

**RIT Faculty Learning Community**

**Portfolio of Project and Reflections**

**Sidney M. Barefoot**

**June 26, 2003**

## Once Upon a Faculty Learning Community: Some Reflections

Sidney M. Barefoot

June 26, 2003

**I'm no idiot.** When Mary Lou Basile, a past member of the RIT Faculty Learning Community (FLC), came into my office about the same day that applications were due for the 2002-2003 community, I had no intention of applying. I was too busy and expected to become busier. But I'm no idiot and since Mary Lou said that's what I'd be if I neglected this opportunity, I quickly filled out an application and negotiated the approval of my chairperson and dean.

**Every ball of string has a beginning.** I was delighted to be accepted into the FLC on May 28, 2002. I had known Vinnie Gupta, FLC co-facilitator with Susan Donovan since May, 2000, when we were both honored as Eisenhart Award recipients. I had yet to meet Susan, but that deprivation ended in our orientation meeting in the Skalny Room. McKeachie, Teaching Goals Inventory, Lilly Conference...this was to be a fast ride. "Don't forget to journal" was a phrase we'd hear frequently, something I didn't do as often as I thought I would and, looking back, doesn't matter much yet. By summer, I was lying in a hammock reading *Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Angelo and Cross and figured it might come in handy someday as a reference, but missed my immediate needs entirely. Not so with Wilbert McKeachie's *Teaching Tips*. I got into it and by fall was ready for the ongoing discussions our small group would have regarding most of the chapters.

**Before you know it, you don't.** I had no idea that the first small group would be so engaging. Susan got us into some great discussions of teaching and learning and the group chemistry began to heat up our collective beaker. It was a good mix of the staid and the unstaid but before long we were asking basic questions about the degree to which we were student centered vs. teacher centered and so much more. I loved those ten weeks of engagement; they were the highlight of the entire FLC process for me. Like Goldilocks, I found this group to be "just right" and it never was as right after that. For me the next two groupings did not display the same level of confidence in each other, forthrightness, challenge, vigor or impact on my teaching. But change is often out of my control so I made the adjustments and found both new groupings to be satisfactory, particularly in helping me get to know more of the faculty. For sure, the best part of the entire experience was getting to know faculty outside of my college in a collegial way, something I valued much more than the occasional RIT social conclave. Here I was learning and having fun doing so.

**I blossomed with the Lilly.** People still ask me how I liked the 2002 Lilly Conference at Miami University of Ohio in Oxford and I'm still hard pressed to give a clear answer. I tell them it was great, and it was, but not in any euphoric sense for me. I loved the very fact of its existence, that so many faculty from around the country would value college

teaching so much that they'd commit to sharing what they were learning and directions they were taking. I still love the thought of that and was glad to have participated. The Millis and Cottell preconference workshop on cooperative learning was a great challenge for me. I found my self enduring it more than enjoying it because I am personally so averse to small group exercises in the classroom, preferring to get students engaged with each other in many other ways. I dreaded each activity, each new grouping and each new application. It was clear that my personality and preferred learning style was out of sync with the process. I found the entire day to be stressful and tiring but I believed that Millis was working with pedagogically sound principles. That reminded me of our earlier FLC discussions on being student centered so I recommitted to applying what I was learning from Millis and many others at Lilly who expounded on cooperative learning even if it was personally painful to me. I determined to seek balances and new combinations that would work for students who really do learn best in some of the cooperative learning activities that were being advocated. The enthusiasm of my FLC colleagues reminded me that I was the outlier. Walking from session to session, I tried to put aside my stubborn insistence that my alternative teaching methods had already been very positively received by students. I forced myself to consider how much more could be learned by my students, or a good percentage of them, if I began to apply more of what I was hearing at this conference. I am quite introspective, it seems, and take self-talk very seriously as a follow up to listening to others, so this effect of the Lilly on me is something I still value.

