

Showing and Telling about First Year Success at the Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase

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Abstract

From September 2012 students entering Memorial with grades that predicted their chances of graduating were slim have had access to an enriched first-year program. While First Year Success involves other academic supports, three dedicated credit-bearing courses are its core. The panel members—past and present instructors—discuss the design, delivery, and assessment of these courses. Our objective is to profile what foundational studies can contribute to the qualities of the graduate. Critical, however, is our opportunity to initiate institutional change by rewriting the script of academic failure. Three short presentations were given: “No student was harmed in the making of this course: Introducing ‘at risk’ students to the university” (Ryan); “Would I take my class: Against a pedagogical stasis” (Lidstone); and, “When engagement isn’t just a poster effect: Getting the measure of the second semester” (Burton). These titles show us sensitized to the possibility that what we offer may have no resonance for students who are unable or unwilling to respond to institutional norms. We cannot rely on them espousing our values or responding in the same way to the need for proofs incorporated into our disciplines. Embracing these dilemmas, we i) indicate how a developing theory and practice in FYS allows for student autonomy and support; ii) discuss how the dynamism of authority and access in our classroom is linked with authoritative and democratic practices in educational systems, and iii) ask whether elements of Memorial’s model might be adopted elsewhere in Atlantic Canada.

Key words: First-year; At risk; Equity; Professionalization; Neo-liberalism; Conferencing; Auto-ethnography; Performativity; Counselling; Academic literacies

Explaining FYS

In September 2012, Memorial launched a pilot project aimed at students who entered the university with grades that predicted their chances of graduating were slim. Conceived by the university’s Teaching and Learning Framework, the First Year Success (FYS) Program addresses the difficulties of students with admission averages between 70% and 75% by offering them an enriched first-year experience. The Program combines three dedicated credit-bearing courses with academic and career advising, small class sizes, supplemental instruction and the support of a learning community. FYS was an initiative undertaken in the first phase of implementing the Framework and the programme remains its boldest and most comprehensive innovation. What is noteworthy is that it targets a population not generally seen to thrive when taught from a scholarly base. As far as the team has been able to ascertain, its

concentration on the lowest grade band of entrants is unmatched among transitional programs offered by Canadian universities.

If Memorial stands out in its commitment of resources to a program like FYS, this can be best explained within the political economy of post-secondary education in the province. First, Memorial was for long the sole degree awarding institution in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). Further, it has a long-standing and publicly canvassed “special responsibility” in respect of the people of the province. But consider too that its revenues owe little to benefactors and more to the allocation of tax dollars by provincial governments, and that from the year in which FYS commenced, Memorial’s fees have been the lowest in Canada. The declining undergraduate demographic of recent years has made low fees important in recruitment strategies. Meanwhile, although leaving the role of public education loosely defined, the “special responsibility” underscores Memorial’s duty to respond to potential students. It is not enough to make a university education affordable; Memorial needs to ensure that all of its students have equal opportunities for success in university once they have been admitted, regardless of the grades they achieved in high school.

At the most recent Atlantic Universities’ Teaching Showcase (AUTS) the authors—past or present instructors in the First Year Success program—discussed the design, delivery, and assessment of the courses that are its core. Our aim was to profile what a suite of academic courses can contribute to the orientation of the new undergraduate. Critically, we took this as an opportunity to engage a discussion of how educational institutions might be changed by rewriting their scripts of academic failure. Now, in writing about how this message was delivered and received, we use elements of auto-ethnography. Our hope is that candid reflections on our conference participation might encourage more colleagues in the Atlantic region to think of the AUTS meetings as a primary venue for discussing transformative projects in undergraduate education. In particular we would like to reach those new to conferencing, or dubious about its merits.

Why “show and tell”?

In the summer of 2015 the team responded to the call for proposals for the AUTS, electing a 50 minute slot. As we prepared the abstract we were aware of colleagues who eschew conferences that concentrate on teaching. Dismissing them as a simple re-telling of the past triumphs or disasters of the classroom, they prefer going to conferences where “presenting papers” advances their scholarly profile. Our billing for this session embraced the irony of this dual standard. It would indeed be a “show and tell” and it was to unfold in three parts under sub-titles that acknowledged the self-effacing cast of our teaching: “No student was harmed in the making of this course” volunteered Ryan; “would I take my course?” quizzed Lidstone and, referencing an image posted on the FYS website, Burton invited looking beyond its “poster effect”. With this bravado we intended our session to have appeal. But, should any delegate doubt our seriousness as presenters, the sub-titles in the conference programme advertised our commitment to examining substantive issues: “Introducing ‘*at risk*’ Students to the University” (Ryan); “Against a *Pedagogical Stasis*” (Lidstone); and, “Getting the *Measure* of the Second Semester” (Burton) [*emphases added*].

