

# THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM: PLAN, BUILD, RENEW LIBRARIAN AS CONSTRUCTIVIST ARCHITECT

KIMBERLY DAVIES HOFFMAN AND SUSAN PRESTON NORMAN

## WELCOME TO RYSAG

Nestled in the heart of New York State's Genesee Valley is an aspiring Honors College within the 64 campuses of the State University of New York (SUNY). SUNY Geneseo, a predominantly undergraduate institution of approximately 5,000 students, is situated 30 miles south of Rochester, NY. While its location benefits from the beauty of such natural treasures as Letchworth State Park (aka The Grand Canyon of the East) and New York's multiple wine-producing Finger Lakes, and its students are among the finest within and outside of the state, a disheartening story of what-could-be-potential college applicants emerges just miles away.

Contrasting with the safe academic community within small-town America boasted by SUNY Geneseo, our Mother City of Rochester profiles an unsafe and illiterate number of youths. Within the past few years, several schools within the Rochester City School District (RCSD) have been placed on New York State's *Persistently Dangerous* list (McLendon, 2007), while RCSD ranks lowest of New York's largest urban school districts with an appalling graduation rate of 39% (McLendon & Ortiz, 2007). As students progress from grade school to high school to college, the dropout rate of 13% from middle to high school and 15% throughout high school and into the college years (RCSD, 2008) can help explain the high levels of illiteracy in Rochester's adolescents. The future is not bright for those who drop out. Staggering unemployment rates in the city of Rochester (McLendon, 2008, stated 72% of African Americans without a high school diploma were jobless in 2004) unfortunately lead many desperate black and Hispanic youth into a life of crime (Vargas, 2007, noted 80% of those arrested in Rochester are high school dropouts).

---

*Davies Hoffman* (Reference/Instruction Librarian) and  
*Preston Norman* (Director, Xerox Ctr for Multicultural Teacher Ed.)  
SUNY Geneseo [Geneseo, NY]

To combat such educational and socioeconomic discrepancies, many organizations in Rochester have worked to provide Academic Intervention Services (AIS), community centers and recreational programs. Through collaborative efforts, regional funding and die-hard commitment from faculty, staff and students, SUNY Geneseo currently supplies one such program. Under the direction of Susan Norman, Head of the Xerox Center for Multicultural Teacher Education, a deliberate curriculum based on sound educational research of middle school and urban youth, was offered to children through the creation of the Rochester Young Scholars Academy at Geneseo (RYSAG) in 2007. The innovative, residential, and theme-based summer camp selectively recruited students living in some of the poorest areas of the city. The goal? To work with students in transition, developmentally and academically and to provide opportunities other than what they might see in their crime and drug-infested neighborhoods in Rochester, NY.

Using pop culture as a springboard to entice students in an educational camp, CSI (Crime Scene Investigation) was chosen as a theme known to expose students to Science, Social Studies, Technology, Critical Analysis, and English Language Arts (RYSAG, 2007). Students accepted into RYSAG discovered on the first day of the two-week camp their "charge": At a fictitious Works Progress Administration (WPA) art auction that occurred weeks prior to the students' arrival on campus, four of the precious paintings were reported stolen. Despite SUNY Geneseo's administrative efforts to catch the criminal(s), the mystery had yet to be solved. It was up to the 53 young CSI candidates, divided into four teams, to catch the thief. During the two-week program, students engaged in self-discovery and group-enhanced learning, following Arts Integration and Constructivist models. Laboratory tests involving the analysis of hair samples, chromatography, and fingerprinting took place in Forensics. Teaching the ethnographic interview process, including the development of relevant questions, interpersonal communication and note-taking, occurred in the Critical Thinking Unit (CTU) as well as in Communication classes.

CTU also incorporated online research and technology training, while Communication classes engaged students in public speaking techniques and other theories of communication such as reading nonverbal gestures. CSI candidates got their hands on digital cameras for the Digital Arts component of the camp, snapping pictures of each team's respective "crime scene," all to be used in the final day's Grand Jury hearings where each group's prime suspect would be brought to trial. The RYSAG experience was not purely academic, however. After a full day of class sessions and investigative fieldwork (e.g., interviewing suspects and witnesses across campus), sports and recreational activities kept students active outside, while other evening activities like steel drumming, dance clubs, and talent shows showcased special abilities hidden in each of the students.