Of course, as everyone in the FLC learned, I missed many of the sessions I had checked off on my program, spending the time in my hotel room recovering from a Grand Case of Head-to-Toe Hives, something I had never before experienced. Subsequent strings of doctors all insisted it was something on the conference dining menu, but tests never found the culprit. I found myself taking it all in stride, like I do with so many teaching experiences that resemble hives. There is a certain adventure in such things. Maybe because I find it in teaching, I've not had any real desire to climb Everest or traverse crevasse-riven glaciers. The hospital staff was great and it was interesting sharing the second half of the night with a moaning, post-surgical, high school hockey player who broke his leg about the same time as I broke out all over. A nurse forgot to call Susan the next day to let her know where the rental car had gone, but once that was rectified, Susan and others in our caring group showed me what community can mean beyond our shared interests in college teaching, something I will always appreciate. Adventure can have many rewards.

**Just ask them.** I found the FLC individual project very difficult to get started. By the time we began, I was no longer teaching the course I had hoped to modify. With relaxing encouragement from Vinnie and others in that quarter's group, I plunged into a different project, this time with an individualized course. Fortunately, this dovetailed well with another project I was working on with my department, so I began to videotape some interviews with my students to find out which questions contributed most to developing strong teacher-student learning partnerships. The process got me into the literature and there's no question at all that the topics and issues we had dealt with in the FLC gave me a perspective and a lexicon that helped me prosper with my students. My report was



called, "Just Ask Them: An Inquiry Approach to Student-Teacher Learning Partnerships." I was home; I had found the combination of philosophy, methodology and vocabulary that would lead both me and my students. I had no time for this whole project; my teaching load and other responsibilities were overwhelming. But I did it and it was the right thing to do. It proved to be the second most positive influence on my morale that the learning community provided. It can be okay to be exhausted when the gold is in your hand.

**From here to paternity.** As difficult as it was for me to participate in the FLC this particular year, I am entirely glad I did it. Susan Donovan and Vinnie Gupta should be congratulated for their efforts again and again. They found the right way to do this. (Well, almost....I'll never forgive their remixing of the "One Perfect Group.") The year with our community needed the emphasis it got on scholarly literature as a reference point without having to be pedantic. It needed a project without typically structured, formalized research. It needed a portfolio, but without a hard cover. The joy for me was in having a structure with the flexibility that was respectfully afforded the members of the community. Ours was not the kind of group that would have responded well to patronizing from its leaders. The FLC needed what Vinnie and Susan provided; a mature, enthusiastic guidance of people who were at all times respected for our own role in the greater RIT community. This whole Faculty Learning Community concept was obviously conceived in hope and trust. I think each of us who participated in the community is better prepared to bring good teaching to the next generation.



Sidney M. Barefoot  
RIT Faculty Learning Community  
Project Description  
January 20, 2003

**Course:** Individual Speech-Language Therapy (0860-001)

**Course Description:** This course focuses on improvement of spoken communication. Goals of the course are individualized based on student need. Instruction may include aspects of speech production such as voice, articulation, pitch or loudness and aspects of language including grammar and vocabulary.

**Teaching/Learning Problem to be Addressed:** The individualized nature of this course allows for a wide selection of learning goals. From the onset, students are informed that they are co-developers of the learning goals and co-managers of the instructional approaches. However, they often defer quickly to the professor for primary decision-making in both categories. I would like to refine a "Socratic" approach I have used in the past to improve a cooperative learning process involving the student and professor. Specifically, I would like to describe a questioning process that promotes students' introspection and descriptions of their communication experiences, learning needs, instructional approach and content, and learning progress.

**Project Activities:**

1. 30-40 minute videotaped interview of 4 students by the instructor
2. Transcription of the interviews.
3. Analysis of the transcriptions to determine key areas of inquiry that could guide the subsequent instructional process.
4. Report outcomes to learning community and greater institute

**Project Timelines**

1. Winter (022)
  - Select 4 students for project
  - Describe an inquiry approach
  - Arrange interviews for Spring Quarter
2. Spring (023)
  - Complete interviews by mid-March
  - Complete transcriptions by mid- April
  - Complete analysis and provide report to the institute by end of April

## **Just Ask Them: An Inquiry Approach to Student-Teacher Learning Partnerships**

**Sidney M. Barefoot**

**NTID Speech-Language Department**

**RIT Faculty Learning Community Presentation, April 28, 2003**

### **The Course:**

Individual Speech-Language Therapy (0860-001). This course focuses on improvement of spoken communication. Goals of the course are individualized based on student need. Instruction may include aspects of speech production such as voice, articulation, pitch or loudness and aspects of language including grammar and vocabulary. Most students continue to enroll for two or more quarters of instruction.