The AUTS audience would, we anticipated, be quick to appreciate how professional knowledge, pedagogical theory, and personal experience come together as the elements of teaching. We were to treat these things by emphasizing greater awareness of the reach of theory into educational practice and by elaborating new dimensions of professional competency. But for attendees to be guided through our “show and tell” they needed the clarity provided by us explaining our conception of instruction as a process of social transformation underpinned by the values of social justice and democracy (Biesta, 2016). FYS is grounded in the equity-embracing goals, core values, and foundational statement of

Memorial's Teaching and Learning Community. Yet we, like many of our colleagues in post-secondary institutions, have been increasingly concerned as the ground shifts away from equity-seeking ideals. This article, like our presentations that preceded it, does not make a rebarbative reference of neo-liberalism, nor is it organized by a Manichean dualism between market forces and moral imperatives. Readers should make no mistake, however, that a key reason for our interest in the possibilities created by the reach of theory into educational practice and by the identification of new dimensions of professional competency is their potential to further an agency oppositional to neo-liberalism and its growing influence in our post-secondary institutions. In an increasingly marketized university system the FYS Program is unlikely to accomplish its own transition from a pilot to a more permanent fixture without owning an ideal of a reinvigorated pedagogical professionalism, organized accountably, and rooted in a pluralist educational landscape (Visser, 2016).

Rejoining our Dialogue

The period of preparation for the conference in early October constituted a reunion of sorts since the team had not met for several months. Supplied with only short term funding, FYS draws upon a pool of contractual instructors. Our working conditions were not open for two of three of us to re-shape, even so, in teaching from a democratic and social justice conceptualization we had the space to exercise leadership independently of organizational structures and management roles.

Lidstone, who was responsible for three sections of Arts 1500 as a teaching term appointee in Fall 2014, had left the Province before spring. Ryan completed her contract to teach University 1010 and, but for a leave replacement position, might have ceased contact with FYS. Instead she moved into a non-teaching position as the Administrative Director of FYS. Burton, the only member of the team with tenure, negotiated a further period of secondment from her department and continued as the Academic Director. She was preparing to deliver the winter semester core course that was moving towards Calendar regularization in its new design. Under the title "Path to Future Studies" University 1020 would join "Introduction to Critical Reading and Writing in University" (Arts 1500) and "The University Experience (University 1010) in a package that students and colleagues alike could better understand as affording an academic experience outside the domain of Memorial's disciplinary or professional units.

Asked to provide rationalization for the pedagogy of FYS, its erstwhile delivery team might first cite a discontinuity with an earlier type of remedial intervention. When students with failing grades were taught how to improve via behaviourally orchestrated procedures they mostly learned that conformity and compliance were rewarded in academe. The incongruity with the post-modernist ideas that are our intellectual inspiration is palpable. The promise of a radical deconstruction of how the world is ordered in terms of what is valued has not to any great extent translated across into the ways and means by which we teach. Burton, the instructor with the longest perspective, has seen the knowledge/social effects of the value systems involved in education come under more intense scrutiny; and she is still not convinced that academics have become any better at providing what is needed for first year students to see that the university could be a home to "people like me" (Burton & Guthrie, 2014; Burton & Sweeny, 2015).

Learning to live with contingency and contradiction presents a far better approach to the conditions of the 21st century than learning a set of procedural arrangements. Our practices draw upon this "after the modern" inspiration to integrating knowing, acting and being amongst our students (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007). For his theoretical insights into learning as dynamic, idiosyncratic and particular, Lidstone turned to the Bakhtinian scholars of his post-graduate studies to discover their dialogic persuasion informs and supports a teaching method that uses his and his students' experiences in (and beyond) the classroom. Lidstone's "bait and switch gradualism" is a learning scaffolding process in which

he has grown more practised since the pedagogic discourses of performativity revealed to him the many levels at play—and that teachable moments arise from (and are continually shaped by) the dynamics of in-class engagement. Burton’s search for a robust account of what education is about has always involved questions of agency. Four decades ago it was supplied by the writings of Paulo Freire in which teachers were encouraged to start with their students’ already existing knowledge rather than have them acquire canonical and outdated learning (Freire 1970, 1987). Now in this age of “massification” progressive academic literacies theorists inform Burton’s championing of the democratization of learning (Lea & Street, 1998; Sutton, 2011). Impressed by the scope of what they encompass in their pedagogical sweep, Burton also finds in literacies framing a way to make the theoretical and methodological construction of disciplinary knowledges meaningful to students whose interests in life may well not be closely connected to study. Having a background in counselling psychology, Ryan is relieved to see the dominant educational paradigm of the past decades and its associated psychometric practices in retreat (Shepard, 2000). With mechanistic theories of knowledge acquisition supplanted, she applies insights from counselling to encourage students to develop self-awareness about when and how to use skills. By introducing students to a way of thinking about and representing problems that is both principled and empathic, and by teaching that learning is not just an accumulation of knowledge, Ryan makes our target group more at ease with the values and tacit understandings of the university (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Redefining their university experience is, however, her ultimate goal.

A ten-minute allocation of time at the AUTS concentrated our minds on what we were to say about rewriting the institutional script of failure at Memorial. Ryan indicated that what she wanted to profile was the layering of influences and experiences involved in a comprehensive transitional programme. Drawing insights from three overlapping roles—instructor, academic counsellor and program administrator—she supplied the elusive confirmation that at least part of the reason for students’ progress over two semesters was the team’s success in making accessibility and participation core values of the Program. “While I was teaching ‘The University Experience’ (University 1010), Ryan observed, “I often struggled to see if the content and delivery of the course were making any impact on the students as they navigated their first semester of university studies. As an instructor, I constantly searched for ways to de-mystify, clarify, and make sense of content that might be intimidating or inaccessible to students. I also sought to normalize and validate the students’ experiences and help them make connections to what they already knew. In short, my goal was to build on the strengths that the students brought with them to my classroom and send them off to further studies with a greater sense of their own potential. “But”, she added, “It is sometimes difficult to determine whether one has met such an imprecise and somewhat intangible target”.