## ENTER MILNE LIBRARY

Though a seemingly strange fit for a CSI-themed summer camp for seventh and eighth-graders, SUNY Geneseo's Milne Library emerged as a leader within the program with its facilities, scholarly resources, and staff. In the midst of a program geared to introduce and encourage young city students to keep up their studies and plan for a successful future beyond college, the academic library could not be overlooked. Much like any academic library should be at the center of its campus' endeavors, it was only natural that the library at SUNY Geneseo serve as Command Central for all RYSAG camp activities. Milne Library was no stranger to innovative programs and partnerships, so this was an easy decision. Collaborative efforts, as envisioned by Library Director Ed Rivenburgh, have included the integration of various campus services (e.g., ESL/Dual Degree Programs, Teaching & Learning Center, AOP's Center for Academic Excellence, a satellite Writing & Learning Center) into the Library. Combined with cultural events (e.g., *Heavens Above* exhibit and related campus-wide programming; gallery shows highlighting faculty, student and community artwork; a sand mandala exposition by Tibetan monks), pedagogical training of Milne Library's instructional staff (Argentieri, Davies, Farrell, Liles, 2003), and invitations for professors to teach their semester-long courses in one of several technological classrooms, Milne Library has succeeded in creating an intellectual, cultural and social mecca for campus and community members alike.

While the entire campus community at SUNY Geneseo concerns itself with fostering a welcoming, multicultural and diverse atmosphere, this is especially true of those working at Milne Library. Well aware of the traditional and stereotypical image of libraries and librarians, the staff at Geneseo's library works very hard to make sure that all members of the College feel comfortable, safe and productive at this center of campus life. Whether encountering a timid first-year student who admits to being completely lost and intimidated among the abundance of print and electronic resources or an adult international student who is struggling with both the English language and culture shock as a foreigner in a new country and as a stranger in a new academic setting, the staff at Milne Library is committed to exposing the very best of what our library has

to offer. When presented with the opportunity to welcome yet another special group of library users to Milne Library, the Director jumped at the chance - and his staff happily followed.

## INCORPORATING A LIBRARIAN AS AN EXPERT...

### ...IN PEDAGOGY...

Among the staff at Milne Library, Instruction Librarian Kimberly Hoffman was thrilled at the prospect of the summer camp. Past experience working with Dr. Elaine Cleeton (Sociology) led Hoffman to be invited to join RYSAG's faculty team. Due to the positive results of course-integrated library instruction during the academic year, Cleeton was familiar with the constructivist techniques Hoffman employed in her teaching. Through this partnership, college students were exposed to scholarly research instruction as a vehicle to learning course content. Once undergraduates were made aware of effective search techniques and resources related to current projects, content could be discovered independently or in groups, without the standard lecture (Davies, Kintz & Lamie, 2006). Although Hoffman and Cleeton would discuss the assignment-specific needs for research and Hoffman would develop an appropriate lesson, Cleeton sometimes went one step further to create impromptu homework activities, requesting that students present their research findings in the following class session. The symbiosis of skills, content and student accountability convinced Cleeton that Hoffman could deliver similar collaborative lessons and results to middle school students in the RYSAG program.

In RYSAG's first camp experience so far, Critical Thinking Unit (CTU) lessons and activities included web-based research, both biographical and historical; ethnographic research through interviewing; timeline handouts to introduce students to the concept of alibi; and storyboards used to visually gather all of the students' research and observations into one place. Familiar with the general lessons taught in Forensics, Communication and Digital Arts, Hoffman and Cleeton were able to engage the CSI candidates in discussions of their findings happening outside of the CTU classroom. On one white board per CSI team, Hoffman, Cleeton and the students connected suspect/witness photos to individual motives, opportunities, alibis, pieces of evidence tied to different suspects, personal and professional relationships and other suspicious hints and clues. Using "Information Literacy" or "Critical Thinking" as a content area, CSI candidates learned to question the information gathered, fit that information into existing knowledge and/or experiences (i.e. watching TV programs like CSI and Law & Order) and draw conclusions based on group discussion and "hunches." Examples of these conclusions, as informed by students' prior knowledge, can be seen through various blog posts (*see Appendix*).

### ... IN TECHNOLOGY

Based on an Instruction Librarian's daily responsibilities, designing class lessons that combine research techniques with computer use has become second nature.

Comfortable teaching with technology, Instruction Librarians can effortlessly guide students from a print-based environment to one that's online. The RYSAG experience proved to be no exception. CTU classes were taught in one of Milne Library's four "smart" classrooms, where wireless laptops and a Classroom Technology Assistant (CTA) were available at all times. Movable furniture, a retractable screen for computer projection, and four large white boards also proved to be extremely useful, the latter setting the stage for the pivotal storyboard activity.

