The fire of December 30, 1972, which destroyed Blanton Hall, Belmont’s main academic building, left the campus in a state of shock. More than one person has suggested that the burning was a “blessing in disguise,” but no one was saying that at the time of the fire. The building was old, tired, overcrowded, and had inadequate plumbing, heating, and electrical systems. Maybe hindsight would say that it was a blessing to be rid of it, but what a sad way for a beloved, well-used building to go!

What followed the fire, from a faculty point of view, was a time of everyone pulling together, sharing their office or supplies, and greeting everyone warmly when the faculty went to pick up their mail in the campus mail center in Blanton Annex (Blanton Annex, which housed a gym, a pool, post office, and rudimentary student center, did not burn, perhaps because the filled swimming pool diverted or calmed the fire). (Interview with Mike Awalt 2/2/2010). Since at least 80% of the faculty had been housed in Blanton Hall, space was of the utmost concern. The faculty were moved to different places on campus, including the cottages (from Ward-Belmont days), and one science lab was placed above the now-covered swimming pool (Propane burners were used for the labs). There was not much complaining, as all were absorbed with the idea of rebuilding and having a productive semester for Spring, 1973. None of the faculty entertained thoughts of Belmont closing for good, but they found out much later that Dr. Gabhart rightfully had some doubts. Indeed the task was daunting and overpowering.

Although there was some insurance on Blanton Hall, the stained glass windows in Blanton were insured at replacement value, and this provided quite a large sum to go toward rebuilding. In fact, that policy provided enough extra money to make rebuilding feasible (Don Ramage, 8/14/2009). The fact that someone years before had insured them individually and not just as a part of the building, was indeed a blessing in disguise. Eventually, the insurance settlement was $1,015,892—about half of what was needed to build the two replacement buildings. The trustees personally pledged $100,000 and the Tennessee Baptist Convention’s Education Committee allowed Belmont to make a direct appeal to Middle Tennessee Baptist churches for funds. Amazingly, Belmont closed the 1972-73 year with surplus funds of $672.58, and all employees were given a four percent raise! (Herbert C. Gabhart, Work: the Soul of Good Fortune. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989, p.113.)

During 1973, plans were made and construction begun to replace Blanton Hall with two complimentary buildings, which are today known as the Science Building and Wheeler Humanities Building. Many department heads, particularly in Sciences, were given a month to come up with a design for what their department needed in the new building, and such participation furthered the idea of camaraderie on campus.

The two new buildings were opened in fall of 1974, and a symbolic phoenix was erected between them, showing that life had risen from the ashes. The phoenix was moved to the area between Gabhart Student Center and the Science building when the outdoor amphitheater was opened in Spring of 1983, so the wording on the base of the phoenix doesn’t quite line up with its current location. It’s there, and I encourage you to take a good look at it. In some ways, it’s a symbol of the “new” Belmont!

From possible disaster to two new buildings, Belmont was one the way toward greatness with new life and renewed fervor!
thoughts on be a beginner! teaching center symposium

By jennifer t. thomas
assistant professor, biology department

The night before the Be a Beginner! Teaching Center Workshop, I flipped through the descriptions of “classes” I might attend and noted that we would draw from a basket to find out where we would go. “Ten different sessions, only 2-3 related to technology/computer…no problem… I should be fine.” I thought to myself. “I hope I get to sew a bag.” Well, I didn’t get to sew a bag, I drew the data management session. I was crushed.

You see, I don’t like computers and technology. I don’t understand them. I feel stupid and overwhelmed. And who says I need to understand them anyway? As long as I have my husband, my colleagues, and my students to get me out of my PowerPoint disasters and iTunes blunders, I’m good to go. But I signed up for this workshop, so I figured I should at least make an effort. I walked over to the table with Gary Garrison and laid it out for him that I was not happy to be there. He just laughed and nodded his head.

That was the first thing that Gary did that made me feel better. He acknowledged my fears. He smiled a lot. He was downright nice. We got to know each other and exchanged a few things about our experiences. It was a good beginning.

Gary also helped us see how databases could be used and that they were important and helpful. Meanwhile… how do I make my class different and somewhat frightening territory, my instructors were very patient with me… why?… well, for a few reasons. They didn’t know how I was doing that day, the choosing of the IE (I’ll consider it)… I can’t make up my mind. And when I found Nanci Alsup, the course “class,” and missed the brief organizational meeting which preceded our discussion, I just moved against the current. And when I found Nanci Alsup, the course “class,” and missed the brief organizational meeting which preceded the “classroom experiences” scattered across campus.

