Faculty Learning Community (FLC) III

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English and Humanities Faculty

Teaching Portfolio

Course: English Composition II
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Reflective Statement

While their teaching methods vary, the best college teachers challenge students to think critically and help them make connections between the course material and the world around them. For English teachers in particular, an added thrill is unlocking the mystery of language for students and teaching them to appreciate the craft of composition and the complexity of literature. Even more importantly, though, all teachers fill an important role in helping students improve their lives through education and should strive to fulfill that obligation according to their students’ needs, using a variety of methods such as individualized instruction, collaborative learning, lecture, hands-on activities, and technology to address diverse learning styles. Beyond that, teachers should assess student success through empirical data as well as anecdotal evidence and stay abreast of trends.

These are all things that I believed at the beginning of FLC III and still believe today. What has changed, due in part to team-teaching with a member of a former FLC, is that I realize now how much more I have to do to make all of those beliefs and goals a reality, and that has been both humbling and rewarding. I have enjoyed working closely with fellow faculty members and gaining many ideas that will ultimately help students succeed both in and out of the classroom, and I look forward to making my teaching philosophy a reality.

As a result of the FLC and team teaching, I have completely re-organized my English classes, adopting the method of using “lenses” to interpret and write about literature. I have also re-written assignments to more explicitly and deeply engage critical thinking. In my English 1302 classes, for example, students read philosophical or theoretical texts like Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” William Pollack’s Real Boys, or Naomi Wolf’s The Beauty Myth as the first assignment for different literature units. Then, as students read the assigned short stories, poems,
and plays in each unit, they interpret them from the point of view of that particular philosopher or theorist. This cross-disciplinary approach to teaching composition is intended to increase the sense of purpose in my class by helping students understand (and discuss) literature as a representation of the human experience, their experience. The three following assignments illustrate the “lens” approach and will be repeated throughout the semester.
Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:
This course will help you develop your critical thinking skills and your expression of ideas through grammatically sound, academic writing.

In order to construct and support thesis statements through literary analysis essays, we will do the following things using the elements of reasoning:

- **Interpret** texts using particular **points of view**
- Support our **interpretations** through textual evidence
- Gather and synthesize additional supporting **information** through library research
- Establish **purpose** for each literary analysis

Likewise, in accordance with the departmental rubric (attached), we will adhere to the academic standards of **clarity, accuracy, relevance, sufficiency** in our thinking and writing.

Assigned Text / Supplies:
- *Backpack Literature* (Kennedy, Gioia, 2nd ed)
- *The Little, Brown Handbook* (Fowler, 11th ed)
- binder or folder, pens, paper
- dictionary and thesaurus
- a flash drive

Grading Policy: See departmental rubric for grading standards. (A=96, A-=91, B+=88, B=85, B-=81, C+=78, C=75, C-=71, D=65, F=55)

Assignments: To Determine Your Average:

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Classroom Guidelines:
1. Students must attend class. If a student misses more than three classes, he/she will be dropped. Excessive absences will negatively impact one’s grade.

2. Students must show proper classroom etiquette. Our multi-cultural classroom will be a safe place for students to share ideas and discuss literature. Students who disrupt class will be asked to leave and will be counted absent for that day. Also, students should arrive on time. Those who arrive late will receive a zero for the work they miss.

3. Cell phones and pagers must be silent and out of sight during class.

4. Papers must be turned in by 9 PM via WebCT on their due date. Late papers will be penalized one letter grade per class day they are late.

5. Students must submit original work. Plagiarism will be penalized according to Lee College policy.

Course Expectations:
In this course, students will be required to participate in peer group work and class discussions. To that end, it is essential that students come to class prepared to discuss and share their ideas. Students should plan to devote at least 8 hours a week outside of class to reading and preparing for the course.

