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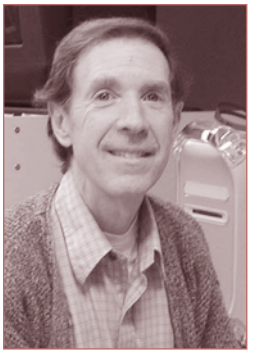

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Listening in on Dr. Robert Blodget's "Learning, Development, and Technology" class, I found myself second-guessing where I was in Building 38. Was I listening to a music class, or was I listening to a child development class? Dr. Blodget was teaching his students the process of learning a musical instrument, and how to incorporate music into the classroom. I heard Dr. Blodget himself singing joyously, in his serene, soothing voice— kind of like James Taylor. Never before had I heard one of my professor's sing out loud to the class. As I waited for his class to end, I thought, "Is this the Dr. Robert Blodget I am supposed to interview on the arts and technology?"

I entered the classroom to greet Dr. Blodget. He was already busy answering questions for his office hour preceding class. Discussions he held with students varied from teaching techniques to advice on the latest digital cameras/camcorders. As he consulted with one student, I was amazed by his depth of technological knowledge. He clearly knew and expressed the tech lingo. When I asked how he knew so much about technology, he simply expressed that he had always been interested. As a young child, Dr. Blodget always found himself attracted to the latest technological equipment. Growing up, he bought equipment that ranged from tape recorders to video cameras. He used them to make movies with his friends, and he stated that he and his friends would constantly find ways to creatively use the technology.

As for his background in education, Dr. Blodget explained how he graduated with a double major in Social Sciences and Journalism from Willamette University in Oregon. He flatly stated that he never considered a career in teaching until his mother suggested that he pursue a teaching credential for practical reasons. While working to attain a teaching credential, Dr. Blodget searched for openings in Journalism. But a phone call from a local school district ultimately beat his search. He began teaching Social Studies and Language Arts for middle school.

Dr. Blodget's first jump into teaching came quite naturally to him. He was excited to talk with students and engage in discussion with them. Drawing from interests that trace back to his childhood, Dr. Blodget used innovative ways to engage students in actively learning. He described one method he used as an exercise to get students writing. He explained how he wanted students to visually construct the stories in their heads, before they began writing. So he had his students take Polaroid pictures and make a storyboard out of them. He then had them write and tell a story based on the storyboards. Dr. Blodget's main goal was for his students to envision a picture, then be able to tell a story about it. He created other activities such as having students create silent movies, pantomime

stories, and listen just to sound, all to get students to realize the importance of dialogue in their writing.

Dr. Blodget's curriculum techniques led to a breakthrough in his career that would lead him to pursue his doctorate in Education at the University of Massachusetts. As I asked him how he went from teaching at a secondary school to the university environment, he told me how, one day, he was lucky enough to meet a University of Massachusetts student working at a hi-fi, stereo-electronic store. Later on, he received a phone call from the student asking Dr. Blodget if he wanted to join a research project with the added incentive of pursuing graduate studies in Education. Dr. Blodget said he felt a little hesitant leaving his teaching job, but support from colleagues and school administration allowed him to pursue further study in Education.

Dr. Blodget explained that at the time he entered the University of Massachusetts, the kind of research the institution was exploring within Education was revolutionary. The University was looking to research "ways to revolutionize education" in the classrooms, utilizing techniques that Dr. Blodget himself used among his middle school students. "We actually conducted research on much younger children, but the experience I had from teaching middle school was invaluable," said Dr. Blodget.

After completing his Ph.D. in Education, Dr. Blodget found himself "locked out" of public education by being "overqualified." He attempted to return to public education, but found that schools were only willing to hire him as a consultant. Principals and other administrators felt it wasn't appropriate for someone with greater credentials to work under them. "That was just how it was back in those days," Dr. Blodget lamented.

Overqualified to teach in public schools, Dr. Blodget and his wife decided to move back to the West Coast. He went back to his alma mater, Willamette University. At the University's career placement center, he searched for job openings. He saw that Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, had an opening in the Education Department as a lecturer. Though it wasn't a tenure track position, Dr. Blodget seized the opportunity. "My wife had an uncle that lived in Santa Barbara at the time, so we figured it would be a wonderful experience."

I asked how he ended up in the Psychology & Human Development department. After a couple years in the Education Department, a position opened in Child Development with an opening for a tenure track position. More importantly, the position would allow Dr. Blodget to teach labs. For Dr. Blodget, the opportunity reflected his passion for teaching interactively.