As I arrived, a steady stream of “beginners” was leaving the Massey building, while I moved against the current. And when I found Nanci Alsup, the course “class,” and missed the brief organizational meeting which preceded the “classroom experiences” scattered across campus. As I arrived, a steady stream of “beginners” was leaving the Massey building, while I moved against the current. And when I found Nanci Alsup, the course “class,” and missed the brief organizational meeting which preceded the “classroom experiences” scattered across campus. As I arrived, a steady stream of “beginners” was leaving the Massey building, while I moved against the current. And when I found Nanci Alsup, the course “class,” and missed the brief organizational meeting which preceded the “classroom experiences” scattered across campus. As I arrived, a steady stream of “beginners” was leaving the Massey building, while I moved against the current.

The January symposium by the Teaching Center entitled, “Be a Beginner!” was an awesome time of accountability and reflection as a teacher. What better way to access how you learn than to learn how to do something totally out of your comfort zone. From this “new” experience I would like to address three questions.

What helped my learning? Not having enough time to grasp the concepts completely. This symposium was a perfect setting of the classroom situation. We have three instructors present – and only one other student who contributed to the conversation. It is easier to understand. This is not always warranted, but allow the students to see how databases could be used and that they were important and helpful. Meanwhile… how do I make my class different and somewhat frightening territory, my instructors were very patient with me. I was encouraged to try something new and to whiz through the database with my own queries…just for the fun of it!

As I reflected on the experience back in the Board Room, I truly appreciated that this is how many of my students feel about biology. It is not as if I did not know this before, but I forget what it feels like. I say Professor Van Hatten-Granath, monitored our progress, let me see you as a person. We, too, face personal and professional struggles from outside of their experience. Even more significantly, I was led to ponder the ways that we can prepare the material we teach to facilitate learning, just as Teresa and her team prepped the sewing machines and bag materials. Such techniques as the use of analogies at the start of class to orient the students to the concepts to be studied that day, the choosing of appropriately complex examples by remaking irrelevant steps where possible, and the careful choice of reading and homework assignments to facilitate learning came into a new light for me through the process. The value of taking a moment to review concepts at the end of class or the start of the next meeting also came to mind. It is easy to take such things for granted after teaching for a few years, especially in a frequently-taught course.

To close, I would suggest that making a Green Bag Lady Bag is surprisingly satisfying and almost therapeutic in its simple yet focused routine. If you have not yet made one, I recommend you contact Teresa and see about joining the Green Bag Lady group some Sunday!

BY john niedzwiecki
assistant professor, biology department

When I attended the Spring teaching symposium, as I have since starting at Belmont, I looked for it as a chance to touch base with colleagues from across campus, and maybe pick-up a few tips to consider for implementing in my classes. I hadn’t given deep consideration to the topic “be a beginner”, and when I pulled a slip that said, Green Bag Lady Bags with Teresa Van Hatten-Granath, out of the fish bowl, it also didn’t strike me one way or the other. I saw it as an instant opportunity and I thought, well at least it should be interesting; but I was also thinking I would be unlikely to pick up a list that would help me in Biology classes let alone pick up my fabric and handle and sit down at the sewing machine my journey to “Being a Beginner” was complete, and I finally appreciated the theme. At that moment, I was mostly thinking, I don’t want to a) break this thing and b) look like a idiot. After an initial orientation, as I was left to sew seams at my own pace, I could really appreciate with my students trying to use a microscope or a spectrophotometer in lab the first time. Like a spectrophotometer, there were only four or five things to remember to do, in the correct order, but it was difficult- and yes I did mess up the order more than a few times. I noticed I was not thinking about anything except doing the task and trying not to mess up that. That led me to realize why students doing labs often forget that I consider the main point. In Biology lab, we mostly treat equipment as tools to teach a larger concept which many of our students- surprisingly don’t seem to remember the next week. Maybe they are more caught up in the mechanics of the task then the purpose of the experiment…hmmm…? This lesson comes at an important time in my teaching career here at Belmont, I have begun to realize that mentoring and keeping an active voice in the classroom situation. We have countless students who learn in different ways and it is important that we, as professors, allow enough time for me through the process. The value of taking a moment to review concepts at the end of class or the start of the next meeting also came to mind. It is easy to take such things for granted after teaching for a few years, especially in a frequently-taught course.