Original plans to incorporate a solid base of online research for the students fell somewhat flat considering the lack of information on the specific WPA artists/paintings in the staged art theft. CTU instructors could lead students to general research regarding Great Depression artwork, but found nothing providing a true picture of who the chosen artists were or their inspirations for the paintings. (Ironically, the creation of an online inventory of WPA art used during the summer camp lead a wealthy nephew of a WPA artist to discover his aunt's paintings; Milne Library received an unexpected phone call from the nephew asking how he could purchase the collection.) Although web-based research on WPA artists was limited, students had no problem conducting basic biographical research on the suspects and witnesses that they intended to interview. It was essential that students familiarize themselves with each individual's background before the scheduled interviews so they could effectively link personal information to possible motives, opportunity, evidence and alibis.

Thinking further about the new teaching endeavor and wanting to design fun and relevant lessons for middle school students, Hoffman suggested to RYSAG faculty that they incorporate blogs in the curriculum. Although Hoffman had never previously worked with blogs in a classroom setting, the two-week program allowed her to experiment with new technologies as part of CTU's learning objectives. The primary goals for having students use blogs included (*see Appendix for examples*)

- using Milne Library's wireless laptops
- exposing students to web 2.0 technology
- creating a place where students could take class notes to later be used as reminders
- creating a place where students could collaborate on their research findings (web, ethnographic, laboratory) and discuss their suspicions
- allowing RYSAG faculty to communicate with each team on important camp issues
- allowing RYSAG faculty to track the progress made by students, providing helpful information along the way
- creating a "secret admirer" persona to lead students to new evidence

Unintended benefits of the team blogs included (*see Appendix for examples*):

- student creativity when updating their profile and username
- evidence of students' technological savvy when uploading pictures, YouTube videos, etc. to the blog
- team support and encouragement throughout the art theft investigation
- camaraderie among team members and the sharing of information between teams
- a positive balance between students having fun with the blogs while retaining focus on the investigation
- students' use of home language - African American vernacular - to think critically about the presented evidence
- visible leadership roles emerging among team members
- continued contact among the CSI candidates well beyond the two-week summer camp, including the sharing of outside e-mails, phone numbers, MySpace accounts, and current happenings during the school year

### ... IN INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

With natural affinity, interest, and experience working conjointly with different academic disciplines (in terms of library materials, students and faculty), Hoffman seemed the perfect candidate to act as Project Coordinator. While the Library serves (or should serve) as the central hub to all campus activities, the curriculum in Critical Thinking similarly became the linchpin that tied together the lessons learned and evidence gathered in the camp's three other subject areas. It was through the use of storyboards that all evidence, research, and assumptions from the art theft investigation came together visually, where students were easily able to begin crossing off those suspects whose names were "cleared." Storyboards facilitated students to narrow in on their prime suspects, ultimately deciding on one person to be brought to trial.

### RENEWING FOR THE FUTURE

Taking leaps of teaching faith and learning from her mistakes, Hoffman has been able to adapt certain lessons used in RYSAG and gear them toward a college audience, all the while increasing her repertoire of student-centered learning activities. The storyboard idea has been incorporated into the first-year writing course as an introductory session to Milne Library's physical layout, resources and services. Wikis, as used by RYSAG faculty during the summer camp, have become a required component to practicing scholarly research (searching, evaluating, and citing) and reading assignments (with student

commentary) in the Anthropology courses in which Hoffman is a teaching partner (Davies Hoffman & Kintz, 2008). Although blogging technology has been considered for semester-long courses where Hoffman is involved, their implementation has not yet come to fruition. On a personal level, Hoffman has begun her own blog, detailing thoughts, projects and challenges of librarian-faculty partnerships (Davies Hoffman, 2008). New uses for technology are already on the horizon as RYSAG's faculty plans for an archaeological exploration in the summer of 2008 (D.I.G. - Discovering the Iroquois in Geneseo) (RYSAG, 2008).

What began as a huge unchartered risk, bringing more than 50 adolescent students from Rochester's inner city for a two-week, intensive learning adventure, proved to be an experience that those involved will not soon forget. This can be said from every perspective - from the teenagers tough from the city but vulnerable to wide open fields, fresh air, and steep hills; to the professors and counselors who instantly grew to love the CSI candidates through laughter, learning and respect; to the "players" on campus whose summer transformed from standard business to intrigue, trickery and enhanced expectations. The library staff who engaged in the program, whether as an instructor, as an innocent witness/guilty suspect, or as a casual observer, continue to reminisce about the positive experience and anticipate an even better "story" for the sequel in summer of 2008.