Literary Analysis Essays (85% of grade):
Students are required to write six literary analysis essays in which they use an assigned philosophical/theoretical text to analyze and interpret one of the literary works they select from our reading list. Students must include a works cited page with at least four sources of information (the literary text, the philosophical/theoretical text, and two library-type literary analysis essays), and parenthetical documentation must be used. All full-length essays must be typed according to MLA standards. Typically, an essay of this nature is about four pages long.

Each essay will have an introduction that establishes purpose and grabs the reader’s attention, introduces the philosophical work that informs the text (author, title, and basic tenets as applicable), introduces the literary work (author and title), and ends with an original thesis statement that guides the work. The thesis statement should refer to the literary work, show how the philosophical work informs the student’s reading, and have a sense of purpose.

An example thesis statement is as follows:

In Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use,” the alienating and personally destructive false enlightenment that Dee/Wangero experiences illustrates the difficulties we all may face as we ascend from our “caves” of existence in search of Plato’s ideal forms.

From there, each body paragraph should have a main idea sentence that connects to and
supports the thesis statement. The remainder of each body paragraph should support that main idea sentence through evidence (quotations or paraphrase) and commentary/discussion.

The conclusion should remind the reader of the thesis of the work and end with a generalized statement that restates the relevance or importance of the literary analysis.

**Daily Work (10% of grade)**
Students will take reading quizzes for most assigned readings. These quizzes will be given in the first 10 minutes of class and cannot be made up. Students will also complete in-class written responses and group activities.

**Participation (5% of grade)**
A participation grade will be assigned at the end of the semester based on attendance and students’ involvement in class discussions and activities. Students who miss two or fewer days will begin with an A (96), while those who miss three days will begin with a B (85). Students who miss more than three days (and have not been dropped) will begin with a C (75).

**Please inform the instructor if you are a student with disabilities and need special accommodations for this class.**

**Important names and numbers:**
Susan Keith (Division Secretary): BH-245, (281) 425-6503
Dr. Gordon Lee (English Division Chair): BH-235, (281)425-6417
Division Fax Number: (281) 425-6228
Writing Center: BH 225, (281) 425-6534
Counseling Center: (281) 425-6384
Assignment Schedule: ENGL 1302

Week 1: January 20
Introductions / Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” (packet)

Week 2: January 25 / 27
1/25: “Allegory of the Cave” / “Everyday Use” (68)
1/27: “Everyday Use,” “Ex-Basketball Player” (558), “We Real Cool” (434), Assign Essay 1

Week 3: February 1 / 3
2/1: “The Jumping Bean” (packet) / “Bilingual/Bilingue” (513)
2/3: Meet in Writing Center (Bring flash drive, thesis statement, and outline of essay One.)- Demonstrate library search

Week 4: February 8 / 10
2/8: Test for Everyday Reasoning [Essay 1 due by 9:00 P.M.]
2/10: Real Boys (packet) / “Dulce et Decorum Est” (348)/ “Not Waving but Drowning” (396), Assign essay 2

Week 5: February 15 / 17
2/15: “Greasy Lake” (86)
2/17: “The Things They Carried” (265)

Week 6: February 22 / 24
2/22: “Hands” (packet) / Return Essay 1 / Writing Workshop
2/24: Open Conferences in library [Essay 2 due by 9:00 P.M.]

Week 7: March 1 / 3
3/1: The Beauty Myth (packet) / “Girl” (249) / (Assign Essay 3)
3/3: “Cinderella” (packet)/ “The Storm” (81)

Week 8: March 8/10
3/8: “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” (251)
3/10: Writing Workshop/Essay 3 due by 9:00 P.M.

Spring Break is March 15-19. Enjoy!

Week 9: March 22/ 24

Week 10: March 29/ March 31
3/31: “Goblin Market” (packet)
Week 11: April 5 / 7
4/5: A Doll’s House (795)
4/7: A Doll’s House

Week 12: April 12 / 14
4/12: Discuss A Doll’s House (Essay 4 due by 9:00 P.M.)
4/14: Sartre (packet) / “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” (119) / (Assign essay 5)

Week 13: April 19 / 21
4/19: “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” (packet)
4/21: “Cathedral” (55)

Week 14: April 26 / 28
4/26: American Beauty (film)
4/28: American Beauty (Essay 5 due by 9:00 P.M.)

