It’s September and Back to School time once again -- a time to start our new academic year, meet a new class of students, and begin to implement our goals for the upcoming months. In France, this time of year is also abuzz with school starting and the purchase of new school supplies, a time that is called La Rentrée. I’ve always loved this term because its translation denotes a sense of “coming home.” In fact, it comes from the verb rentrer, which means “return home.” In a way, I believe that educators worldwide may think of the new academic year as a time that calls us back to familiar classroom settings and to learning – returning to our schools and classrooms, to a new group of students, to both new initiatives and familiar routines, where education has an intellectual anchor.

In ASTL, we are greeting this new academic year with gusto, as well. We have some wonderful information and updates to share with you about the program and its faculty. You may notice immediately that our Newsletter has a new look. This new feel echoes some of the changes and updates that have taken place over the past year. In this month of La Rentree, we remain strongly tied to our mission and goals while also moving forward with some new initiatives. It is exciting to be able to share some of our new initiatives and information with you, and we ask that you help to keep our information flow current by sharing important aspects of your work, as well.

Many of the highlights of the past few months are expanded upon later in this newsletter. We moved in December to the newly renovated Thompson Hall and love our new space! As part of the College’s growth, the College of Education and Human Development is now comprised of eight divisions; ASTL is now part of the Division for Advanced Professional Teacher Development and International Education (APTDIE). Some other information you might find interesting is that ASTL graduated 59 teachers from our program in May, and over 90 new ASTL teachers have begun the program during the summer and fall. They are enrolled in coursework representing all of our areas of Concentration.

One of our most recent initiatives is the pilot of our Core coursework in the hybrid and online environment. This set of online Core courses is being offered this year for the first time for our International Baccalaureate Concentration folks who are teaching around the world and are in the States only in the summer for coursework. We welcome our new international teachers who are already providing a rich perspective to our Core discussions.

At this writing, many of the grant proposals that were submitted in May are beginning to come in. Please send us information about your grants, as well as any other items you would like for others to know, so that we can share this news through our Newsletter network.

The ASTL faculty and staff join me in welcoming you to this new academic year 2012-13. As we feel the September energy that underscores our “return home” to our classrooms, we hope that for each of you it also brings with it a sense of excitement and anticipation for the year ahead. Please stay in touch with ASTL and look for ongoing news throughout the year. Wonderful wishes to you all!

Becky Fox and the ASTL Faculty and Staff
Congratulations, Peter Balas!

Peter Balas, award-winning graduate of two College of Education and Human Development programs—ASTL and Education Leadership—was named Principal of Mount Vernon Community School in Alexandria, Virginia. Mr. Balas comes to his new post from T.C. Williams Secondary School where he helped to increase English test scores. Mount Vernon Community School is a school marked for “transformation,” or top-to-bottom makeover. His mission at Mount Vernon Community School is to close the achievement gap and improve test scores.

Peter Balas was featured in a wonderful Washington Post article. Read his story at http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/alexandria-school-on-a-mission-to-improve/2012/08/07/9a804238-e010-11e1-8fc5-a7dcf1fc161d_story.html?hpid=z6

Judy Tuebner Awarded Grant

Congratulations to Judy Tuebner who was selected to receive a $2000 ING Unsung Heroes award! Judy, a physical education teacher at Sangster Elementary School in Fairfax County, applied for the grant last spring when she was taking the ASTL Core Education Change course.

The title of Judy’s grant is The Heart Muscle and the Meaning of Its Ever Changing Beats. Judy will use the grant money to purchase pulse monitors for students to use in physical education class.

We asked Judy if she had tips for other teachers applying for grants. Her comment: “When applying for grants, I believe it is important to align the request with standards that apply to your program.”

New Science Concentration

We are pleased to announce that the College of Education and Human Development approved all new coursework for the ASTL Science Concentration. All science teachers, K-12, will now take the following required advanced courses:

- EDCI 670 Advanced Methods of Science Teaching in K—12 Classrooms (3 credits)
- EDCI 671 Innovations in Science Teaching (3 credits)
- EDUC 547 Scientific Inquiry and the Nature of Science (3 credits)
- EDCI 663 Research in Science Teaching (3 credits)

Teachers will also select six credits of content-based elective science courses corresponding to the student’s science discipline.
Researching Culture in the Class Room by Sean Murphy