### **The Need for Student-Teacher Partnering**

Limitations to teacher-generated assessment and instruction. Formal assessments of speech and spoken language are generally limited to the instructors' judgments of students' speech intelligibility, their production of discrete phonemes, and the semantic and syntactic choices made in recorded samples of speaking. A questionnaire also solicits a self-rating of students' speech intelligibility and speech reception ability. These assessments do not clearly indicate the informal judgments made by a wide variety of people throughout the students' lifetime or the communicative and psychological impact of not being understood or not using appropriate spoken English in important situations. They also do not indicate the students' personal or cultural identity or many other factors that can influence language learning. Formal assessments may help prioritize instructional needs from the instructors' point of view, but they do not sufficiently indicate the personal needs, preferences and priorities of the students. Given the brief instructional time available, this information becomes critical to the selection of goals and the determination of success.

Backgrounds highly parent/teacher directed. While strong external influences on learning are experienced by many college students, deaf and hard of hearing students at RIT have often experienced a life-long process of parents and teachers making additional, deafness-related decisions for them regarding their education, exposure to life situations, and communication options. While this varies greatly among students, it can be valuable for the instructor to probe these factors to determine how prepared the students are to take responsibility for their own learning at this point.

Need to promote thinking conducive to life-long self-assessment, goal setting and improvement. This need is not unique to deaf and hard of hearing students, but applies to any college student interested in improving communication. Many students who take this course have found it relatively easy to communicate within a deaf community or their families, but they have now challenged themselves to communicate better with an expanded number of hearing people using speech. This learning is seldom completed to their satisfaction during their college years. It

requires that they develop means of assessing themselves, setting realistic and achievable goals and making improvements during the course of their lifetime, generally without any professional assistance. For that reason, the instruction they receive in college is directed at expanding their competencies for independent learning in general as well as for developing communication competencies in particular. It has been observed that leaping from externally-directed learning to self-guided learning generally does not occur naturally or rapidly. It is hypothesized that a transition or bridging can be facilitated by forming learning partnerships between students and faculty that help students find ways to become more self-directing and begin to experience resulting benefits. However, the needs and the process may vary greatly from student to student. Determining optimal individualized instruction requires a means of getting student histories, perceptions, needs and desires "on the table" for the instructor and the student to use in a learning partnership or "shoulder-to-shoulder approach" (Tattershall, 2002). For this project, an interviewing method of inquiry was employed.

### **Inquiry by Interview:**

Question - What are some key areas of inquiry that can guide an instructional partnering process? Given that time is a valuable commodity in instruction, it is important that any inquiry method be as efficient as possible. For this project, interview transcripts would be used to isolate areas of inquiry that seemed most profitable to the purposes of instruction.

Method - In this project, four students were interviewed, each at a different stage of instruction. The interviews were videotaped and transcribed. Transcriptions were then analyzed for appropriateness and timing of the questions, types of questions eliciting the most valuable information, student engagement during the interview and any other factors that would reveal themselves.

### **Preliminary Results:**

Students highly engaged in interviews. Of the four students, three responded to open-ended questions with excellent disclosure. Their body language appeared positive throughout the interviews. Two students provided answers that were informative but brief, sometimes requiring a series of follow-up questions. All of the students became engaged in the interview in a manner that suggested they viewed the process as both interesting and informative for later use.

Found several key areas of inquiry. Although many areas of inquiry provided information that seemed useful to the development of an instructional process, five areas were noted that seemed most useful. These areas (not necessarily found in all interviews) included:

- Personal and educational history (in a story-telling context or as individual facts)
  - "I was the only deaf person in my school all of my life....There were no deaf in my home town.....I am lucky because a lot of my friends really like to learn sign, so I taught them. I grew up with a lot of [hearing] friends who can sign.....Some friends sign better than me."