Week 15: May 3 / 5
5/3: Discuss American Beauty
5/5: Nelson Denny

Final Exam: Wednesday, May 12, 8:00-10:00
In-class essay (#6) / Bring a bluebook, the texts you need, and your thesis and outline.
Practice One: Pre-Reading and ReaCTion

One of the elements of critical thinking that Gerald Nosich discusses in *Learning to Think Things Through* is metacognition, or the process of thinking about, or reflecting on, one’s thinking (3). This is perhaps the most important aspect of critical thinking, because without this type of reflection, people are unable to recognize the flaws in their reasoning or measure the way that their thinking has developed. Furthermore, for the instructor, students’ metacognitive reflections serve as an assessment of the critical thinking skills that have been taught.

In this exercise, which I will repeat for every major unit, students will write pre-reading and post-unit responses to a fundamental question pertaining to the philosophy that will serve as our “lens” for interpreting the literature in that unit. The pre-reading question helps students articulate the assumptions they have about a given topic and helps generate interest in the philosophical text by showing how it connects to their own lives. Later, the “reaCTion” helps them reflect on the way their thinking has changed throughout the unit.

I. Pre-Reading: Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”

Assignment: Using complete sentences, explain one example of how politicians, religious leaders, parents, teachers, or the media project a “false reality” to the masses.

- What is the benefit of making people believe this particular “false reality”?  
- When you personally realized that what you believed to be true was false, how did you react?  
- What did you tell others? How did they respond?

Students will turn in this response before they read Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.” If time permits, students will have the opportunity to discuss their responses with the class.
II. ReaCTion: Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”

By the end of the two to three week unit, in which students will use the ideas in Plato’s work to interpret literary texts and then apply the ideas in a literary analysis essay, students will have a much better understanding of the way in which human beings are manipulated by the “puppeteers” that project these “false realities.” To end the unit, I will pass back the pre-reading responses, and students will measure the way their understanding has grown.

Assignment: Review your pre-reading response. Now that you understand the concepts of shadows and puppeteers according to Plato, how has your thinking changed? Using complete sentences, elaborate on and revise your original answers with Plato in mind.

- Who are the puppeteers in your example? The shadows?
- Who are the prisoners? What are the chains that keep the prisoners locked into place?
- What motivated you to either share (or not share) the truth with others?
- Knowing what you know now, do you believe that you acted ethically when you recognized the truth about the situation you mentioned?
- How has your thinking changed?

If time permits, students will have the opportunity to discuss their responses with the class.
Practice Two: Group Writing

In Richard Paul and Linda Elder’s text, *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life*, the authors identify the intellectual standards that should guide critical thinking as clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, and fairness (87). They write that “to be good at assessment requires that we consistently take apart our thinking and examine the parts with respect to [these] standards of quality” (87).

In a composition class, many of those same principles can be applied to good writing. For example, students’ ideas should be clearly and accurately stated. Their arguments should be logical and have appropriate depth, and the textual evidence they supply should be relevant. In accordance with these ideas, the Lee College English division has a uniform grading rubric to help students examine the quality of their writing. With these two sets of standards in mind, I designed this assignment to help students practice assessing their own work (and the work of their peers) in terms of intellectual standards. The activity will also help students understand the process by which their grades are determined.

Secondarily, this exercise is an excellent example of “scaffolding” concepts to promote student learning. Before students have to write a complete essay, they will work together in groups to complete a similar process.

**Making the Connection to Critical Thinking:**
Before the group writing takes place, I will pass out an explanation of Paul and Elder’s intellectual standards as well as the English division grading rubric. As a class, we will discuss how the intellectual standards relate to the rubric.

Then, students will go through the process of writing a body paragraph for a mock essay and assessing its quality.