In the spring of 2011 I was finishing up my Master's Degree through the ASTL Graduate program. I began one of final my classes, EDUC 606, in which we were presented with the challenge of conducting research in our classrooms focusing on how culture effects education. The CIP (Cultural Inquiry Process) project included collecting data, doing research, creating interventions, and reflecting on the process. I am an art teacher in a multicultural elementary school environment, and I saw this an opportunity to gain insight into my students' learning and the way I deliver instruction. The puzzlement I chose to research was why my students were not showing more of their culture in their self portraiture. I started off by creating a SMART board presentation where we discussed what culture is and looked at various self portraits created by famous artists from various cultures. I collected field notes from our conversations and also a cultural questionnaire the students used to reflect on their culture. I gained insight about my students such as: where they were from, the different foods they eat from their native countries, various hair styles, and even those who were not allowed to draw representation of themselves. By doing the research I was able to create interventions such as table conversations about things they were going to use in their artwork to show their culture and creating a portrait using their rooms instead of themselves. I used the knowledge, insight, and interventions I gained from the study to improve my future portraiture lessons.

By conducting this research I realized that through questioning I can help my students make connections between their art work, themselves, and their cultures. This view made culture “not an object unquestioning reference, but a mobile field of ideological and material relations that are unfinished, multilayered, and always open to interrogation (Giroux, 1992, p99)” (Gonzalez, 1995, p5). It is believed that a student’s learning can be increased when teachers become more informed about their students’ culture, not only in the abstract but also the individual (Gonzales, 1995). The questionnaire and the individual conferencing gave me greater insight into my students’ experiences and gave them the permission they needed to saw students ask more questions about their process and take more ownership in their work. Although my research did not completely answer why there is not more personal culture reflected in my student’s portraits, it did show me that permission, approval, and praise of incorporating experience and culture are needed to build the emotional scaffolding essential for student engagement and expression.

With the encouragement of my professors, Dr. Rebecca Fox and Dr. Sharon Hardy, I submitted a proposal to present my research to The Fall 2012 VAEA Professional Conference. This past summer I found out that my proposal had been accepted, and that I would be giving a lecture this November at the conference. I am excited to present my research to my colleagues, and also to hear about their experiences on the subject. Through sharing the research my hope is to create professional conversations about how culture is effecting the modern classroom and what interventions other art educators are using to solve their puzzlements. It is through the ASTL program at George Mason I have gained the confidence to improve my own pedagogy and share with the educational community my insights and experiences.

References

Sean Murphy has been teaching Art for 22 years in the Alexandria City Public School System. He is currently teaching Art K-5 at Samuel W. Tucker Elementary. He can be reached at smurphy@acps.k12.va.us
Over the summer, ASTL adopted a new Mission Statement. The philosophy expressed in the statement will drive program development and support future outreach efforts.

The purpose of the ASTL program is to provide school divisions with experienced teachers who possess advanced professional knowledge and skills and a sound understanding of educational change. Conducted through a Master’s degree, the ASTL program provides practicing teachers with multiple, robust, and meaningful academic and professional coursework that sharpens their content and pedagogical knowledge and research skills as educators, such that they will have positive impact on the achievement of PK-12 learners because of their deep knowledge in a discipline, as well as critical understanding about themselves as professional educators who are disposed to reach all learners in highly diverse classrooms.

Mission Statement

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The mission of the Advanced Studies in Teaching and Learning (ASTL) Program is to develop the content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge of practicing teachers who want to lead from the classroom and contribute to the ongoing renewal of their school. Grounded in the five core propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and aligned with the five core values of the College of Education and Human Development, the ASTL curriculum accomplishes this goal through its education “Core,” which focuses on teachers using their classrooms as a “laboratory” for studying and understanding: how students learn, how to design instruction that meets the needs of all learners in their classroom, how to assess student learning through multiple approaches, how cultural and linguistic factors affect student learning and school climate, and how to become agents of change in their school communities by cultivating their leadership skills. The ASTL curriculum embodies “excellence in education” and also seeks to increase teacher content expertise by requiring them to gain greater depth in a discipline through a Concentration in areas such as literacy, mathematics, history, science, foreign languages, or international baccalaureate.

Congratulations to Gary Galluzzo, Joan Isenberg, Steven White and Rebecca Fox on the publication of their new book—The Master’s Degree in Education as Teacher Professional Development: Reinventing the Role of the Academy in the Development of Practicing Teachers. In the book, this ASTL faculty team discusses their journey toward creating a new Master’s degree program for practicing teachers grounded on the propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. They share the various elements in the ASTL program design, the evidence gathered to examine program effectiveness, lessons learned along the way, and changes made as a result of inquiry and reflection. In the book’s foreword Sharon Robinson, President and CEO of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, describes ASTL as “a program of which the educator preparation profession can be immensely proud.” Indeed, all of us associated with ASTL agree wholeheartedly.