- Reasons/motivations for enrolling in instruction and related expectations
  - “Well, at first, well, my mom really wants me to come here to get some speech. Therefore, I do it for my mom.....But, in some ways, I would like to talk more, but not as much as my mom wants.....My dad really wants me to have some speech but he will just leave me alone, whatever I want, he says nothing.....My mom thought my speech would ‘save my life.’”
  - “[Signing up for speech therapy] was my decision, not my family. My friend told me about this communication department and I thought, “Oh, why not? Try again. I used to take speech therapy in elementary school.”
  - “If I stay in speech therapy for a few years, I expect a big difference. If only one year of speech, then I probably won’t see a big difference....I don’t expect perfect, but near-perfect.”
- Description of previous speech-language instruction and those aspects they would most like to avoid or develop further
  - “In my junior year of high school, I took one year of speech therapy. It was too boring for me so I stopped.....I thought I would be able to communicate with hearing people, but her way of teaching speech made me lose my motivation.....I remember the speech therapist had vocabulary cards with various terms. You just looked at them and pronounced them.”
  - “[At NTID] I don’t want boring exercises that repeat things over and over. I want something that keeps me motivated.”
- Defined goals for the next instructional period and rationale for selection
  - “I want to practice getting good air flow again while speaking in complete sentences.” [Student took some time to explain her previous speech skills that she “lost” when she attended a residential school that did not use spoken English. She wanted her old skills back and wanted to build on them.]
- Preferred approach to learning
  - “I think that maybe I could try ‘top-down,’ because if you talk and I am lost, I could stop you.....Then go down, revise, and go back up [to conversational level] again.” (This was an applied paraphrase of the therapist’s previous explanation of “top-down” vs. “bottom-up” approaches to skill development.)

Student data complemented and informed other assessments. In some cases, instructional goals that would have been selected by the instructor on the basis of formal assessments were not at all the same as those of the student. Some student responses indicated that years of work had been put into those areas with unsatisfactory results. In such cases, the instructor could offer to provide a different and more promising approach to that area or could agree to focus on a different goal. In other cases, there was an excellent match between formally-obtained information and the perceived needs of the students. The important thing was not to prove the superior value of either source of information but to bring them both into the subsequent teacher-student-partnered discussion and goal-setting process.

The inquiry process itself appeared to foster subsequent cooperative and self-directed learning. In the weeks subsequent to these interviews, the instructor observed that the students seemed to become comfortable taking on more responsibility for decision-making than they reported they were used to. They frequently made reference to matters that had first been presented during the interview. While they

did not always have immediate or clear answers to questions about their needs or preferred direction, they deferred less often than usual to the instructor for full control and used their answers to previous inquiries to guide them. This was by no means uniform among students or necessarily sufficient. All four of the students indicated that they had never been asked for this type and amount of personal input in their pre-college instruction. They also indicated that while they were often not confident taking more responsibility for their learning, they were willing to try to contribute as much as possible.

### **Future Plans**

Continue analysis of current interviews. A much more thorough analysis of the videotapes and transcripts is needed to refine key areas of inquiry and to note specific interviewing techniques that need to be improved. For example, with the more reticent students, the interviewer continued too long with a questioning style that elicited too little information and, in fact, became more of an informer than an inquirer. While this was not without value in the greater instructional picture, it may have prevented a more complete disclosure from the students.

Modify interview to focus on key areas. In Fall quarter (031), interviewing will continue with an expanded student population. Results of the current project will be used to shape and test subsequent inquiry.

Develop student inquiry of instructor. One of the after-effects of the interviewing process in the course of communication instruction has been a higher-than-usual amount of student inquiry of the instructor. For example, one student later asked if the instructor's perceptions of improvement were the same as his. Another asked why a particular teaching technique was being used and why it was not used sooner. This suggests that these students have seen some value in inquiry and are "turning the tables" for the purposes of collecting even more guiding information. It seems appropriate to investigate this further and support student inquiry more intentionally in the future.

