questions about what the next steps should be. The school wanted more information about the extent of bullying and the needs of their students. The end result of these ongoing conversations was a solid commit-

ment from both institutions to “the bullying project.”

The school's primary concern was to find out more about how bullying was impacting the students. Not everyone was convinced that bullying was a problem. Eager to quantify the prevalence of bullying in the school, the middle school methods students offered to develop a survey to assess the needs of the school and to help build awareness of bullying at the local

Not in the Script: Developing “Research-Like” Experiences

Labs in biology or chemistry often have relied on “canned” or “scripted” laboratory experiments. **Brenda Kelly**, assistant professor of biology and chemistry, is working to change that. Teaming up with science faculty from Grinnell, Hampshire, Harvey Mudd, Hope, and Wellesley colleges, Kelly is involved in a study to evaluate student perceptions of science after completing realistic “research-like” laboratory experiences. Research-like experiences, Kelly explains, “typically involve the students working in teams, selecting a research question, designing a plan for answering the question, collecting data, and reporting the analyzed results via an oral presentation or paper.” The lab experience is designed, Kelly concludes, “to mimic as closely as possible,” the challenges and rewards of a genuine research experience. Kelly's collaborative work on this project is being supported by a mini-grant from the Faculty Development Program. If the team's hypothesis proves correct, Kelly anticipates including more of these “research-like” experiences as early as possible in the science and mathematics curricula at Gustavus.

The Business of “Re-enacting History”

The Merck-Vioxx legal case drew attention not only for the science behind the pharmaceutical drug, but for the critical ethical challenges it raised for business. **Mary Gaebler**, visiting assistant professor of religion, realized that the proceedings presented an ideal situation on which to build an engaging pedagogy of role-play, enhancing students' historical knowledge and sharpening their discussion skills. Gaebler assigned students roles in the case, including the characters of those injured by Merck's aggressive sales tactics. Students then conducted their own trial and came to better understand the consequences of ethical neglect. The role-play “forced the students to explore perspectives they might have otherwise missed,” Gaebler comments, “especially important in the business ethics setting since some students begin from the presupposition that anything goes, as long as



level. This met the need of the school site partner and provided opportunities for pre-service students to look more closely at the use of data gathering to shape school decision making and to focus on the developmental needs of pre-adolescents.

Thus began the parallel work of developing a survey instrument while addressing the other objectives for my course. Meetings with the school's middle school team charged with looking into developing stronger homeroom sessions were used to share ideas and flesh out both the survey prod-

uct and the process. In the beginning of the semester, my students read their assigned text and articles, but I added additional readings on the topics of bullying and service-learning.

Our school partner determined that it would be helpful to give the survey and then follow up with an awareness activity presented during homeroom. After the college students had developed the survey, they would facilitate its delivery in the homeroom. Because the school was in the process of reviewing and developing a more "advisory-like"

homeroom program, middle school methods students had a chance to create these advisory sessions, giving them opportunities to work with pre-adolescent learners and get to know first-hand what support could be offered in advisory-like sessions.

As a class, the pre-service teachers came up with three guiding questions to use as a focus for their survey: 1) Did the middle school students really know what bullying was, and did they recognize bullying behavior? 2) What types of bullying behaviors were happening to middle school stu-

dents? 3) How pervasive were these various bullying behaviors in the school? As the next step in this work, the college students individually developed survey questions that would address the focus questions based on what they read and what they felt would be important to know.

After a final draft had been reviewed and approved by the school counselor and planning team, two-person teams of Gustavus pre-service teachers administered the survey in middle school homerooms. Once the surveys were com-

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you make a profit for the stockholders." Supported by a Faculty Development Program mini-grant, Gaebler attended a conference that allowed her to model her trial after role-playing techniques developed by the Barnard Project.

Accessible Psychology

"We wanted to talk as a department about how best to infuse life into psychological topics in a way that 18–22 year old psychology undergraduates can relate to and understand," explains **Marie Walker**, associate professor of psychology, about her department's seminar. As a structure for these discussions, the department faculty discussed Malcolm Gladwell's recently published *Blink*, a book that looks at decision making, social judgment, and first impressions.


Additionally, psychology faculty received a tutorial in E-Prime, a software package for creating computer-generated experiments. Psychology major Jake Anderson '02, who has been working at the University of Minnesota's psychophysiology lab in the last few years, provided the instruction in E-Prime. Walker notes that faculty will be able to use the software in their own research, in their classes, and with student advisees who could develop their own directed research projects.

Going Right to the Source: Analyzing Students' Online Research

Not surprisingly, many of the Folke Bernadotte Memorial Library's resources are online. But just how well do students understand the research process using online resources? How can students' information-

seeking behaviors inform library website design? And how can faculty and librarians collaborate to improve student research? **Anna Hulseberg** and **Michelle Anderson Twait '98**, both librarians at Gustavus, hope to answer these questions analyzing data in the usage of the library website. "We hope to explore students' overall understanding of the research process," Hulseberg explains, "focusing in particular on how students use the library's website to access materials for research and coursework." "Based on our findings," Twait adds, "we plan to redesign the website to provide better access for students and more focused support for teaching and learning at Gustavus."