When the evidence of her success came, it came later, and by a route that we might not have remarked but for our sensitivities to what educationalist Tara Fenwick has called the “web of relationships into which pedagogy is interwoven” (Fenwick, 2006, p. 4). When placed in a situation of putting a name to her presence as their teacher Ryan’s former students embraced the terms “caring”, “kind”, and “helpful”. They were commenting on a self-generated image arising from a class experiment with photo-documentation in the winter semester. On this occasion a guest plenary presenter, TA Loeffler, had sent all students of University 1020 about campus with their camera/cell-phones. Their task was to select and capture images of places that had meaning for them. Some had come to Ryan’s office door and, after asking her permission to make an image, they sent her picture back to the classroom where it became part of a portfolio. The course coordinator and the graduate assistant who were present for the discussion were the source of Ryan’s information. The plenary presenter clearly knew the value of the exercise she had initiated—it allowed for the evocation and construction of the emotional relationships of learning—yet Loeffler is likely still unaware of the significance to the Program of what emerged when she gave these students scope to reflect on how they were connected with people in the university. For

Ryan, this was the turn on which “no student has been harmed in the making of this course” ceased to be in any sense apologetic. Her confidence that an institution can be made into a place not just for learning and development but for support and encouragement was the impetus for what was to be a spirited ten minute presentation at the AAUT showcase.

Lidstone’s proving ground had expanded, although he was not at first sure how he would deal with it, for the fact was that in over a year he had not taught a class: “being outside of the academic world for this length of time, would it affect my memories and experiences with the First Year Success team?” Lidstone’s move to a new province accompanied a change in the way he made his living. Editing and producing text for commercial purposes now occupied his working days. Rejoining the material he had been reading and writing when we formed an instructors’ discussion group might be problematic, and interesting as it could be, he was not free of anxieties. Yet, “immersing myself in the material and research I had undertaken a year prior was a rewarding experience”, he was later to tell his erstwhile colleagues.

There was no need of changing his original explanation of an “Introduction to University Writing”, a course that exposed students to “a classroom experience that relied on a constant weekly writing routine in which the students’ written responses were paramount”. These responses established the basis of Lidstone’s dynamic dialogical pedagogy, a quality that he now parsed as “the fluid omnilogue that informs the content and presentation style of Arts 1500”. “Omnilogue”, he subsequently explained to quizzical colleagues, described “the discourse that involves all present... a collectivity, moulding the shape of things to come.” Lidstone traced this approach to learning to his own status as a post-graduate preparing for doctoral studies and to continued research/writing habits forcing him to continually assess and reassess the validity of his pedagogical approaches. “If a strategy does not reflect effective experiences from my memories of being a nascent writer and essayist”, his professorial-self observed, “I am forced to re-evaluate the exercises and delivery accordingly; this self-reflexive, self-evaluative approach forces me to continually steady the course so that students, in turn, stay the course.”

Now, however, in prospect of presenting from the other side of his time as an FYS instructor he was called to reconfigure his previous research in reflection on that change in perspective (and lifestyle). But, realizing this was not unlike his initial lecture style constituted the breakthrough that would now make him into an effective conference presenter and enable him to assume this task with the authenticity that “performativity” sometimes disallowed. The integration of shifting perspectives could well provide a striking tail-end to the conference presentation. And that would come by a strategic rephrasing of his original question “would I take my class?”

Burton considered Ryan’s observations and how they bore out the Freirian thought that “a primary reason why space and place are central to human empowerment is their evocation and instruction of our emotions” (Weibe *et. al.*, 2015, p. 235). She was also drawn by what Lidstone had decided upon as the focus of his presentation. Contrary to conventional assessment procedures that separated out learning elements into categories of perceptions, approaches and outcomes (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999), he was to profile an approach that respected elements simultaneously present in student awareness. Dissatisfied for some time with the increasingly ubiquitous National Survey of Student Experience-type student satisfaction survey, Burton took Ryan’s and Lidstone’s observations as her call to action. The Directors had routinely to report on student progress in the pilot Program, a degree of transparency that was to be expected in a publicly funded institution. Yet through Burton’s investigation of the tools available, and more particularly when reading Australian academics’ publications, she had become aware of a substantial critique of the most common survey procedures used in institutional audits of student satisfaction (Krause & Coates, 2008; Sachs, 2000). In Canada, where Maclean’s magazine further simplified the resulting measures to create rankings and set universities sparring one with another, the

“push back” should have been greater. The critics’ point was simple enough: since these surveys mostly used a check-list of features, how were they registering anything more than students’ awareness of what was available to them on a university’s real and virtual campus? Might we know better what learning was taking place amongst the students enrolled in our programme if attention was shifted to the nature and consequences of students’ interaction with what was provided for them?