Scholarship. Samples of the videotaped interviews are being edited (with student permission and editorial rights) for use in an online tutorial from the website of the NTID Speech-Language Department. This tutorial will be accessible to speech-language therapists worldwide as well as parents and students who may be considering enrollment at RIT. It is felt that the presentation of the values of this and other adult models for communication instruction could affect instruction at pre-college levels. This will be explored when the interviewing data and other approaches to learning partnerships are presented at an upcoming national conference.

Reference: Tattershall, S. (2002) *Adolescents with Language and Learning Needs: A Shoulder to Shoulder Collaboration*. Albany, NY: Delmar.

### The Course

- *Individual Speech-Language Therapy*, an individualized non-credit course focusing on the improvement of spoken communication.
- Learning goals are variable, based on student needs.

### The Need for Student-Teacher Partnering

- Many limitations to teacher-generated assessment and instruction
- Backgrounds highly parent/teacher- directed
- Need to promote thinking conducive to life-long self-assessment, goal-setting and improvement

### Inquiry by Interview

- Question: what are key areas of inquiry that can guide an instructional partnering process?
- Method: interview 4 students, each at a different stage of instruction. Videotape and transcribe.

### Preliminary Results

- Students highly engaged in interviews
- Found several key areas of inquiry
- Student data complemented and informed other assessments
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### Future Plans

- Continue analysis of current interviews
- Modify interview to focus on key areas
- Develop student inquiry of instructor
- Scholarship:
  - online tutorial for professionals in the field
  - national presentations

# **Faculty Learning Community: Using Metaphors to Develop a Personal Teaching Philosophy**

**A Panel Presentation for the  
RIT Faculty Institute for Teaching and Learning  
May 29, 2003**

## **Speaking Notes**

**Sidney M. Barefoot**

I first wrote a teaching philosophy that I was willing to share in January, 2000. I had been nominated for the Eisenhart Award for Outstanding Teaching and the review committee asked me for one. I thought that things might go better if I took their request very seriously so I wrote a one-page statement of my philosophy at that time. Having since spent a delightful year with the Faculty Learning Community, I am updating my philosophy somewhat and am using a teaching metaphor to guide me.

When my learning community group met to discuss metaphors for our teaching, mine came almost immediately. I have adjusted it three times since, but at that time, I said, "I know what I am; I'm a Rabbi Clown." Fortunately, the metaphors we choose don't have to make immediate sense to those around us. I have seldom seen so many blank looks. I took a little time to explain myself... and those who knew me best could see some sense to it. About a week after my obscure exclamation, it occurred to me that I don't like clowns and many kids hate them, so "Rabbi Clown" wasn't really me. I changed to "Rabbi Comedian" until, on sudden reflection a few days later, I realized that I'm not a comedian at all. I stand up a lot when I teach but I don't do "stand up" comedy. I don't talk about airplane food or do imitations of the apes that came home with Jane Goodall to study her family. Well, sometimes I do but no one laughs..... so I'm more of a Rabbi Humorist than a Rabbi Comedian. I'd call myself "Sidney, The Funny Rabbi," but there's generally more respect embedded in the word "humorist" than the word "funny." People have respect for Will Rogers, Mark Twain, Dave Barry and Garrison Keillor as humorists. "Funny," on the other hand, can turn on you. It just might mean that people look at you and laugh, not because you are humorously clever, but because God also needed a laugh when he doled out the DNA for facial features. And God said, "Now THAT'S funny." "He's a funny sort of chap" is not always the highest compliment, although I must say that "funny" has appeared somewhere on just about every student evaluation I've ever received and "humorist" has not been used more than twice.

As you can see, while I changed from clown to comedian to humorist, I remained a rabbi all that time. That could be the funniest part of the whole metaphor because I am a Christian. People who know that have asked why I chose rabbi instead of pastor or priest. I just tell them to buzz off and stay out of my metaphors. But since you're all here today, maybe I can shed some light on my choice.

It is because I am a Christian that I chose to be a rabbi in the classroom. It's like pastor or priest, but Rabbi is less familiar to me....it has a more ancient mystique about it... like Shaman and Imam.....and draws me into the time-honored aspects of teaching. I am a rabbi because I am a teacher. "Rabbi" is a Hebrew term used as a title for those who are distinguished for learning but it is often used to mean simply "teacher." Please remember, we're working with metaphors here, so I have no pretense of claiming credentials as a Jewish rabbi. Secretly, I would love to be remembered as "Rabboni, (Ruh-BO-ni)" a much-loved teacher.

