

I have had the good fortune of being included in both of Massasoit's TWO NECIT Seminars. I was a participant with the first eight Seminararians in Spring of 2005, and then was a Mentor this semester.

Richard Pepp has said that NECIT Seminars provide faculty with integration and/or renewal. Renewal was what I needed. I am 57 years old, and when I was 56, before I had experienced the first NECIT seminar, I was feeling more like 70. My mom, my father in-law, my best friend with whom my husband and I owned our two-family house, my sister, and my brother in-law had all died from 1999 to 2004. Five years. Five deaths.

Aging in itself is a losing game, and besides losing so many people I loved, I was losing my sense of myself, as parts of my self deteriorated.

My vision – my hearing, my mobility, my strength, my memory, and eventually, my optimism, were declining. The students seemed younger and younger and I had a decreased sense of identification with them.

I needed to teach for at least six more years. How would I manage? My experience with loss, grieving, and aging had thrown me into an Identify Crisis. Who was I really? A defeated, nearly old woman, **with a ten year old daughter**, ready to give up.....or something more?

The NECIT Seminar helped me to go for the something more. The participants helped each other try to achieve a better balance in our classrooms between access and excellence – the mission of our community college. We shared common frustrations, learned from each others' successes, and experienced a deep sense of hearing each other and of being heard. We also shared the opportunity of being students.....again.....together.

In the Seminar, I worked a lot on my Women, Minorities and the Poor class; it became much more learner-centered. Today, I am organizing the course around each student's sense of **personal identity**. I used no quizzes or tests this semester and added a final, personal Identity paper in which students had to weave a number of the diversity-related course topics into an essay that addressed the question, "Who Am I?" Some of these papers were very poignant. In one, three-quarters of the way through her paper, a student moved from a "well-enough-done" personal essay into a disowned, kind-of-research-paper description of several disabilities which the student had, but which the student had not really grappled with accepting. We talked a long time and she later rewrote the paper. She has begun to integrate the struggle with these issues into her sense of herself. This is profoundly interesting and humbling teaching and learning.

This semester I have thought a lot about **my identity** as a community college teacher. I was personally hurt and angered, as I know many of you were, by the

portrayal of Massasoit faculty that surfaced in print at the beginning of the semester. I was working in the NECIT Seminar to promote Inclusive Learning. Like many other faculty, I was taking what we now call an “alternative assignment.” For this, we were being vilified.

One of the most useful readings we used in the NECIT Seminars addressed how **the fear of being perceived through negative stereotypes** can damage a person’s performance. Claude Steele’s article, “On Thin Ice” helped us look at our students and try to discern if ‘stereotype threat’ was limiting their progress.

This semester, **as teachers**, we talked about how, in the future, we might be reluctant to accept alternative assignments **because we were afraid of being stereotyped as opportunistic, slacker, “state workers.”**

Identity – one’s sense of oneself. It is such a vulnerable and powerful thing!

One of my favorite movie scene’s is in The Elephant Man – Does anyone remember that movie? John Hurt played, John (Joseph) Merrick, the leading role.

In this scene, Merrick, who is profoundly physically deformed is being chased by a mob of people, as if he were a rabid animal. They pursue him through darkening streets and drive him into a corner from which there is no escape. He slowly pivots his body to face the mob, scans them with his eyes, and in his guttural voice proclaims, ‘I AM A HUMAN BEING!

It is one of the most triumphant assertions of a human identity I have ever seen. He saves himself – the mob disperses.

We had a similar sense of a gathering mob with those newspaper articles this Spring. And the day in March when we heard representatives from the Faculty Committee of Implementation and Vice President Barbara Finkelstein provide testimony that “No wrong was done,” was a day of exoneration, and beyond that, a day which reaffirmed my, and I hope your, sense of a **positive identity** as a Community College Teacher or professional.

I want to thank all of you who contributed your time and talents on that faculty committee. You served us so well.

Paolo Friere, who wrote The Pedagogy of the Oppressed hoped that teachers would be agents of inclusion; that we would help our students to become more powerful. I share his vision. I think most of you do too. I believe it is one of the chief reasons we are here at Massasoit. To empower our students, we need to increase our own power and resources; our power to teach effectively, and our power to demonstrate our effectiveness to others.

NECIT Seminars can help us to do this.

I hope you will consider becoming a NECIT Seminarian. I believe it will help you, as it has helped me, to smile and say,

“I’m a community college teacher”.

Or

“I work at Massasoit Community College”

Thank You.