Listening to her colleagues, Burton had been reminded of an account in which the South African practitioner of academic literacies, Lucia Thesen, expressed frustration with proofs resting upon a “narrow definitions of learning in the shadow of assessment” (Thesen, 2009, p. 392). Thesen identified the instructor’s professional judgement as the element that was over-shadowed and suggested that we needed to discover more about its use in classrooms. At the AUTS the panel would cohere by its efforts to encourage listeners to think differently about their political and ethical role as teachers. Using accounts of how their FYS pedagogies have worked, the trio would make clear our belief that thinking differently started with re-envisaging students’ potential. But, while Ryan and Lidstone were to concentrate on their different professional practices, Burton now saw her efforts should be put to raising the problem of how the always-emergent, multi-dimensional learning that both favoured should be tracked. With just one word changed, Thesen’s formulation identified how the pilot FYS might be short-changed; by the “narrow definitions of *success* in the shadow of assessment”. A fully theorized and empirically supported response to the challenge to take the measure of the multiple discourses and literacies involved in student learning was impossible in the time available. Even so, if she could make a start on documenting the significant relationships by which students in FYS learn, and join that with Thesen’s challenge, this could invoke a larger debate about the contribution of democratic professionalism to institutional politics.

The absence of a model provided by a convincing student questionnaire proved critical to Burton’s decision about what and how she would prepare for the conference. What would the members of this audience see if they could “look” into her classroom? FYS already had a promotional image that showed a University 1020 class organized for its capstone session. The course involved a retinue of plenary presenters who visited as individuals to “explain themselves” as disciplinary or professional school experts. But as Tamsin Haggis writes, “there is not one ‘academic culture’ that students have to be ‘inducted’ into but [an academy] that ... consists of a range of diverse and often contradictory cultures that students have to learn to negotiate” (2003, p. 101). For the penultimate class, faculty returned as a group to join the students in roundtable conversations where the “thought-encouraging” questions were the students’. The image captured a moment in this class when a joke was shared: were these students and instructors thinking or were they laughing, and in any case what was the difference? A picture allows scope for meaning-making based on an assessment of content and this particular picture opened up the fleeting and the distributed aspects of learning. Just as the image was a means to provoke discussion of the encounters and situations we construct as pedagogic, its micro-level introduction to an FYS classroom would increase the possibilities of the audience being able to envisage what all three of us meant by democratic education.

We had known from the first that “showing and telling” is not the simple and straightforward act of retelling a story. It is a beginning to new possibilities. During our preparations we had begun to appreciate the many ramifications, metaphorical and literal, of a show and tell. From this period of preparation we were thinking differently, at the level of ontology and epistemology and so in terms of a research method.

Presenting

On October 17, we took our dialogue to new people. Twenty-five or so delegates attended our session. How many of this audience were primed by reading the abstract was an open question. But, with parallel sessions on offer, this attendance indicated a gratifying interest in transitional programming. Professors who knew the Program more intimately joined the strangers in the audience. Conferencing on home territory promised a dialogue across an interface larger than the one that we were about to initiate.

A slide projection greeted the early arrivals. It displayed questions that put our audience in the position of curriculum developers, prompting them to deliberate on the ideal components of a transitional programme. Then we moved them into particularly telling ground: would their ideas change if they knew the constituency for which their programme was designed was the lowest grade-band of students admitted to their college or university? And finally, probing institutional contexts, we asked; would the program they now had in mind garner support at their home base?

The classroom in which we were assembled was a generation apart in design from the FYS suite, one floor below. Its cumbersome seating would have frustrated many of the group activities involved in the delivery of FYS courses. Even now, the formality of a front-of-class, scripted, delivery concerned us, yet we knew that our three presentations could each be delivered in exactly ten minutes. Greetings and personal introductions were kept brief: the audience should know we put a higher priority on dialoguing about programming and teaching first year students than self-promotion. It would become clear however that we were far from thinking the teacher should “disappear” from either the classroom or from education policy making (Barnett & Coate, 2005). The most effective change starts with our understanding of what it means to be a teacher.

Ryan went first with a presentation that invited discussion of the premise that the “not yet developed” view of the student was a necessity of confidence-building in new entrants to the university. Coming to the classroom with a background in academic advising and counselling, Ryan found that the multiple layers of her professional experiences advanced her thinking. New to teaching at first year, she said she had been challenged by the form of academic socialization required in University 1010 and looked for opportunities to de-mystify the university experience for her students and build on their existing strengths. Alongside evidence of how her course had contributed to putting FYS students at ease with the university's unfamiliar values and expectations, Ryan brought her provocation: the necessity of reframing understandings of “poor performance” to create the circumstances in which instructors could become more aware of students' concerns. Her emphasis was on the students, yet the potential of educators to grow also concerned her. It was not just her perception that after studying in University 1010 students were better prepared than were their peers across a range of tasks. Participants themselves spoke of being more capable when they were required to identify credible resources for a research paper, to collaborate in a group activity, and to engage in in-class discussion. They also observed their increased ability to discriminate between information to be remembered and that which could be relocated electronically contributed to better time-management.

Learning cast as a project of increasing self-efficacy worked best when students recognized and valued the kinds of agency that facilitated what was at the core of a university's endeavours. The significance of them conceiving themselves part of a learning institution which proved itself ready to learn should not be underrated. As the students developed effective academic skills, strategies and approaches, Ryan saw their growing comfort and confidence in the university as an integral feature of their learning. She emphasized that this had to be an improvement over what these students might have experienced if they had been thrown into university studies without a “First Year Experience”. Her conclusion that “no

student had been harmed in the making of this course” was not just the resort to “happy thought” by an instructor who had indeed been challenged by lack of any previous experience in first year teaching, but an important contribution to a development process recognizing education as a domain of empathy, caring and values.