I also use the metaphor Rabbi because it speaks of Law. There is an aspect of my professorial life that is obligated to remind my students of laws, policies, and rules that do not emanate from my desk but from some Mt. Sinai of RIT, NY State, Federal law or human ethics. "Thou shalt not sexually harrass in this classroom" is something I want to be heard by my students in a thundering voice reminiscent of the days of Moses. There are also less severe matters that enter my class that sometimes make me feel rabbinical. Things that are and must be...at least for the next 10 weeks.....like textbooks, exams and grades.

I am a rabbi because I believe in high standards for myself and for my students. I cherish integrity and have come to realize that there's something about basic human integrity that appeals to students. I want to model it and give them every chance to do the same. I want to do it so consistently it looks easy. I want to emphasize the sweet smell of honest success. I want to describe academic standards and and the rigors of academic self-discipline in this context so that those who achieve... can enjoy that sweetness. It just seems rabbi-like not to rob my students of the joys of hard-earned gains.

I am a rabbi, too, because I am a minority and I speak for a minority population. In the university environment, I am one of a few teachers in a world of many more students. I come from a rare place of tenure, given a protection to be free to think and express things learned that may not conform to common knowledge. I teach deaf students subjects and language forms that have resulted or nearly resulted in my academic persecution. In those possibilities, I am somewhat of a rabbi.

I am a rabbi in a multilingual and multicultural world. Neither is a cliché to me. They are realities to be accepted and used to the advantage of all. I will use my strongest language and my cultural identity to understand myself and what I can offer and I will encourage my students to do the same. I will use my weaker languages to the best of my ability as bridges to others and to mutual understandings but I will not apologize for not being them.

I could go on, but it seems like a long time since I said something funny, so let me summarize by saying that although the Rabbi Humorist metaphor may not last long for me, I have enjoyed using it as I updated my teaching philosophy. And it's fun telling about it.

SMBarefoot 5/29/03



### My Approach to Teaching

Charles van Riper, one of the founders of my profession, wrote about his own approach to assessment and teaching. When sitting down with a client, whether a child or adult, he would ask himself, "What does this person need and what does this person need from me?" Those two questions have guided me throughout my 25 years of teaching at NTID. They have applied to my individualized instruction and every classroom filled with students. While there have been days when I took the easy road and told myself simply, "They need this course and they need to get used to the fact that I'm teaching it," that has never been a healthy long-term approach. My better days have been when I've done what I believed served my students and myself, including the following maxims and self-talk:

- Recognize that a student may not believe that they need the instruction I am offering. They may be right. Either adjust the course, adjust yourself or work to be convincing of the value of things as they are. Try to become credible before the course is over. Don't cop out with "They'll appreciate all this years later." It may be true, but focus on the present and near future. Refer students to others who can meet specific needs better than you and do it without shame.
- If I'm teaching toward known needs, why hold back? I want to do whatever it takes, within reason, to help the students understand and be understood. Plan thoroughly and modify spontaneously. Be active; move in and out of students' space.
- Every course is a communication course. Some are just more obvious about it. Whether I am teaching the inconsistencies of English grammar or the intricacies of interpersonal relationships, the students must communicate with me, with each other and within themselves. No excuses for any of us. Work every day on this.
- Multilingualism and multiculturalism in the classroom are not clichés to me, but are realities to be accepted and used to the advantage of all. I will use my strongest language and my cultural identity to understand myself and what I can offer and I will encourage students to do the same. I will use my weaker languages to the best of my ability as bridges to others and to understandings, not as apologies for not being them.
- I must know the stuff of my profession and each course I teach. If I don't know it before the class is assigned to me, then my learning curve will have to be steeper than that of the students. When caught behind them, I will admit to them that I, too, am a learner and I will show them how I learn.
- There's something about basic human integrity that appeals to students. Model it and give them every chance to do the same. Do it so consistently it looks easy.
- Emphasize the sweet smell of honest success. Describe academic standards and the rigors of academic self-discipline in this context so that those who achieve can enjoy that sweetness. Don't rob students of the joys of hard-earned gains, but be generous in every other respect.
- Failure in education is one way to learn a lot. I will work hard with students who have not met course goals to help them discover new approaches and intensities for the task or new directions for their lives.
- Did I save humor for last? I'm sorry. I will first and foremost encourage the use of humor in every niche it fits. Never to hurt. Some stunning will be good, though.