## WORKS CITED

- Argentieri, E., Davies, K., Farrell, K., & Liles, J. (2003). Hitting the books: Practicing educational theory in library instruction. In J.K. Nims & E. Owens (Eds.), *Managing Library Instruction Programs in Academic Libraries* (pp. 47-51). Ann Arbor: Pierian Press.
- Davies, K., Kintz, E., & Lamie, K. (2006). Convergence of librarian, faculty and student: Creating a plan for continuous discovery. In T. Valko, S. Fabian & R. Stevens (Eds.), *Discover, Connect, Engage: Creative Integration of Information Literacy* (pp. 27-32). Ann Arbor: Pierian Press.
- Davies Hoffman, K. (2008). E-merging. Retrieved April 24, 2008, from <http://ruemerging.wordpress.com>.
- Davies Hoffman, K. & Kintz, E. (2008). Class Wiki for ANTH 224: Ethnography of Gender in Latin America, The Case of Brazil. Retrieved April 24, 2008, from <http://anth224.pbwiki.com>.
- McLendon, G. (2008, March 27). Schumer wants to boost job preparedness of black men. *Democrat & Chronicle*, p. 6D. Retrieved April 11, 2008, from the NewsBank database.
- McLendon, G. (2007, June 24). Violent acts up in area schools. *Democrat & Chronicle*, pp. 1A, 10A. Retrieved April 11, 2008, from the NewsBank database.
- McLendon, G. & Ortiz, C. (2007, October 27). Who'll lead city schools. *Democrat & Chronicle*, pp. 1A, 13A. Retrieved April 11, 2008, from the NewsBank database.
- Milne Library, SUNY Geneseo. (2008). Heavens above. Retrieved April 24, 2008, from <http://heavensabove.geneseo.edu/>.
- Vargas, C. (2007, March 3). Violent crime trends down in city. *Democrat & Chronicle*, pp. 1A, 4A. Retrieved April 11, 2008, from the NewsBank database.
- Rochester City School District (RCSD). (2008). District Profile 2007. Retrieved April 11, 2008, from <http://www.rcsdk12.org/district/profile.htm>.
- Rochester Young Scholars Academy at Geneseo (RYSAG). (2008). Homepage for Rochester Young Scholars Academy at Geneseo. Retrieved April 24, 2008, from <http://rysag.geneseo.edu>.

## APPENDIX

### Examples of CSI Candidates Using Prior Knowledge to Construct New Meaning

<p><b>Motive for Bill Jones</b></p> <p>Bill Jones is an undergraduate student at Geneseo. We know he is currently engaged to be married. Weddings cost a lot! With the cost of an engagement ring, a wedding dress and all of the accessories (for example - a veil, jewelry, shoes, make-up and hair), the groom's tuxedo and all his accessories, bridesmaids' dresses and attire for the groom's men, gifts for the bridesmaids and groom's men, invitations, a location for the ceremony, entertainment for the ceremony, a limousine from the church to the reception hall, the reception hall, food and drink, a photographer, a DJ, flowers, decorations, a cake, and all of the arrangements for a honeymoon, the price of a nice wedding can cost up to \$30,000 or more. As an undergraduate student with mounting student loans, how can Bill Jones possibly afford this wedding?</p> <p>Bill Jones had a secret. He knew that his grandfather painted The Bridlepath in Central Park, the piece of art that was stolen from the study lounge in Milne Library. On the back of this painting was a treasure map. It would stand to reason that this treasure, if found, would earn Bill Jones the necessary money for his dream wedding.</p> <p>So, think about it, ladies and gentlemen of the jury. With all of Bill Jones' debt - a pending wedding and many student loans - how could he afford these expenses?</p>	<p>Friday, July 20, 2007</p> <p><b>Furaha Moye's "acting" skills</b></p> <p>This is Secret Admirer logging onto Larrus Dunson's account to tell Orange Crush a rumor about Furaha Moye: she guest starred on Law and Order: SVU! What does this tell us about her "acting" skills? Also, I overheard Chief Cleeton speaking to Fuhara, and found out that she wants to start an art business (what do you need to start a business?)</p> <p>-keep thinking y'all.</p> <p>Posted by A JENT j at 11:12 AM 0 comments</p> <p><b>A simple Tip!!!</b></p> <p>If you are interviewing someone and you happen to ask a question that someone from a different group already asked and they gave a different answer obviously they are lying or trying to throw you off because they might be smart enough to know that the other group might have told you the answer to the same question, and they want to throw you off!! So dont let them!</p>
--	---