Next to present was Lidstone. Concentrating on the first year teaching–learning relationship as a dialogue, he referenced a Bakhtinian approach to the classroom that navigates the “teachable moments [that] are discovered in the gaps of a discursive, malleable approach”. Eugene Matusov and other scholars provided support for Lidstone’s decision to give attention to the various learning styles and socio-historical contexts that are unique to each student. As he told the audience he had crafted a teaching approach that reacted to the in-class responses and written exercise evaluations of Arts 1500. He had thus created a changing environment that adapted to the students’ strengths and weaknesses. “As the instructor, I simultaneously learned from and responded to the class, integrating this acquired knowledge into the Program” he said. Describing his delivery as a “bait and switch gradualism”, he further explained: “the pedagogical agenda remains behind the curtain until the student has been immersed in an exercise that implicitly requires the very skills being taught. It is through reflection that these skills are solidified, and subsequently made more meaningful, as the student has already seen the skillset in action from my lectures and demonstrations”. “Essentially”, Lidstone observed, “the performative nature of language, the relationships and tensions that create moments of meaning within language itself, becomes the inspiration for and structure of the classroom experience.”

Over the days of preparation he had arrived at understandings that had particular resonance for a conference that was themed around the qualities of the future graduate and their employability. He was able to say that his new area of interest in commercial writing was simply an extension of the learning styles that were paramount in the classroom setting. He now clarified these as the ability to adapt, through dialogue, through interaction; he emphasized the necessity of reconfiguration and reorientation and stressed the pre-eminence of adaptability, malleability and fluidity. “The tenants of my classroom bled into my daily work and effectively created this new opportunity for me” Lidstone said. He went on to reveal how this showcase had galvanized his thoughts on the problematic of performativity.

“Performativity, in reflection, is the ability to switch roles in response to the audience—initially that audience consisted of a classroom of students, and it was the adaptive performativity that resulted in a continually evolving presentation method. As such, I could adapt in response to my own vocational role, apply it to my previous research, and now present it to a new audience at this conference in an effort to highlight the depth and functionality of such a pedagogical approach. The content of my presentation and the method of my approach are inextricable, and the goal is to present that interconnectivity in this new classroom.” And, where was Lidstone now in his thinking about the qualities of the graduate student in relation to labour market needs? His answer was embedded in his entire presentation: there were no winners and there was no gain from the subordination of the creative and critical learning process of the kind that his continuing education had afforded him, and here he drew attention to his avoidance of such hollow clichés as “entering the real world”. Finally, he said, I find myself presently facing a new question. “Not, ‘Would I Take My Class’ but, ‘Would I Teach That Class Again?’ Of course I’d teach my class again, because I continue to practice it daily: evaluate, respond, re-evaluate, reconfigure. Critical performativity is part of all discourse, of all interaction: social, academic, business, or otherwise

Once Lidstone had spoken, Burton’s task was easier. She observed that multiple professorial presences had provided for the academic enrichment of the capstone FYS course. Using visual triggers might one further explore what her colleagues had already established about the always-fluid relationship between conceptions, perceptions, approaches and learning outcomes that cannot be *exactly* specified? The emphasis on the latter was required because of what she wanted the audience to grasp as the

significant part of her presentation; what is missing from what counts as evidence in the audit culture of universities. The reporting responsibilities of the Directors at the culmination of the pilot FYS significantly upped the stakes of considering forms of evaluation other than standard metrics and formally gathered student feedback.

In the classroom image she brought to the conference, students could be seen... She paused, this was reaching for matter that should not be pre-empted. "Work-shopping" the image would have been the ideal way to proceed from this point. While gathering the audience's feedback, she would have asked whether the experience of elicitation did not itself bring home to them that content, purpose and relationship are key questions about learning. But her time was short so, in the days before the conference, she had asked groups of both faculty and first-semester undergraduates to write or speak about what they saw in the classroom image. Initially conceived as surrogate data-sets, Burton now perceived their value differently. They provided cross-sectional cameos of student and instructor "talk". Aspects of institutional conditions, practices and effects were raised and in a way that they could be questioned. After distinguishing the responses of students from faculty's, and further distinguishing faculty with any kind of FYS experience from those with none, she had bundled the narratives. Plotted as word cloud graphics, patterns of word-use frequency could be more readily discerned. The clouds that now served as studies in making pedagogy meaningful had opened other horizons on FYS than could be arrived at by measurement.

Students had a little difficulty in recognizing this as a regular class: "Orientation" was a second order word and thus featured larger in their cloud than "learning". But this was a sign that perhaps the only time these students who were mid-way through their first semester had experienced a discussion with faculty sitting alongside them was in their first week introduction. "Engaged" featured just as large, and with a surprising frequency for a word which, until then, Burton had thought a marker of a specialized vocabulary. Yet it was a clue to these students having applied Lidstone's test, and in answer to their own question "Would I take this class", they had answered "yes". They saw students in the FYS class laughing *and* thinking.

