

A Brief Process-Oriented Overview of NECIT Seminar for Spring, 2006

by Rebecca Shipman Hurst, Seminar Mentor, Spring, 2006

The Spring, 2006 NECIT Seminar was scheduled to meet on Mondays from 2-4. Typically, most of us chose to continue the conversation longer, in the seminar room, or meandering down the hallway, until at least 4:30. It was that engaging. Many conversations were later continued through informal face-to-face sub-groups, and through e-mail and phone conversations.

Our assigned readings included two books - - *What the Best College Teachers Do* (by Ken Bain) and *Achieving Against the Odds: How Academics Became Teachers to Diverse Students* (Esther Kingston-Mann and Tim Sieber, editors), and one lengthy article: *Thin Ice: Stereotype Threat and Black College Students* by Claude M. Steele. We found both books and the article engaging and informative. Typically, we would assign 2-4 articles to be read for each seminar session. When these assignments were set, participants chose articles for which they would be the discussion leader.

When we met, we typically began with any business which needed to be conducted, then discussed the articles, drawing many parallels to our own teaching and learning experiences and investigating possible applications for our classes. It should be noted that throughout the semester, we noticed how commonplace the kind of diversity that was new to the faculty at U-Mass Boston in the mid-to late 1990's was to us now. We felt blessed and challenged by the greater degree of diversity which we need to accommodate for here at Massasoit. The article on *Stereotype Threat* was perhaps the most useful one. It kept coming up in our discussions throughout the semester, and it was mentioned by three of five of us who were speaking (as a part of the Keynote Address) about our NECIT Seminar experiences at a recent on-campus Faculty Development Day.

In our seminar, the readings functioned as a "jump off point", providing us with a themed discussion to begin our meetings. As the semester progressed, we relied less on these texts, and used more of the time within the seminar to speak directly with one another about our individual teaching and learning experiences and challenges within our classrooms. Many of us also brought in additional articles, references to web-sites, books and teaching/learning materials to share.

Typically, a participant would start to explore a knotty issue of classroom functioning. The rest of the group would initially ask questions, or relay information about similar instances they had experienced. Sometimes, advice was suggested. Sometimes, particular concepts or readings were suggested. Oftentimes, we just listened to one another as we grappled to understand, support and inspire. Sometimes, we had to acknowledge that the issue at hand was a college-wide one, and that, while it required management within the classroom, it could only be solved through college-wide efforts. We saw our

discussion of this type of issue to be particularly helpful. We hoped that through NECIT Seminar participation, we were beginning to build the critical mass of faculty who would ultimately help to solve such issues.

Participants within the seminars were expected to develop a project (its completion might extend beyond the end of the semester). Project ideas and activities often became a topic of discussion in the last half of the semester. Some participants in the seminar made many noticeable changes during the course of the semester; altering things like course assignments, departmental procedures, college testing materials. Some participants made changes in current classes, others planned changes in future classes. Everyone changed and grew. Several participants have already shared their "works in progress" within and beyond Massasoit by work within their academic departments, and at conferences on and off-campus.

Gerry Janey, Spring 2005 NECIT Seminarian has equated taking a NECIT Seminar to "being baptized" in that once a person has been involved in a NECIT seminar, the transformation is on-going. As the NECIT Seminar participants continue their work on the projects they conceptualized in Spring 2006, they will share the fruits of these efforts within and beyond the Massasoit community.