**Just Ask Them:**  
**An Inquiry Approach to Student-Teacher**  
**Learning Partnerships**

**Sidney M. Barefoot**  
**Speech-Language Department, NTID**

**Faculty Associate – Dominique Lepoutre**  
**Student Associate - Brennan Vining**

### The Course

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Backgrounds highly parent/teacher directed. While strong external influences on learning are experienced by many college students, deaf and hard of hearing students at RIT have often experienced a life-long process of parents and teachers making additional, deafness-related decisions for them regarding their education, exposure to life situations, and communication options. While this varies greatly among students, it can be valuable for the instructor to probe these factors to determine how prepared the students are to take responsibility for their own learning at this point.

Need to promote thinking conducive to life-long self-assessment, goal setting and improvement. This need is not unique to deaf and hard of hearing students, but applies to any college student interested in improving communication. Many students who take this course have found it relatively easy to communicate within a deaf community or their families, but they have now challenged themselves to communicate better with an expanded number of hearing people using speech. This learning is seldom completed to their satisfaction during their college years. It

requires that they develop means of assessing themselves, setting realistic and achievable goals and making improvements during the course of their lifetime, generally without any professional assistance. For that reason, the instruction they receive in college is directed at expanding their competencies for independent learning in general as well as for developing communication competencies in particular. It has been observed that leaping from externally-directed learning to self-guided learning generally does not occur naturally or rapidly. It is hypothesized that a transition or bridging can be facilitated by forming learning partnerships between students and faculty that help students find ways to become more self-directing and begin to experience resulting benefits. However, the needs and the process may vary greatly from student to student. Determining optimal individualized instruction requires a means of getting student histories, perceptions, needs and desires "on the table" for the instructor and the student to use in a learning partnership or "shoulder-to-shoulder approach" (Tattershall, 2002). For this project, an interviewing method of inquiry was employed.

### **Inquiry by Interview:**

Question - What are some key areas of inquiry that can guide an instructional partnering process? Given that time is a valuable commodity in instruction, it is important that any inquiry method be as efficient as possible. For this project, interview transcripts would be used to isolate areas of inquiry that seemed most profitable to the purposes of instruction.

Method - In this project, four students were interviewed, each at a different stage of instruction. The interviews were videotaped and transcribed. Transcriptions were then analyzed for appropriateness and timing of the questions, types of questions eliciting the most valuable information, student engagement during the interview and any other factors that would reveal themselves.

### **Preliminary Results:**

Students highly engaged in interviews. Of the four students, three responded to open-ended questions with excellent disclosure. Their body language appeared positive throughout the interviews. Two students provided answers that were informative but brief, sometimes requiring a series of follow-up questions. All of the students became engaged in the interview in a manner that suggested they viewed the process as both interesting and informative for later use.

Found several key areas of inquiry. Although many areas of inquiry provided information that seemed useful to the development of an instructional process, five areas were noted that seemed most useful. These areas (not necessarily found in all interviews) included:

- Personal and educational history (in a story-telling context or as individual facts)
  - "I was the only deaf person in my school all of my life....There were no deaf in my home town....I am lucky because a lot of my friends really like to learn sign, so I taught them. I grew up with a lot of [hearing] friends who can sign.....Some friends sign better than me."