But there was more to be said about the word "Engaged" (and its variants) and this was because the word did not appear with any great frequency in either of the faculty clouds. Surprisingly, it was used less by faculty who had volunteered their time as plenary presenters in University 1020 or worked with FYS in another capacity than faculty who had no contact with the Program. This was explained by a qualitative difference in the narratives that supplied the words for the clouds. Complicated narratives rich with registers of the emotional and embodied class characterized the "FYS faculty" as distinct from their counterparts. By a large measure the former saw more going on in the classroom, and they took it in a positive, open spirit. To be sure they knew about FYS and its pedagogy—their counterparts knew little—but that point hardly detracts from our overall argument in this article that the Program's success has been in a transformative view of learning relations. A shadow was cast by some words in the "non-FYS" cloud. It came in the shape of "disengaged"; more than one of the "non-FYS" faculty respondents predicted poor learning outcomes by taking laughter for a lack of attention and construing the shared joke as evidence of a disorderly classroom.

There is a group missing from this experiment: the students of FYS. At the embryonic stage of Burton's "What are you seeing?" investigation, the ethical implications of asking one group of FYS students to comment on another when all were subject to institutional and in-course assessment were too much to resolve. Reproducing student work (permissions obtained) in the form of assignments designed for reflection and feedback was the default in the conference presentation. Particularly useful were the questions for faculty prepared by the students. Curiosity about the personal trajectories of individual faculty blended with wanting to know the social and collective applications of their knowledges, with

some students reflecting on how a course had come about that encouraged students and faculty to meet and talk about these matters. This, argued Burton, was the way to trace changes in students' understanding of learning and purpose.

We hoped at this stage that we would be carrying the audience with us, having persuaded its members that the academic enhancement we had been providing students in the first three years of the pilot was well worth supporting.

The Audience Responds

The silence that followed our presentations seemed longer than it really was. When they came, however, the early questions were troubling. "Was it our aim that FYS students should hold their own with the best", the first questioner asked; "did we see them enrolling in Honours programs?" The next wanted to know what standard metrics showed about FYS students, "were they beating out others who were not in the Program?" We began to wonder whether we had brought the right messages to the AUTS. "Re-writing the institutional script of failure", paying attention to the "yet to be developed potential of the student", pin-pointing how poor performing students are discriminated against; had these formulations not resonated? The discomfort of the moment was no less for us having lived this same dissonance within our own institution, but the brevity of the Q&A allowed the panel no time to regroup. So, when the second questioner thought to acknowledge our intentions for the session in a reframing of his question, Burton took the initiative.

She provided reassurance on the matter of statistics. Her argument was made not to evade data that told against the Program, for the opposite was the case. She welcomed critical comments, but in response to a critique that had made its target an institutional environment of quantifiable accountability that discounts any aspect of education and teaching that is not immediately quantifiable (Bennett, 2016). From Ryan and Lidstone we had heard that multiple factors shaped the learning environment in FYS, and she had pushed the argument to the need of multiple criteria to validate its outcomes. Ryan shifted in her seat, but remained silent, still grasping what seemed the implausible expectation embedded in the first question. Why should Program students be asked to meet standards that accounted for the experience of possibly less than five percent of Memorial's undergraduates? Had the questioner asked whether FYS students were blazing a path as Honours students because he was, in fact, complimenting the Program! The academic socialization that started with the first session of University 1010 would only be provided senior undergraduates in some institutions. Graduate programmes might be the first opportunity some had to ask what motivated their professors: University 1020, however, foregrounds this kind of question. Lidstone, too, was quietly taking stock. Nods and smiles had greeted the delivery of his paper, the more so as he reached the section where he spoke of the blending of learning experiences and the audience-informed theatre of lecturing. While he was sure that audience members without his disciplinary background were on board, was he to be disappointed of a further dialogue; would he have to wait for another occasion to hear discussed his arguments for a theory and practice of education in the post-modern academy that could liberate learning from the category-making that had outlived positivism?

Having arrived at this tangly spot, an audience member thought to lighten things. Danny Dyer knew more about the Program than most. He is the professor who not only provides the session "Mathematics as a Questioning Practice" in University 1020 but also serves as a member of the Program's steering committee. On this occasion he had popular wisdom to share. "Don't let University get in the way of your education" Danny's father had advised his son on the latter's acceptance to Memorial. Dyer thus characterized the quality that infuses public concern for post-secondary education in NL. Respectful disrespect is its most refreshing part, and if this exists amongst the people of our

province, it also exists amongst Canadians elsewhere. We do not subscribe to nativist interpretations of NL politics and culture, but that does not prevent us saying that Memorial and its province are different in a way that merits further consideration. We ended the conference impressed that the University's special relationship to the people of the province sustains a public accountability that in turn means it needs to give all students admitted to Memorial a fair start. Discussion with colleagues outside the province was needed to bring home how this has advanced our scope to innovate, but this recognition was the fruit of further dialogue outside the conference room.

