



visions

**Staff Development Newsletter
Quinsigamond Community College
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Visions

A Newsletter of the
Staff Development Committee

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On the cover:

Things are melting. I hope. The cover shows a pond on the Sterling-Princeton line, and I'm trying to add a tarnished sparkle to what has become a grim, aggressive winter, the worst in a long time—what feels like “record-breaking” snow, combined with bone-rattling temperatures.

As I write this, on Washington's Birthday, over two feet of snow have fallen on most of the Northeast (on top of what we had). And that's only one storm! I'm stranded in Maine, where the snow is not as bad, but is arriving later. It has been, to put it kindly, a bizarre year—hot, hot summer in 2002, then a wet cold fall, and now this.

Most of us are just sick of it.

Even one of our die-hard skiing faculty (not mentioning any names, Nancy), remarked to me the other day that it's just sometimes too cold to ski. She was talking 40-below-and-beyond wind chill. And this was coming from a person who blossoms in winter and wilts in summer, and who would climb Mt. Everest, if it were in Worcester or Vermont.

In mid-coast Maine, it's ranged from -3 to -23 below every night for weeks. Although Worcester hasn't been as cold, we have more snow. Lots more. But March is right around the corner. Then we have mud season...



If you are reading *Visions* on paper, you're really missing out. You can see the cover as well as the other pictures in here in stunning color. Just go to my website and follow the links:

www.qcc.mass.edu/pconnell/index.html

QCC Holiday Bash Photos

Karen Kaletski-Dufault was kind enough to take these excellent pictures of the QCC Holiday Bash sponsored by Staff Development in December.



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Accelerated Learning Takes Off At QCC

Photo and Article by
Dean Mary Lee Reiley



Left to Right: Jean Kennedy, Jim Rice, Kathy Rentsch, Felix Rizanov, Charles Pederson, Pat Hutchinson, Chris Robbins, Mike Araujo, Carol Murphy, Sheila Booth, Linda Witham, Mary Lee Reiley. **Members Not Pictured:** Priscilla Gimas, Betty Lauer, Carol Darcy, Elaine Previte, William McGovern,

Accelerated Learning programs are one of the fastest growing enterprises in higher education. Increasing numbers of colleges and universities have developed accelerated or intensive learning formats to serve students of all ages.

What is Accelerated Learning? It is a brain efficient method of learning and teaching, which encompasses the latest scientific research on learning and memory. We all have tremendous capacity for memory but can be quite poor in recall. Retention increases dramatically and information taught can be expanded as much as 200%. Accelerated Learning emphasizes collaborative activities and mutual exchanges between the teacher and the learner so that it can be stimulating for both. It relies on action exercises and devices such as metaphors, themes, mnemonics, props, music and color to create an enjoyable setting conducive to learning and increasing both the relevancy and retention of knowledge.

As many people talk about Accelerated Learning, many did not know how to apply it properly. A team

of full-time and adjunct faculty at Quinsigamond Community College attended a 3-day workshop on how to implement this very popular methodology to the Worcester community. Currently many of the instructors have started implementing components of this methodology in their traditional classrooms. This course was a wonderful opportunity to learn more about teaching and learning and to reflect on current teaching practices. The next step is to provide a learning environment (both physical and affective) that allows students to process information and make connections so that the knowledge stays with them. The goal of the institution is to provide several continuing education and program courses in this format for the summer and fall of 2003

Quotes from some of those who attended:

“This workshop provided us with activities and learning strategies that energize the classroom and maximize student involvement.” *Shiela Booth*

“In the business world and all the places we work where time is a precious resource, this approach to learning will have a dramatic impact on performance and

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Accelerated Learning Takes Off At QCC (continued)

productivity.” *Chris Robbins, Dean of Continuing Education and Workforce Development*

“Classroom time flies by, thoroughly engaging learning rather than memorizing.” *Pat Hutchinson*

“For me the exciting thing about accelerated learning is that it gives both the instructor and the student a glimpse into the learning process of each student.” *Linda Witham*

“It truly has changed the big picture and micromanagement of my classroom and so far the students are “eating it up.” What a difference a semester makes!” *Carol Murphy*

“It was such a delight to see seasoned, brilliant instruc-

tors ‘drink-in’ with enthusiasm the methodologies that were presented in Accelerated Learning. Knowing we can always learn more efficient and productive means of facilitating knowledge makes the field of education an exciting career for those who embrace it. As we continue to develop our skills in this area, and experiment with the techniques, we invite anyone who is interested to contact any of the members to learn more about the journey.” For more information, see: *Mary Lee Rieley, Dean of Business Management and Human Services.*

QCC Holiday Bash Photos (continued)



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QCC Holiday Bash Photos (continued)



QCC Holiday Bash Photos

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The following is an excerpt from:

Calkins, M. V. (in press). Book review
[*Giants among us: First-generation college
graduates who lead activist lives*].
Journal of College Student Retention.

