



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Podium: A Forum of Inquiry

In 1983, the Brookdale Center for Educational Research was established to promote educational research at the community college. The mission of the center was to recognize the ongoing research, to encourage new research, and to publicize these projects in the college and in the community. Research was broadly defined to exceed the traditional structures established in most institutions to include classroom research, grant proposals, and special projects.

One of the original goals of the center was to develop a journal that would publish the unique type of research conducted at the community college level. It would represent the efforts of the total college community (faculty, staff, students) who contribute to the success of the overall educational program.

In the fall of 1985, with a grant from the New Jersey Department of Higher Education, *Podium* began to be a reality. It took about two years for the first issue to get off the ground. Each successive issue, now supported by the college, is published annually. It has color and illustrations, and its lively format is accessible to both professional and lay audiences.

Subjects in *Podium* are as diverse as the college community. Recent issues feature articles on the "Vanishing Towns of the Pinelands," "The Use of Humor in Teaching," and "Latchkey Children." Viewpoints on challenging teaching methodologies include articles on "Discovery Through Writing," "Risky Business," and "New Computer-Aided Indexes." Research involving statistical data is represented by articles on "The Reverse Transfer Student," "The Unknown States," and "Who Are the Math Achievers?" Each issue has interviews with faculty, authors, musicians, and/or artists.

The journal is edited by a writing faculty member who solicits manuscripts from the college community. The role of the editor is to encourage and assist fledgling authors to risk putting their ideas and experiences on paper.

Podium has been enthusiastically received at the college. Several articles have been republished in other journals. Copies have been circulated at college conferences, workshops, and seminars in a variety of disci-

plines. It has become a model for other colleges. The focus is so disparate that everyone seems to find something to read and discuss.

Frank Paoni, Coordinator, Center for Educational Research
Freda Hepner, Editor, *Podium*

For further information, contact the authors at Brookdale Community College, Newman Springs Road, Lincroft, NJ 07738.



The following is abstracted with permission from *Podium '88*.

Teaching by Storytelling

While one purpose of storytelling is entertainment, the story is not a trivial device intended only for amusement. The story is one of the basic intellectual means through which we make sense of the world and organize events and facts.

The purposes and uses of storytelling in the classroom include:

1. **Curriculum enhancement:** Almost any area of the curriculum can be enhanced by the addition and use of storytelling as a form of presentation. Obviously literature and the social studies courses seem to be natural areas for the incorporation of storytelling as a teaching technique. Yet, less obvious areas, such as science and mathematics can benefit from the telling of tales regarding beliefs, discoveries, and even related mythology.

For example, the myths which complement the names of the planets and stars of our universe can entertain and inform the class. Anthropology and sociology courses can be enriched by tales from the folklore of diverse cultures. Philosophy and religion are natural areas for the presentation of mythological tales.

Almost any course and instructor can employ what R. R. Ross, in *The Storyteller*, calls "the Experience Story" ... "those remembrances that caught and stirred our emotion at the time of their happening, and imprinted themselves on our memories." These anecdotal stories can be tailored for any subject area,



but like more traditional stories, require more than mere memory. Careful preparation will ensure that the relating of experiences is more than an amusing digression.

2. **Improvement of listening skills:** Farnsworth states that "Listening, a normal and necessary human function, is nearly a forgotten art. No wonder that listening skills are now being taught in business, in universities, and in human relations. Storytelling encourages and develops concentration and good listening habits in a pleasurable and effective way."
3. **Language development:** Listening to stories also introduces more varied language patterns and can work to extend vocabulary, even among college students whose experience with language has been limited in our "post-literate" age.
4. **Creative expression:** Listening to stories gives practice in visualization and leads to further development of the creative imagination.

The time involved in the selection and preparation of stories for telling can be considerable, but the investment of time yields rewards and enjoyment in both the learning and presentation phases.

1. The story must have meaning for the storyteller, and the teller must be comfortable with and enjoy the story himself/herself. The selection and telling of a story ultimately reveals aspects of one's self. The teller's life experiences will influence the interpretation of a tale, and the teller should look for stories with which he/she can identify in terms of content, character, emotion, and style.
2. The story must be appropriate for the audience.
3. These criteria are inherent in the story itself: a) well-developed plot; b) clearly defined theme; c) style, especially use of language; e.g., vivid vocabulary and rhythmic and pleasurable combination of sounds; d) characterization; e) dramatic appeal; f) faithfulness to source material or best translation.
4. Storytelling within the classroom requires that the tale go beyond entertainment. The stories selected must, therefore, meet the instructor's goals and objectives for a particular unit and be accompanied by follow-up activities where appropriate. Sometimes the purpose of the telling may be to fill in gaps in the student's background or to provide information in a manner that delights and instructs.

In the visual approach, the teller learns the story as a sequence of pictures or as frames in a storyboard. In the auditory approach, the teller retains the sounds and rhythms of the story's language. Both approaches share some basics:

1. Read the story several times, both silently and then aloud, to acquire a feeling for it. As it is read aloud, listen to the sounds and rhythms. After reading, stop and recall the images which comprise the outline of the story.
2. Tell the story without the aid of the book. Be sure the proper sequence of events is learned.
3. Practice the story's style. Learn and use the interesting and repetitive phrases or words that add to the flavor of the story.
4. Practice timing to ensure dramatic impact. Use effective pauses to heighten suspense. Emphasize important words. Remember that this is storytelling, not acting. The teller does not have to use different voices or be overly dramatic.
5. Be aware of tone of voice. Use breath control to add variety and strength to tonal patterns.
6. Practice gestures. Eliminate any distracting movements or mannerisms. Use gestures which feel comfortable and are suitable to the story.
7. Prepare an introduction to the story that places it within the context of the course and the audience's experience.
8. Practice in front of a mirror or with a tape recorder or video recorder. This allows the teller to see and hear the process and may indicate areas which need refinement.

The delivery of the story should be as natural as possible. The teller should strive to maintain an inviting, relaxed, and intimate environment. This can be aided by establishing eye contact with the audience. The teller should establish a sense of personal warmth with a smile and pleasant facial expression.

Editing: *The storyteller should feel free to edit the story while in the process of telling. Unnecessary material may be cut and certain scenes and characters may be elaborated upon or eliminated as the occasion demands. One of the characteristics of the oral tradition is the wealth of story variations produced by such editing over the centuries.*

Physical setting: *The best environment for storytelling is free of distractions such as doors, bulletin boards, or windows. The teller should be the center of attention.*

Evaluation: *Depending upon the purpose of the telling, follow-up activities such as discussion, art projects, dramatic interpretation, or writing experiences may be appropriate. But often the concentration needed to really listen to the story is a learning experience in itself.*

Janice Antczak, Associate Professor, Library Science/
Literature

Suanne D. Roueche, Editor

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