- Reasons/motivations for enrolling in instruction and related expectations
  - “Well, at first, well, my mom really wants me to come here to get some speech. Therefore, I do it for my mom.....But, in some ways, I would like to talk more, but not as much as my mom wants.....My dad really wants me to have some speech but he will just leave me alone, whatever I want, he says nothing.....My mom thought my speech would ‘save my life.’”
  - “[Signing up for speech therapy] was my decision, not my family. My friend told me about this communication department and I thought, “Oh, why not? Try again. I used to take speech therapy in elementary school.”
  - “If I stay in speech therapy for a few years, I expect a big difference. If only one year of speech, then I probably won’t see a big difference....I don’t expect perfect, but near-perfect.”
- Description of previous speech-language instruction and those aspects they would most like to avoid or develop further
  - “In my junior year of high school, I took one year of speech therapy. It was too boring for me so I stopped.....I thought I would be able to communicate with hearing people, but her way of teaching speech made me lose my motivation.....I remember the speech therapist had vocabulary cards with various terms. You just looked at them and pronounced them.”
  - “[At NTID] I don’t want boring exercises that repeat things over and over. I want something that keeps me motivated.”
- Defined goals for the next instructional period and rationale for selection
  - “I want to practice getting good air flow again while speaking in complete sentences.” [Student took some time to explain her previous speech skills that she “lost” when she attended a residential school that did not use spoken English. She wanted her old skills back and wanted to build on them.]
- Preferred approach to learning
  - “I think that maybe I could try ‘top-down,’ because if you talk and I am lost, I could stop you.....Then go down, revise, and go back up [to conversational level] again.” (This was an applied paraphrase of the therapist’s previous explanation of “top-down” vs. “bottom-up” approaches to skill development.)

Student data complemented and informed other assessments. In some cases, instructional goals that would have been selected by the instructor on the basis of formal assessments were not at all the same as those of the student. Some student responses indicated that years of work had been put into those areas with unsatisfactory results. In such cases, the instructor could offer to provide a different and more promising approach to that area or could agree to focus on a different goal. In other cases, there was an excellent match between formally-obtained information and the perceived needs of the students. The important thing was not to prove the superior value of either source of information but to bring them both into the subsequent teacher-student-partnered discussion and goal-setting process.

The inquiry process itself appeared to foster subsequent cooperative and self-directed learning. In the weeks subsequent to these interviews, the instructor observed that the students seemed to become comfortable taking on more responsibility for decision-making than they reported they were used to. They frequently made reference to matters that had first been presented during the interview. While they

did not always have immediate or clear answers to questions about their needs or preferred direction, they deferred less often than usual to the instructor for full control and used their answers to previous inquiries to guide them. This was by no means uniform among students or necessarily sufficient. All four of the students indicated that they had never been asked for this type and amount of personal input in their pre-college instruction. They also indicated that while they were often not confident taking more responsibility for their learning, they were willing to try to contribute as much as possible.

### **Future Plans**

Continue analysis of current interviews. A much more thorough analysis of the videotapes and transcripts is needed to refine key areas of inquiry and to note specific interviewing techniques that need to be improved. For example, with the more reticent students, the interviewer continued too long with a questioning style that elicited too little information and, in fact, became more of an informer than an inquirer. While this was not without value in the greater instructional picture, it may have prevented a more complete disclosure from the students.

Modify interview to focus on key areas. In Fall quarter (031), interviewing will continue with an expanded student population. Results of the current project will be used to shape and test subsequent inquiry.

Develop student inquiry of instructor. One of the after-effects of the interviewing process in the course of communication instruction has been a higher-than-usual amount of student inquiry of the instructor. For example, one student later asked if the instructor's perceptions of improvement were the same as his. Another asked why a particular teaching technique was being used and why it was not used sooner. This suggests that these students have seen some value in inquiry and are "turning the tables" for the purposes of collecting even more guiding information. It seems appropriate to investigate this further and support student inquiry more intentionally in the future.

Scholarship. Samples of the videotaped interviews are being edited (with student permission and editorial rights) for use in an online tutorial from the website of the NTID Speech-Language Department. This tutorial will be accessible to speech-language therapists worldwide as well as parents and students who may be considering enrollment at RIT. It is felt that the presentation of the values of this and other adult models for communication instruction could affect instruction at pre-college levels. This will be explored when the interviewing data and other approaches to learning partnerships are presented at an upcoming national conference.

Reference: Tattershall, S. (2002) *Adolescents with Language and Learning Needs: A Shoulder to Shoulder Collaboration*. Albany, NY: Delmar.