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BY pETER lamothE
Assistant professor, school of music

On January 11, I participated in the Teaching Center Symposium “Be a Beginner!”, designated to remind us seasoned professors of the experience of trying something new - which many of our students do each semester through the BELL Core, electives, and other coursework. It was a chance to see you as a person. We, too, face personal and professional struggles from outside of their experience. Even more significantly, I was led to ponder the ways that we can prepare the material we teach to facilitate learning, just as Teresa and her team prepped the sewing machines and bag materials. Such techniques as the use of analogies at the start of class to orient the students to the concepts to be studied that day, the choosing of appropriately complex examples by remaking irrelevant steps where possible, and the careful choice of reading and homework assignments to facilitate learning came into a new light for me through the process. The value of taking a moment to review concepts at the end of class or the start of the next meeting also came to mind. It is easy to take such things for granted after teaching for a few years, especially in a frequently-taught course.

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BY mARK J. chirico
assistant professor, School of pharmacy

As I hurried up the stairs of Massey Hall for the Be a Beginner! Symposium I was once again reminded that I should incorporate more cardio into my workout routine. I was greeted on the fourth floor by a little more compassion, I need to help them see the relevance that this is how many of my students feel about biology. It is not as if I did not know this before, but I forget what it feels like. I say Professor Van Hatten-Granath, monitored our progress, let me see you as a person. We, too, face personal and professional struggles from outside of their experience. Even more significantly, I was led to ponder the ways that we can prepare the material we teach to facilitate learning, just as Teresa and her team prepped the sewing machines and bag materials. Such techniques as the use of analogies at the start of class to orient the students to the concepts to be studied that day, the choosing of appropriately complex examples by remaking irrelevant steps where possible, and the careful choice of reading and homework assignments to facilitate learning came into a new light for me through the process. The value of taking a moment to review concepts at the end of class or the start of the next meeting also came to mind. It is easy to take such things for granted after teaching for a few years, especially in a frequently-taught course.

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choices”, “Relax and move with Pilates!” my ticket said. I recalled my impression of Pilates which was formed up to this point by what I had seen on infomercials. After a brisk walk to the Sports Science Center (I was getting more cardio already!), my colleagues and I sat and shared out initial impressions of Pilates which was facilitated by Ms. Sarah Cowart who,
as an elementary school teacher in a previous life truly understood a beginner’s barriers to learning. What made me feel more comfortable was that several familiar faces dotted the room; fellow teachers that I had come to know through the New Faculty programs at Belmont. They knew about as much about Pilates as I did. Yet there were some Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA’s as they liked to call themselves) present that intimidated me because they seemed to know what they were doing and they also were in a lot better shape than someone like me who is almost twice their age (besides I didn’t even have my workout clothes on!) Before I could process the brief history lesson on this exercise system which followed our self-evaluation of Pilates knowledge we were flat on our backs on the mats in the gymnasium. “If folks were able to do this a hundred years ago, surely I could do it”, I thought to myself. After all it was a beginner’s class. Slowly I began to settle into each “movement” as our instructor coached us. Names like “roll-up”, “saw”, and “scissors” identified the various exercises we performed, aptly describing the techniques as our instructor told us which body part we were working. I began to feel the benefits of these movements and was humbled by my own level of fitness which prior to this course I perceived as moderately high. I also saw where I could improve with respect to flexibility and core strength without risking injury or investing a lot of time and money. As we stacked away our mats and shared our self-deprecating remarks I think we all learned about Pilates and how it might benefit our health. Sarah invited us all to participate in her class on Mondays and Wednesdays. One of the GTA’s named Matt even offered to help me out with my weight routine in one of his classes. “Hey, this wasn’t so bad after all” I thought as I walked back to Massey, eager to take on the stairs again.

Back in the meeting room, individual and group reflection enhanced our separate but surprisingly similar experiences and confirmed that this symposium was well worth the time. As I got up from my chair and reflected on the morning’s events I began to plan which Pilates class I would attend the next week when the cramp in my hamstrings quickly brought everything into perspective. Unfortunately, Joseph Pilates’ quote at the top of our instructor’s handout for the beginner’s class was true; “Physical fitness can neither be achieved by wishful thinking nor outright purchase.”

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