Meanwhile Dyer's intervention cut through the knot that had seemingly contributed to the slow start of the Q&As. The three questions to the audience that prefaced our session asked for a complex and possibly discomfiting re-positioning as soon as individuals and groups entered the room. If the easy part was answering an invitation to envisage an ideal first year transitional programme, the rest asked for some deeply searching political and ethical ruminations. Without this there could be no answering what changed when it became clear that the programme was to cater to the conventionally least able undergraduate group, nor whether it would fly at their home base. For classroom teachers who were unwilling administrators institutional critique was not a comfortable place. Yet current efficiency and economy agendas really do ask for a new kind awareness of how resource needs can be articulated starting from the ethics of the classroom. We had no reason to regret announcing our project in this way, but we understood why the brain-storming and heart-searching involved in our session made it a heavy duty event.

Later questioners negotiated the intellectual, ethical and practical dilemmas better. We were asked about the Program's evolution as a "growing concern" by a questioner interested in the pilot's genesis and evolution. Institutions have Calendar regulations incorporating peer review, and the required procedures generally move at a slow pace, she observed. Two of three courses were on the books already, Ryan responded. Without them there could have been no starting the Pilot just six months after it received Senate approval. But the questioner's point was well taken because no teaching semester had passed without us preparing the necessary paperwork to initiate changes to course titles and descriptions. We, however, valued committee work as a platform on which we can demonstrate to the rest of the university that our pedagogy is never static. The paperwork now constitutes a genealogy that leaves traceable Memorial's transition from an institution providing after the fact rescue courses for failed students to one with a package of upfront support. In the Calendar and in committee minutes is language embedding the epistemologies that are needed for colleagues to appreciate the difference of a practice that makes students into the subjects of remedial interventions from one which cultivates the appropriate personal, social and intellectual attributes to free them as enquiring subjects.

Appropriately epistemology was taken up by an audience member who had been mulling on Lidstone's presentation and who now sought to incorporate another perspective. The latter drew attention to Lidstone's emphasis on the word performativity, a word he had played with when conveying one of the key components of his classroom delivery methods. This is the term that, for Lidstone, highlights the creation of action and identity through communication acts, and it provides him with a scholastic framework to refer to his lectures as performance pieces, thus acknowledging that he builds a character to act in each classroom setting. But the questioner wanted to foreground a link with performance as an indication of results, the students' level of performance, that Lidstone had commented upon, thus bringing a third layer to the communicative performance dynamic he had played with in his explanations. Lidstone clarified that he performed a role as educator and the students in attendance perform their role in the classroom dialogue in response. But he reminded us that their graded performance serves as the resultant third element in the pedagogical dynamic exchange. The omnilogue

to which he had referred unfolds based on the performances of student and educator, and both feed the resultant recorded performance.

For an educator that bases his delivery methods on language theory, this was a revealing experience to have a word deconstructed meaningfully via conversation to yield an expanded explanation of the significance of performance in the classroom. Even though time had run out, the dialogue had only just begun.

Emerging to Better Understandings

Beth Ryan: It has taken us considerable discussion and debate to get to a place where the three of us could explore our thoughts about our individual experiences in the classroom and examine the connections that exist among them. At the beginning of the process, I was not sure how or what I could contribute to the conversation of the pedagogy that informed our work in the classroom. In the months that passed between my teaching term and our presentation at the AUTS, I came to realize that I could bring something meaningful to the process simply because I come from a different perspective from my colleagues. My own background in counselling psychology and my work as an academic advisor influenced the way that I engaged with the students in the classroom. However, the degree to which that training and work experience made an impact on my teaching philosophy became more apparent to me in the months since I taught the course. I have come to recognize that the way I engage with my students is rooted in the humanistic theories of counselling psychology that I studied and continue to practice as a counsellor. It is a strengths-based model that aims to build on what the clients (or in this case, the students) bring to our work together and steers away from pathologizing people or seeing them from a deficit perspective. As an academic advisor, I took a similarly holistic approach to my work with students, eschewing a prescriptive stance in favour of a developmental model that allowed me to see the student in the context of all of their experiences.

The first year of university studies can be intimidating, isolating, and indeed, alienating to new students. Ample evidence exists that students often leave university discouraged and defeated by what happened in their first year, hence the concerted effort by many universities to explore new ways to retain students until graduation. But transitional programs like FYS have the ability to create a culture of caring and support that helps students make the connections they need not just to survive but to thrive in their first year and beyond. My brief tenure in the classroom, coupled with my work as an academic advisor and now as an administrator with the Program, has allowed me to form connections with some of these students as they begin their university studies. These relationships have the potential to change the students' impression of what a university can offer them. At the very least, I would want students to leave first year with the sense that the university is a place where their potential can be recognized and realized.

Matt Lidstone: Post conference, I find myself meditating on one word that was an essential piece of my presentation, but had been re-evaluated after the panel discussion: performativity. An essential part of my pedagogical approach, I had always viewed performativity as my performance on the classroom's stage, acting in response to student work, student discussion, and general feedback. Dialogic modification influenced the teacher performance, the impetus for all dialogue within the classroom. But there is also the aspect of student performance—both the way they act in the classroom in response to my lecture material/dialogues, and the evaluative component of course material. In actuality, it would appear that everything that I bring to the classroom—and everything that comes about from my times teaching—can be condensed into the multifaceted concept of performativity. I set out to provide a performance, which in turn, elicits a performative response from the student body. It cannot be overlooked that every member of a classroom is, in a manner of speaking, performing a role influenced

by the setting and roles of authority. Furthermore, as the content comes to reflect the interaction of both performative roles, the onus is placed on the lead performer (i.e., me, as instructor) to evaluate the overall performance of my audience.

