

The Community College of Baltimore County



Council on Innovation and Student Learning

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Avoiding the Double Whammy

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Dr. Donna McKusick asked the attendees at the recent Closing the Gap Symposium to share one or two "powerful ideas" they took away from the conference. Twenty-two people responded with a host of interesting thoughts. Although Donna hasn't yet decided on the means to do so, she will be sharing the ideas with the college community in the near future. Be on the lookout.

One idea contributed by Leslie Tinios, Associate Professor and Chair of the Dance Department at CCBC Essex, concerns the rectification of a bad habit educators are sometimes prone to fall into. That is, they get caught up in what their students CAN'T do and then miss what they CAN do.

Sustained over time, this practice will, no doubt, inflict serious injury on the potential of students to be successful. But that's not the only danger. Potentially, there's a nasty problem awaiting the institution as well. The practice inevitably spreads, standards fall to meet expectations, self-fulfilling prophecies abound and bingo: A new culture is born; a new way of life is institutionalized.

Is that a danger here at CCBC? Four years ago, a lot of us would have said yes. Today we are far less vulnerable; the principles and practices of LearningFirst have provided a powerful antidote. But, we shouldn't have our heads in the sand. We are not immune to focusing on what students CAN'T do. So, a little self-appraisal wouldn't hurt.

If you examine your approach and find that you've slipped into this crusty consuetude, here's some powerful motivation to make a break-through. Consider the powerful impact of your conclusion that a student just CAN'T do it and then DOUBLE it.

Why do that? Because you can be sure that the capacity to make such a judgment is not

yours alone. Chances are good, very good, that the students are also making the same judgment. They are much better at handicapping their potential by focusing on what they CAN'T do than we'll ever be.

My SDEV 101 students are a case in point. When I asked them to write down a negative thing they've recently said to themselves about themselves, the responses were remarkable. "I can't study...I'll never make it in college...I'm not smart enough...It's too deep a hole to claw out of...I'm too lazy...I don't have enough motivation...I can't meet my goals...I'm not good enough...Working and studying is too stressful; I'll never make it...I don't have the support I need."

To break through, these students need our affirmation, advocacy, and support. That means we need to do more than just break the habit of focusing on what our students CAN'T do. We need to improve our capacity to discern what they CAN do and then help them exploit their gifts.

Internal Partnerships

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CCBC wouldn't long prosper without the many partnerships the college has established with its various publics: business and industry, public officialdom, other educational institutions, professional associations, etc. The importance of these external, symbiotic relationships does not go unnoticed or unappreciated.

But what about the internal partnerships? Aren't they equally important to the prosperity of the college? At CCBC, the answer is decidedly in the affirmative.

The LearningFirst Strategic Plan addresses the importance of developing such strategies. Consider the opportunities for internal partnerships that abound in the language of the plan:

- Make students active partners
- Create a holistic environment
- Create collaboration across campuses and among academic programs and student support services
- Promote faculty, staff, and student relationships that establish a community of learners
- Create a community of commitment that formulates recommendations for improving and expanding student learning
- Promote partnerships for the advancement of technology-based development
- Develop alternative instructional methods that recognize diverse learning styles

The message is clear. Internal partnerships are essential to the creative, building process. Without them, CCBC would probably not get very far in its effort to meet and support strategic planning priorities.

So, how far along are we with this kind of domestic collaboration? Take the time and write to us. Your experience just might be the catalyst a reader is looking for to launch another unique

idea to promote the learning-centered environment.

A Real Example

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Early in the summer, Ingrid Sabio and Gina Strauss submitted a proposal to present their "workforce diversity issues" project to the Maryland Community College Vice Presidents and Deans of Students at the annual Best Practices Showcase conference this fall. Recently the two CCBC Essex innovators (see CISL Gazette Volume 3, Issue 10) learned that the proposal had been accepted.

Last month I had the pleasure of sitting in on two of Professor Sabio's African-American History classes during their scheduled visits to the Career Center. The students discussed their reactions to a January 28, 2002 Newsweek article they had been assigned to read as part of their participation in the jointly sponsored workforce diversity issues project. The Newsweek piece, entitled "12 things You Must Know to Survive and Thrive in America," was an excerpt from Ellis Cose's book *The Envy of the World*.

In the article, Cose identifies 12 "new world rules" black men should practice in order to be competitive in this age of "unlimited potential and soul-crushing inequality." Gina Strauss facilitated the class discussions, which were structured to elicit opinions about the best and worst among the Cose rules. Of course, the students had plenty of opinions on that subject and many other related issues.

One "rule" that elicited a lot of comments was Rule #1: "Play the race card carefully, and at your own peril." Cose's idea here is that when people are reminded of the reality of racism (which is different than being accused of it), "they make a greater attempt to be fair." One student got a lot of supporting nods when he said, "White people need to understand that there is a race problem and black people need to understand that they need to move on."

Of course, it's not quite that simple. Nevertheless, that position taken and expressed by a young man exploring his world certainly opened the door for a powerful exchange on race relations in America. After all, isn't that what it's all about? Wish you could have been there.

Sabio and Strauss have plans to include students in their Best Practices Showcase presentation and show some excerpts from the videotape recorded during the second-class session. The attendees at the October conference are going to hear how two people, representing Instruction and Student Services, came together to create a unique learning opportunity that probably would have gone untested had they not collaborated.

When the students in Professor Sabio's classes were settled into the Career Center, Ms. Strauss warmed them up with the following "quiz." See how well you do. The answers will appear in next month's issue.

- Minorities and women comprise ___% of all new labor force entrants.
- In 1999, ___% of engineers and attorneys in America were African-Americans
- In 1999, ___% of physicians in America were African-Americans
- In 1979, African-American males made ___ for every dollar a white male made.
- In 1999, African-American males made ___ for every dollar a white male made.
- Only ___% of the people in the world are white.