### Examples of Primary Goals for Having Students Use Blogs

**A place to keep track of notes:**

**Creating a "secret admirer" persona:**

<p><b>stingy old rude lady</b></p> <p>i tanaya had an interview with a rude lady she was acting confused and saying rude noises. This lady also couldnt keep still. She was saying mmmmm and trying to waste time. This lady name was Kary Mckeebre but as us being kids its Dr.Karey Mckeeber. At the end of our interview i asked her do she have good debt and she said thats not my buissness and i need to get a sopino which is a person to tell u if a person have good debt</p>	<p>THURSDAY, JULY 19, 2007</p> <p><b>Are you "lost" yet? Or have you "found" your answers?</b></p> <p>Remember that not all evidence will be found at the crime scene itself. One of the janitors of Milne Library tipped me off that there could be some interesting items in the Lost and Found box. Take a peek!</p> <p>Posted by Secret Admirer at 8:28 PM 0 comments</p>
---	---

<p><b>FINGERPRINTS TODAY!</b></p> <p>Today in the lab we will be doing some fingerprints. This is a very good thing for me because I know alot about finger prints. There certain designs in fingerprints that make them diferent like the loop, the arch, and the spiral. CSI agents use fingerprinting powder, fingerprinting ink, and other things to determine people's fingerprints.</p> <p>Posted by krunkb3@stm@n1@c at 9:20 AM 0 comments</p>	<p><b>A "cutting" piece of evidence</b></p> <p>Take the outdoor path from Wadsworth to South and along the way, you will find a little something special to strengthen your case. Don't stop to smell the flowers, just go!</p> <p>Posted by Secret Admirer at 4:57 PM 1 comments</p>
---	---

## Creating a place where students can collaborate on research findings:

**"Great Depression art style"**

yo this is the art style of the great depression, it's the same as the Long island farm and Sue Ann Brainard's grandfather's painting.


Taken from [http://wwar.com/masters/movements/social\\_realism.html](http://wwar.com/masters/movements/social_realism.html)

**Art History: Social Realism: (1930 - 1945)**

The American Regionalism movement, also known as the American Scene Painters, began during the Great Depression in the 1930's. The movement is divided into two groups of artists with different approaches. The Social Realists were devoted to depicting the social troubles of the suffering urban lower class. The Regionalists painted more positive subjects, hoping to lead the nation out of the depression by providing hope for a better future. This group often painted midwestern rural scenes with themes of hard work and self-preservation.

Also, check out these paintings from the Great Depression!

<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/depression/artgallery.htm>

Posted by Black & Beautiful at 2:05 PM 0 comments 

## Unintended Benefits of the Team Blogs

### Students' technological savvy:

**Look at this**


I found out how to see the other teams pages For orange it is [iloveorangecrush.blogspot.com](http://iloveorangecrush.blogspot.com)  
 For blue its [frysagblue.blogspot.com](http://frysagblue.blogspot.com)  
 For yellow its [rochesterlemonheads.blogspot.com](http://rochesterlemonheads.blogspot.com)  
 So now U can see all of your other friends pages and stay green/ G'd out

Posted by Rico\_boy\_12 at 10:46 AM 0 comments 

### Students having fun while staying focused on the investigation:

**t-com**


that dance was mad blood i beasted on mad girls at that night club when 2 step came on my head was hurtin because i was dancing alot.....

Posted by t-com at 9:28 AM 3 comments 

**we had fun**

that junk waz fun last night but dont forget to focus


-fat free

Posted by Kevin aka KJ at 9:28 AM 0 comments 

### Visible leadership roles emerging:

**this is very important ok remember this dont forget**

take a good look at the pictures and match them up with the suspects ok be right at all times.tonight at HQ we have to get the rfeal suspect ok we need to narrow this down to one person only not 2 ok..... be very careful dont let no one get in ure way ok..... remember the clues and notes secret admire is giving u light.....people r gettin to be very fishy bout this crime scene..... dont forget we r goin to dwins Hall tonight before 5pm sharp.....at the janitors closet its very interesting we need to take a look asap {as soon as possible}

Posted by velazq 11:23 AM 0 comments 

### Lessons learned:

**Yellow Jello**

Dear Yellow Jello,

Ijust want to inform you that we are doing so much better. During this process I know that each of us have learn something new. I learn that teamwork is the key to sucess. I also, learn that winning is not defeating someone else; but building someone else is winning. Losing is not being defeating; but giving up is!