This conference allowed me to re-imagine the nature of my pedagogical approach, and envision it in a simplified manner, albeit it one that relies on a three-part complex relationship. All elements of performance (my lecture style, student work and response, and the evaluated student material) interact and influence one another to allow the course to grow simultaneously, as long as my performative role continues to shift in response. Granted, it is still an uneasy space to occupy, knowing that material has to be shifted, rearranged, and modified on the fly, as it were, but the resulting performance of the students is entirely dependent on my performance, my role as the acting instructor, or lead actor in the pedagogical playhouse.

Valerie Burton: As the last of the panel to add my closing comments to this article I have an opportunity to provide further definition to the themes addressed at the AUTS. Reflecting on what has been one of Memorial's greatest learning-about-teaching experiments gains substance with each passing week. In fewer than six months the FYS Directors will deliver a final report on the pilot. Preparations are being made in the knowledge that "hard data" will continue to shape the discussions that will determine the Program's fate. The AAUT delegate who broke the post-presentation silence was not the first to ask for statistics, nor will he be the last. His question drew attention to the vulnerability of the Program if it does not provide robust evidence of its impact.

Recent weeks have brought evidence of continuing improvements in the areas that will surely attract attention. The fourth cohort started in September 2015 with 83 students. Three weeks into the second semester, 70 remain at Memorial. The Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning (CIAP) will look at that figure and, after consulting data on a matched group, they will advise on the weight that can be placed on a retention statistic of 85%. More telling however will be whether the analysts' report 15% as a factor of simple "attrition". These students have ceased paying fees to Memorial, but there is more to their personal histories, and a travesty it will be if these individuals are spoken of as drop-outs and failures. On past experience, CIAP will be one of the influences against essentializing the categories used in reporting Program statistics. Internal discretion and accountability are the signs of a professionalism amongst these analysts that makes them watchful for the rhetoric by which social barriers and academic boundaries are re-privileged within policy and practice across the institution. FYS has come to appreciate the part these colleagues take in restraining the auditing reflexes of a managerial culture. The pilot might have been wound up already—a two year term was all that was originally planned—had the analysts not pointed out the impossibly short horizon for generating data. Their professionalism and collegiality is an encouragement as I pursue the experiment with registers of classroom engagement that I started in advance of the AUTS. Now that it has grown into a formal research project there will be publishable results that the analysts have an interest in reading, for they keep abreast of the current literature, and they too innovate. Via horizontal lines of collegial co-operation we might in our institutions face down the neo-liberal scepticism of professionalism (Kneyber, 2016; Strathern, 2000).

Fifteen percent, or thirteen FYS students were noted above as not registered at Memorial this semester, though some are preparing to return. The relative inaccessibility of our campuses in winter influences the attendance pattern of physically challenged students, as we have seen in FYS. Whether this knowledge and its potential to inform the University's planning for infrastructure development and course delivery adds to the arguments favouring the larger implementation of Ryan's pedagogy of care, I leave readers to decide. Consider, however what a new departure it might mean in policy-making if "neediness" was struck down in favour of the "still to be developed" capacity that informs her approach (Healey, 2008). There are other dilemmas to being institutional truth-tellers motivated to rewrite its

script of failure. In a university that is concerned with maximizing retention, how do we make public that FYS has had taken a hand in re-routing students *out* of the University, for it is, after all, perfectly compatible with our professional responsibilities? Students in and beyond first semester have been guided into more suitable degree, certificate and trade programmes, and into jobs that require no post-secondary qualifications. But, having studied with an FYS instructor whose professional sensibilities were invested performatively in drawing out the qualities of the material with which he worked, Lidstone's students have been given an experience at Memorial that has started them thinking and expressing in new ways that might subsequently be developed either inside or outside the university (Haggis, 2003, p. 100). In his short time of teaching, he has assembled an existentially reconciled practice that has allowed for the moves necessary to survive in a market driven society, while he has provided for his students and for himself learning experiences that transcend the intellectual, conceptual, existential and ethical limits of the market. Memorial can take satisfaction in the qualities of its post-graduates turned instructors, but at the same time it must be mindful to an ever-present wake-up call. The injunction that university should not stand in the way of getting an education infuses the popular vision of post-secondary learning with its democratic purpose in NL.

Outside-province visitors to St John's for the AUTS saw how the connection of welfare social policies to education is upheld in a province with a post-colonial history that encompasses a powerful popular memory of the collapse of a major employment; not oil—the downturn of that industry is too recent—but the demise of the deeply imbricated cod fishery. The public's conditional respect for the province's degree-awarding institution is kept current in each generation as the special relationship of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to Memorial University. Visitors who attended our session were asked their opinion whether a program like FYS might be supported at their home base. Their delay in providing an answer to the question gave me pause. Their reticence was not for lack of awareness of the difference made to an intervention if it could take its cue from a protective not individualistic ideology (Kneyber, 2016, p. 40). Indeed this awareness alerted them to what they are likely in process of losing at their universities. More than ever did I emerge from the Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase appreciative of the local moral economy of student worth. This element in the resistance to the will to commodification in the target-driven culture of the present-day university is never to be underrated. From it we draw our energy for change within our evolving relationship with the students who are indeed challenged by university, but in a radically reconfigured way.

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