

I'm not sure how I'd help students "think on their feet" in a digital environment.

Finally, while it's easy for me to see how, as Jan says, online teaching requires teachers to shift from the role of "expert" to that of "facilitator," I don't quite understand how the online environment does away with the power differential between teacher and students. Don't teachers still need to evaluate the work that students do? Here's my fourth question, then: how is grading in an online course different from grading in a traditional one? **Many thanks to Jan and Karen for sharing their perspectives on online learning. I hope that we can continue this conversation next month.**

## *"Corny Hypotheticals"* *As Thinking Tools*

by Karen Olesch-Williams

In the August issue of *The Generator*, I was particularly struck by Priscilla Perkins's

response to the hypothetical situations that riddle philosophy and science. She said she would "ask a physicist or a philosopher how they come up with the often corny hypothetical situations that pepper their writing." As an English composition and philosophy teacher, I couldn't help but reflect on the role the hypothetical situation plays in my life, my teaching, and my writing and concluded that the hypothetical situation challenges my mind, makes me more creative, and continually improves my writing and critical thinking skills. Because it is a technique I couldn't live without, I wanted to share my reflections with you.

I use the hypothetical situation to test the accuracy of characters and plots in my fictive writing. For example (this is an example Priscilla came across in her reading), if I had a mother who hears some bad news that affects a lot of people who are far away, I need to reflect on the possible ways her character may react to the news, and I need to question whether or not her character is right or wrong to be more concerned about her own daughter even

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though her daughter is completely unaffected by the bad news. Being able to answer these questions leads me to create more dynamic characters.

I use the hypothetical situation to tell me something about myself. When reading literature, we look for metaphors and themes that point things out about the world and the way we perceive our own experiences. The hypothetical situation has the same function; it speaks to us about our perceptions, interpretations, and connections to ourselves.

I use the hypothetical situation to think of all the possible problems I might encounter while writing a persuasive piece, to reflect on the opposite side of an argument, and to anticipate the questions the reader will ask.

In the end, the hypothetical situation is a tool, a technique I use to challenge myself and problem solve. So, instead of being distracted by things that seem implausible, the hypothetical situation allows me one more opportunity to unlock the door to my mind.

**The Generator needs your input. Please send ideas, news, and questions to [pperkins@roosevelt.edu](mailto:pperkins@roosevelt.edu), or to DT Room 724, by Nov. 11.**







The initial development of the class, while long and arduous, challenged me to reflect on all my philosophical experience in order to interpret and guide the students through the

These are the disadvantages I've noticed:

☞ The need for tech-savvy students and instructor. Sending e-mail and using Word are really the only requirements, but be prepared—things don't always work. However, there's usually at least one computer student per class who's happy to bail you out. Do, however, have a backup plan. Prepare to spend time at the beginning of the semester testing and re-testing, and getting students familiar with the technology.

☞ The need to re-think strategies and assignments, and to design them specifically to take advantage of web-based instruction. Staying with your tried-and-true materials won't work well. You need to do more—LOTS more—than putting up syllabus, assignments, and lecture notes.

Here's the biggest challenge—and reward: Blackboard lets instructors move out of the "expert" role and into being a "facilitator." You need to be

ready to relinquish power and to join students as part of a classless learning community.

**Karen Olesch-Williams:** Last May I started teaching on-line for Saint Leo University. I teach two sections of a philosophy class called "The Quest for Wisdom." This is a class that is so beneficial, I have decided to develop my own website and offer it world-wide as a continuing education course. The textbook takes the reader through a collection of great works (both East and West) by philosophers, psychologists, and literary greats. The eight chapters are thematic and deal with an investigation of the self starting with the problem of emptiness and move forward into the way we create meaning in our lives. The text asks each student to carefully examine who he/she is and how he/she reacts and responds to the world around him/her eventually culminating in an answer (the final paper) to "How should one live?" Some of the chapters are called "Pleasure," "Nature," "God," "Authentic Existence," and "Universe."

textbook. This task really put all of my thoughts and ideas into perspective, and I think helped me grow as a teacher. I enjoy teaching on-line because I have young children and it affords me the luxury of working from home. Obviously, it allows me greater flexibility, which is also nice. I also like it because my students can be very open and honest in class discussion—there isn't the threat of being exposed, as you would have in a classroom setting.

While I do see the depth of critical thinking change throughout the eight-week semester, I do miss being able to concentrate on essays and ideas that are particularly complex—something that can really only happen face to face. On the other hand, web teaching forces me to be completely up-to-date on the topic at hand, and I have to know what is happening around the world and on the web in philosophy because my students use the links I provide to further investigate the issues. Overall, I love teaching on-line but only as long as I still teach in a regular classroom setting as well. In the end, I like the balance of both.