Recent years have seen increased interest in first-generation college students, who are an increasing presence in U.S. higher education, particularly in the public regional state and community college systems. Although the unique experience of first-generation college students was first explored by Howard London in his 1978 book, *The Culture Of A Community College*, most research in this area dates from the late 1980s and 1990s. With *Giants among us: First-generation college graduates who lead activist lives*, Sandria Rodriguez follows in the footsteps of researchers such as Levine and Nidiffer (1996), interviewing low-income first-generation college students. But Rodriguez adds a distinctive twist—she not only relates the students' pre-college and collegiate experiences, but she proceeds to focus on their post-college social activism. I would recommend this book to all faculty and administrators who have or are working with first-generation college students. It is interesting, informative, and uplifting.

At the outset, Rodriguez poses her central question: "Why do people who have little to no support for doing so break with tradition by becoming the first in their families to attend college and, after graduation, intentional catalysts for similar metamorphoses in others' lives?" This book is her attempt to answer this question. Rodriguez views education as "a pressure point around which the nation has historically managed privilege" (p. ix). With this book, she hopes to increase our understanding of first-generation college students' educational experiences and outcomes so that we—teachers, parents, family members, school administrators—can better facilitate their path to college and beyond. Her data are provided by a series of in-depth interviews with seventeen first-generation college graduates who became well-known activists..

The book is divided into four parts. The first chapter introduces Rodriguez's argument

and research questions. Chapter two relates the first person accounts from five of the study's participants. Analysis of the study's data comprises chapters three, four, and five. In the final chapter, Rodriguez draws conclusions from the data and offers recommendations for policy and practice. As a first-generation college graduate, teacher, and community college administrator, it is clear that Rodriguez knows her way around this topic, and her passion for the subject is clear. Her viewpoint is that of an "insider," and she has chosen to be forthright about this. Each chapter is prefaced by a segment from her own life history that connects thematically with the data in the chapter that follows.

The study is organized around three research questions of rather extensive scope concerning the family, life, and college experiences that contributed to the educational success of these students. Ultimately, Rodriguez seeks to understand the "manner of individual" who becomes a first-generation college student, earns a degree, and chooses to become a social or educational activist.

As the participants relate their stories, Rodriguez distinguishes several common themes in their experiences, such as perceptions of holding special status in their families, and of positive naming by significant others. From these themes, Rodriguez develops the her central theoretical construct of "ascending cross-class identification," a process in which the individual is exposed to the world of a higher social class, identifies with that class, and gains knowledge that helps them move into that social class.

Rodriguez identifies ascending cross-class identification, along with special status and positive naming, as those experiences which provide the foundation for the responsible risk-taking demonstrated by all her participants, both for themselves and on behalf of others. These individuals are "imbued with a proclivity to take informed risks that have a pivotal effect on their academic successes, on their lives in general, and on their activism" (p. 199). They "switched the tracks" for their families and for generations to come.

In the concluding chapter, Rodriguez clearly shows how her project relates to other research in the area, describing how her findings add to the knowledge base, and making recommendations for both research and practice. Throughout, Rodriguez emphasizes the importance of parents and families in the students' lives. She urges educators and policymakers to encourage low SES parents and relatives, whether or not they are educated or even literate, "to serve as pre-mentors and positive namers of children, to provide them with opportunities for ascending cross-class identification, and to award them special status" (p. 240).

One of the challenges facing first-generation students is their position "on the margin of two cultures—that of their friends and family and that of their college community" (Hsiao, 1992, p. 2). In *Giants among us*, Rodriguez de-emphasizes the difficulties these students encounter in redefining their relationships with parents and family members. Rodriguez's descriptions and participant quotations suggested to me a sense of individuals who have an unusually high level of self-knowledge and inner calm during the process. This may be due to the fact that Rodriguez is working with successful college graduates, or that the participants are looking back on experiences that are years, even decades in the past. In any event, it is important to view these results within the context of the literature, which documents the highly emotional nature of this process of role redefinition for students and family members.

In *Giants among us*, Rodriguez aims to cover a lot of ground. This is both a strength and weakness of the book. The strength in Rodriguez's generality is that she allows central themes to emerge from the data rather than looking for preconceived issues and ideas. On the other hand, at times the sweeping breadth of her research questions make it difficult to correlate specific questions with specific findings. Nevertheless, Rodriguez raises important issues to guide both research and practice.

In particular, the experiences of the students described in this book have much to offer college faculty and administrators seeking to improve student retention, as well as parents and educators who are concerned with student

persistence in postsecondary education. The process of ascending cross-class identification demonstrated by Rodriguez's participants supports the notion that understanding students' habits is the key to improving our understanding of students' retention and persistence behavior. For some students, the transition to college is a process of moving from one part of their habits to another; for the students described in this book, it is akin to moving from one culture to another entirely different culture.

Giants among us is recommended reading for elementary and secondary teachers, guidance counselors, college faculty and administrators, parents—anyone who is concerned with providing students with effective "road maps" to achieving their educational aspirations. As Rodriguez emphasizes again and again, anyone can be a successful mentor. For educational researchers, *Giants among us* provides rich fodder for future studies, and is an interesting and unique contribution to the growing literature on first-generation college students.

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