

50 BC3 students celebrate improved reading by authoring children's books

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Butler County Community College student Taylor McElroy, of Butler, reads her book about the life of a cow to preschoolers in BC3's Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center on Monday, Dec. 11, 2017.

(Butler, PA) Nearly 50 students in Debbie Frazier's three English 030 classes at Butler County Community College celebrated milestones in preparatory reading this fall by authoring, for the first time, books they read to 3- to 5-year-olds in BC3's Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center, among them, a 19-year-old Butler woman who in 2013 suffered a severe brain injury in an ATV accident.

Then there is Ashley Hildebrandt, a single mother inspired to enroll in BC3's registered nursing program after her daughter, Rylee, was born at 25 weeks weighing 1 pound, 7 ounces and spent more than four months in the neonatal intensive care unit at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC.

And Shane Denial, an 18-year-old BC3 English major who says the comprehension and retention skills he learned in Frazier's class may help him to bring to publication the graphic novel superhero character he has been ruminating since age 7.

Two weeks after completing eighth grade in the Slippery Rock Area School District, Taylor McElroy was riding a quadrunner on a 1.5-mile trail on her family's property in Prospect when she "took a turn too fast" and was thrown headlong into a tree.

Despite wearing a helmet, she was knocked unconscious. She was later found by her brother, Ryan, and flown by medical helicopter to Allegheny General Hospital, Pittsburgh, and its shock trauma unit.

"I was in a medically induced coma for 19 days," McElroy said. "Prior to that, I was getting good grades. And after that happened, I basically had to relearn how to deal with everything with school. It was frustrating."

"There is so much value in this course"

Frazier's curriculum at BC3 is designed to improve the reading skills of students who have dyslexia, are line-skippers, have difficulty in identifying or recalling facts, or are overcoming other obstacles, she said.

"There is so much value in this course," said Frazier, who holds a master's degree in education from Gannon University and a bachelor's degree in education from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. "How can you go on and take your core courses when you have difficulties, whatever they may be, with reading? That you might not comprehend what you have read.



Butler County Community College student Ashley Hildebrandt, of Slippery Rock, is shown Monday, Dec. 11, 2017, after reading her book about the colors in a rainbow to preschoolers in BC3's Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center.



Butler County Community College student Shane Denial, of Mars, is shown Wednesday, Dec. 13, 2017, in BC3's Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center. Denial read his book about a pig named Squiggly to the preschoolers.

That you don't know what information is important to study when you are preparing for a test, or how to correct your line-skipping."

Among the techniques Frazier introduced to improve her students' skills were to notate an article's facts in the margins of newspapers provided to her classes by the Butler Eagle, and to suggest the use of specifically tinted glasses to address dyslexia, among the learning disabilities faced by approximately 2.5 million U.S. students, the U.S. Department of Education reported in 2015.



Debbie Frazier, an English instructor at Butler County Community College, makes a point in class Thursday, Nov. 16, 2017, in BC3's Heaton Family Learning Commons.

Frazier also advised BC3 students who are line-skippers to use a blank index card to conceal subsequent sentences – "It slows down your reading in the beginning," Frazier said. "But then you are going to catch it and you won't have to go down line by line" – or to create a window within such cards for those who have difficulty reading a sentence to its conclusion.

"And you move that card along with you," she said. "Word by word. And it works. It's either that, or you don't get it. You have to do what you have to do."

"This course has helped me tremendously"

McElroy, of Butler, has to do what she needs to do in order to earn BC3's 35-credit medical coding and billing specialist certificate, which includes courses in medical law and ethics, basic human structure and medical terminology; Denial, of Mars, to attain BC3's 62-credit associate in arts degree in English, with its courses in American, English and world literature; and Hildebrandt, of Slippery Rock, to pursue BC3's 70-credit associate in applied science degree in registered nursing, with its subject matter including human anatomy and physiology, general microbiology and pharmacology.

"It is important, especially for the nursing program," said Hildebrandt, 28, adding that she had had difficulty in reading and comprehension since high school. "What you learn you have to retain, particularly if you are going to pursue a degree and especially, in health care. And so taking this course has helped me tremendously."

The notetaking in the margins of the Butler Eagle, as part of a course requirement, were most important to her, Hildebrandt said.

“I have learned quite a bit from being able to read and to comprehend and with notetaking,” Hildebrandt said, “and even with vocabulary.”

When the Butler Eagle would arrive, “I had several students say, ‘Oh, we have the newspapers,’” Frazier said. “And they would get up and grab an issue of the newspaper. We would pick out an article. We dissected it, basically. We picked out the important information. The who, the what, the when, the where. The facts.

We annotated it. We wrote in the margins – things students have never heard of before. And they got turned on to reading a newspaper, which is fantastic.”



A selection of the children's books written by students in Debbie Frazier's English 030 class at Butler County Community College this fall are shown in BC3's Heaton Family Learning Commons on Friday, Dec. 8, 2017.

“After my accident, it was so hard”

Students were also required to read and discuss the settings, characters and climax in “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone” and in a work of fiction or nonfiction of their choosing selected from BC3's Heaton Family Learning Commons.

“It is very important to recall what you have read because the events that occurred previously in a story could have an impact, either in the book or in the series,” said Denial, whose graphic novel superhero is named Infinity, his nemesis, Void, and the woman whose love they will battle over, Clara. “There could be something that is set up that will be brought up later on.”

McElroy said her reading and comprehension skills improved, as a result of Frazier's instruction, from a 6 to a 9 on a 10-point scale.

“Every time we would go through the newspaper and read an article, the more familiar I got with, ‘Oh, these are the main details. This is a point that I need to highlight.’”

Her accomplishment “feels good because after my accident, it was so hard,” said McElroy, a fan of historical fact books. “I was going into high school. And I couldn't remember a lot of things. My memory was terrible. So I couldn't remember anything from before the accident. I had little bits and pieces. That is like the same with my education. My education just kind of went downhill because I couldn't remember what I learned. So now that it is all coming back, it makes me feel awesome.”

Hildebrandt, who read her book about the colors in the rainbow to preschoolers at BC3's Amy Wise Children's Creative Learning Center in mid-December, will spend her holiday break reading "The Nursey Rhyme Book," "The Children's Bible" and "I Love You Little Bear" to her 2-year-old daughter Rylee, "who is perfect."

McElroy also read her book about the life of a cow to BC3's next generation of readers.

Luca, 5, said he liked "the blue" in the rainbow book, because it's his "favorite color."

"And green," he quickly added.

Molly, 4, said she liked "the purple part."

Said Denial, who would later read his book about a pig named Squiggly to the preschoolers: "It was really nice to read to the children because it may inspire them."

Much like Frazier inspired her students, he said, a sort of superhero of her own.

"She does," Denial said, "have her power of knowledge."