I asked Dr. Blodget how much his childhood had affected his teaching methods, and how his early interest in technology affected his pursuit for interactive learning. He smiled, and stated, "Well, I was pretty fortunate as a child growing up in the country with virtually nothing around. My friends and I had to create projects on our own. We had to figure things out on our own." He reminisces about the time he and his friends would visit an elderly couple who were professional artists. The couple would teach them about watercolor painting— everything from techniques to tools to how to work

with materials. His uncle, Lee Blodget, had worked as a professional artist and photographer and had collaborated on projects with photographer Ansel Adams. "I thought of all of it as just a hobby. I never thought of art as something I could make a practical career out of."

Noting his visit to MacWorld in San Francisco this past January, he expressed how amazed he was at all the new technology. The possibilities of what the technology could do for classrooms (secondary as well as higher education), enthralled Dr. Blodget. As he got excited talking about MacWorld, I saw Dr. Blodget's face lighten up as I provoked him into talking about one of his favorite "buzz" phrases, "just-in-time-learning." A phrase he uses often, Dr. Blodget characterizes "just-in-time-learning" as a strategy students use to compensate for the immediacies of rapidly changing technology. "It's impossible to know everything, at every moment, especially when technology changes from day to day." That is why Dr. Blodget emphasizes teaching his students how to utilize technology by Cal Poly's "learn by doing" philosophy, something he highly advocates. "Students learn much more on their own rather then having someone like me standing up in front of the class, telling them what to do. I find it much more effective when I let students work on a tutorial and explore on their own, then have them come to me for questions. That, in turn, provokes more questions. Then, all of a sudden, there's a discussion among the class."

Dr. Blodget is not advocating the poor effectiveness of teachers, but is simply pointing out the value of "empowering" students to learn on their own; a skill that students need when going out into the workforce. "Empowering," another buzz word Dr. Blodget uses, allows students to experience mistakes and confront a problem based on real-life problem solving. "Technology helps us in empowering students, to allow them to work and learn on their own, whether it's using resources on the Web, learning software, or learning external hardware devices such as digital camcorders." He pulls an example from his own lab, such as using his website to make available for students materials such as tutorials and instructions for projects. One project involved the construction of a musical instrument, then learning how to play the instrument itself, which also required learning how to read music. Dr. Blodget posted instructions on how to build the instrument, and also posted the required music they needed to learn. "Well, this allowed my students to work on their own, encounter their individual problems, develop their own sets of questions and dilemmas, and bring all their ideas back to class." Positive reactions included one student making a suggestion to go over the music in lab as an entire group, re-enforcing what they learned among themselves. Dr. Blodget was delighted that the student had "empowered" herself to make a suggestion, utilizing his position as a teacher, not as an authoritative source, but a resourceful one.

Dr. Blodget reminds us that "technology enhances and extends our natural abilities. It enables us to do things we couldn't do as easily or quickly before. As a result, people find they are able to learn and do things they never would have dreamed possible. In the past, we were dependent on the teacher for information because that was the only place to get information. Now we have different forms, different media, to assist in the learning process developed by the teacher." He smiles, and

adds, "You know, my daughter asked me once, 'How in the world did people find things out before the World Wide Web?' I told her that people used other resources, and how it may have taken a lot longer. Now we can attain relevant information in a matter of seconds."

A strong supporter of technology as a vital resource for learning, Dr. Blodget asks, "What can technology enable us to do well, and in turn, What does it eliminate?" Dr. Blodget doesn't see technology taking over the education process, nor does he see technology, such as the World Wide Web, replacing teachers and the classroom. "There are still many meaningful experiences provided at school, by the instructor, that are impossible to be replaced or substituted by technology. There are very meaningful, fundamental things we can only achieve in class, as people."

With a wonderfully balanced sense of adapting and relating to a world that brings constant technological change, Dr. Blodget adheres to one personal and professional goal he would like students to take with them when they leave Cal Poly, and his classroom. "I want students to be comfortable and familiar with technology. I want students to be able to utilize and enjoy the benefits of technology in whatever they do."

Perhaps, in the same way Dr. Blodget has attained the appropriate balance in his teaching and personal philosophy with technology, students can find new ways of appreciating technology while respecting the traditional ways of teaching and education. To Dr. Blodget, it's all about "empowering."

Kumi Okimura *is a History and Graphic Communication major. She is currently assembling all her work into one piece entitled "Growth." She's planning on graduating in 2004.*