**Preparing to Write:**
As a class, we will begin by constructing a sample thesis statement for a piece of literature. For example, students might suggest:

In Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use,” Dee/Wangero’s personally destructive false enlightenment exposes the difficulties we all may face as we ascend from our prisons of existence as described in Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.”

Then, as a group, we will break down the thesis in order to determine what the body paragraphs of this essay should prove. Major points that the above thesis suggests are that Dee/Wangero’s enlightenment is false and that her enlightenment is personally destructive.

From there, I will put students into groups of four and have each group construct a body paragraphs that would support one of these points.

**Written Assignment:**
With your group, using overhead transparency paper, write one body paragraph that
supports our thesis statement. Your body paragraphs should systematically and thoroughly show how Plato’s work informs your reading, discuss relevant supporting points from the text, and provide and comment on textual evidence (quotes and paraphrases from the text). Each body paragraph should have a main idea sentence that reminds your reader of the thesis of your essay and connects that paragraph to the paragraphs around it.

Assessment of Critical Thinking and Quality of Writing:
After each group has finished, we will place the paragraphs on the overhead projector and assess the material according to intellectual and departmental standards.

As a class, students will assess each paragraph’s clarity, accuracy, depth, and logic. Once we have read and assessed each paragraph, we will assign it a grade per the departmental rubric.
Practice Three: Essay Assignments

One concept that Elder and Paul stress in their work on teaching critical thinking is that instructors must be explicit about the critical thinking concepts that they teach in their classes. With this essay assignment, which relies heavily on critical thinking concepts, I blatantly incorporated critical thinking terminology. Students are required to examine a piece of literature from a particular point of view, devise their own question at issue, and maintain a sense of purpose throughout their work.

**Essay One: Recognizing Our Existence in the Cave**

**Assignment:** Use the point of view of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” to construct and support a relevant, interesting thesis statement about one of the following literary texts: Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use,” John Updike’s “Ex-Basketball Player,” Gwendolyn Brooks’ “We Real Cool,” Helena Maria Viramontes’ “The Jumping Bean,” or Rhina Espaillat's “Bilingual/Bilingue.”

**Question at Issue:** What do Plato’s ideas reveal about a particular character, symbol, or other aspect of the literary work you have chosen? Or, by using Plato’s ideas to understand a particular character, symbol, or other aspect of the literary work, what can we learn about ourselves and humanity?

**Guidelines:** After your introduction, in which you establish your thesis, the body of your essay will then support and explain your interpretations through textual evidence, original commentary, and researched information.

Your essay must be typed according to MLA standards, use literary present tense where appropriate, contain parenthetical documentation after quotations and paraphrases, and end with a Works Cited page that has at least four sources (the literary work, the philosophical work, and two library sources). Typically, these essays will be about four pages long.

**Other Considerations:** Begin your essay with an introductory paragraph. Here, you will introduce the literary work and author, the philosophical work and author, and any information that is necessary to establish a context for your thesis.

Your thesis statement should have a strong sense of purpose, identifying for your reader how the particular issue in the literary work you have chosen illuminates a broader truth.

**Here is a sample thesis:**

In Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use,” Dee/Wangero’s alienating and personally destructive false enlightenment exposes the difficulties we all may face as we ascend from our prisons of existence as described in Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” but even more specifically, it illuminates the difficulties of African-Americans in achieving cultural identity after the Civil Rights Movement.
After reading my thesis, you should be able to answer certain questions. . .

1. What literary work am I writing about?
2. What philosophical work informs my interpretation?
3. Who or what, specifically, interests me in the literary work?
4. What is the purpose of this essay? What am I trying to prove, and why is it important?
5. What will I prove in my body paragraphs?
   a. __________________________________
   b. __________________________________
   c. __________________________________
   d. __________________________________

Your body paragraphs should then systematically and thoroughly show how Plato’s work informs your reading, discuss relevant supporting points from the text, provide and comment on textual evidence (quotes and paraphrases from the text), and integrate two other library sources as further evidence. Each body paragraph should have a main idea sentence that reminds your reader of the thesis of your essay and connects that paragraph to the paragraphs around it.