Why Read? Why Write?

In "The American Scholar," Ralph Waldo Emerson suggests that "Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the one end, which all means go to effect?" Emerson's reply: "They are for nothing but to inspire." Yet anecdotal evidence suggests that we live in an increasingly technological world where success is measured by financial gain or scientific achievement. Reading literature, for many children and adults, seems a quaint luxury with little relevance to the real world. But not for faculty and students in the English Department, who embarked on a semester-long conversation about the importance of reading and humanistic study. Supported by a grant from the Faculty Development Program, faculty and students initially focused their discussions on Mark Edmundson's *Why Read?* They then welcomed the author to campus for the annual Lefler Lecture. As the culmination of this department seminar, at the end of the semester, the students in **Rebecca Fremo's** Senior Seminar on Creative Nonfiction read from their long projects, suggesting that not only is it important to understand why we *read*, but that it is equally vital to understand why we *write*. 



The bullying project

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pleted, the methods students compiled the data. The school site wanted the raw data, so the students did no statistical analysis; however, a look at the data indicated that there clearly were varying perspectives among the middle school students regarding what bullying really was and whether it occurred in their school.

The feedback from the middle level students showed that for some kids, bullying was indeed a problem, while for others, bullying issues were not on their radar at all. As a result, the school site planning team wanted to provide explicit examples of the offensive behavior, to help "open the eyes" of

students to the plight of some of their peers, as identified by the survey. Because the middle school students were going to be held to the specifics of the school bullying policy, the planning team wanted to be sure that all students were clear on the expectations. Discussions of how to present realistic images of bullying resulted in the selection of a video that would be shown to students.

To address the question of "what next?" the college students began to plan a follow-up homeroom session. Simply giving a data report would not be an appropriate means of sharing the results. They wanted to highlight that a number of students taking the survey had identified particular bullying behaviors and specified that


these actions *were* occurring. They planned to segue into the video as a means of providing examples for those who were "in denial" or unaware of the extent of the problem or the misery that that bullying created. At this point, they had read about planning and practiced writing objectives and assessments in class. In groups they developed ideas for the follow-up that were agreed upon and written up as a draft "lesson plan."

So what were the results of this service-learning project? For the college students, in-class feedback and reflections indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to do real work with students and that this interaction with young adolescents both heightened their knowledge and their interest in teaching middle school students. Their conversations had more depth and real-life examples. Specifically, the creation of the survey called for the students to collaborate, to identify goals and questions, to write questions that would give them results, and then tabulate and identify what the data said. Allowing the survey to be the work of the college students and not a "re-shaped" version created by the instructor made it real, and the subsequent discussion about use of data and appropriate ways to gather data and analyze it took class discussions into new areas.

As for the school site, they reported an increase of documented student reports of bullying behaviors at the middle school level, and a heightened awareness of the occurrence of such behaviors among faculty. The survey gave them initial in-

formation to use for further planning and faculty development.

In the semesters following the initial launch of the bullying project, the course instructor and middle school planning team have continued to meet and extend this work. Each semester, a focus is identified to continue the awareness of bullying and increase student sensitivity to the needs of others. Anti-bullying strategies, complete with role-playing and the use of scenarios, were implemented the second semester. By the third semester, the planning team felt that the school needed to step back and work on relationship-building to help students develop a "kinder, gentler" attitude toward their peers, especially those they did not identify as their friends.

The implementation of service-learning has opened the doors to a real shared learning experience for all those involved, shifting the direction of the learning in ways that are still evolving. The benefits for the students at the middle school, who were provided with information and support regarding bullying, and the opportunities for pre-service students to work and learn within classrooms with experienced staff and real students all combined to make for a complex, messy, and wonderful learning experience for all involved. The bullying project made the learning real for my students. 

Debra Pitton is associate professor of education at Gustavus and has been a member of the faculty since 1997.

Longtime employees recognized

A number of support staff employees were honored for their service to the College at the 2006 Staff Holiday Luncheon, held on Dec. 20. Pictured here are 2006 retirees and those who were recognized for 25 years of service.



Retirees – Pictured is **Betty Jean Passon**, custodial (28 years of service). Not able to attend was **Nadine Zuhlsdorf**, administrative assistant, Department of Chemistry (32 years).

25 Years – Below, from left: **Nancy Sanderson**, administrative assistant, Department of Music; **Todd Block**, plumber, physical plant; **Betty Maas**, Dining Service; **Corky Biehn**, Dining Service; **Kathy Allen**, administrative assistant, Career Center; and **Diane Wilson**, custodial.



Photos by Jonathan Kraatz