Your essay should end with a concluding paragraph that re-states the thesis of your essay (without becoming overly repetitive or redundant!) and leaves readers with something to consider or a general statement that emphasizes the relevance of your work.

If you have any questions along the way, do not hesitate to stop by my office (BH 207), email me (gward@lee.edu), or schedule an appointment with a Writing Center tutor (BH 225/ 281-425-6534). Good luck!
Evaluation of Techniques by Student Associate

One of my former students was gracious enough to meet with me in person and communicate by email to discuss my new teaching ideas and share her perspective on their effectiveness. Rachel had been a student in my Children’s Literature class, which was also organized around particular “lens” texts, so she was familiar with my teaching philosophy and methods. I was thrilled when Rachel told me that she still uses philosophical perspectives that she learned from Children’s Literature in her other classes and in her life! She was appreciative of my methods, and she gave me advice on ways to improve them.

One particular problem that she helped me resolve pertained to the post-reading responses that I had incorporated into 1302. After assigning these writing activities, I found that students struggled with metacognition and were not always thinking as critically as they should but were instead writing superficial, short responses just to get a grade. Since post-reading activity was directly dependent on thinking about one’s thinking, I asked Rachel’s advice on how to help motivate students to move beyond responding at such a surface level. Rachel suggested that I require all students to write the pre-reading response but to offer the post-reading response as extra credit on a reading quiz grade. I usually do not offer extra credit, but I think that this is a good idea. By making the post-reading optional, motivated students would fulfill the assignment, and we would not have to spend class time on something that others did not find valuable.
Student Evaluation by Rachel Miller

As one of Mrs. Ward’s previous students, I can say firsthand how successful I believe the “lens” approach is in her classroom. I had never before been introduced to this approach before, so it was a completely new technique for me at first. It’s so helpful that I was able to use it and apply the technique in other classes as well. The lens approach and the thought process involved is a simple way of explaining or understanding complex ideas and experiences and I believe it helps to improve an individual’s writing. In this method the student uses particular texts and the point of views being expressed in order to expand their own by using critical thinking which leads to connection making.

In regard to the three assignments, I believe that there are advantages and a couple of disadvantages to the students. I think it is important to have an assignment that focuses the student beforehand, so that they are all thinking in the right direction as they begin. In the ReaCTion portion however, the last bullet of the assignment should be rephrased perhaps. It is possible in some situations that a student’s thinking may not be changed dramatically. Maybe another question is in order, but one that requires just as much thought and response.

The group writing assignment is the one I am most uncertain about, while I think it is an advantage to have insight on other people’s ways of thinking and that having access to other’s opinions helps to expand your own. The group writing is motivating to the students because the aid of their peers takes away any possibility of feeling overwhelmed. But in a classroom setting, it is sometimes very easy to be misdirected by another student’s interpretations or to not take your own to their highest potential. That would be the only disadvantage I would be worried of. In the preparation of group writing, I think the method is very sufficient in
forming clear, concise, logical ideas and explanations that will be simple to understand but with depth that exemplifies the presence of critical thinking.

The six essay assignments are a thorough strategy to develop thoughts and understanding of a topic and helps to show the student what they have learned through their own critical thinking. Of the three assignments mentioned, I think this is the most comprehensive and thorough. It requires the student to recall the most of what they have learned from a particular topic.

Mrs. Ward’s straightforward use of critical thinking terminology and assignments help to direct and focus student’s understanding on the process of critical thinking and how to interpret the assigned texts and apply them to and express them through our own experiences.
Reflective Statement: Final Report

Overall, the Faculty Learning Community has been a rewarding experience for me, helping me learn new approaches for increasing students’ critical thinking and ultimate success. Moving forward, I plan to re-organize my English 1301 class in a similar, cross-disciplinary approach and continue to use the types of assignments that are presented in this portfolio.
Works Cited

