

Abstract. Helping student to acquire conscious knowledge of what they feel/think should be the first order of work in the composition classroom. Attention to the affective must be an equal partner with the cognitive and metacognitive in the development of student self-awareness and maturation.

The Use of the Affective, Cognitive, and Metacognitive in the Developmental Education Composition Classroom: A Course Portfolio

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The purpose of a Developmental Education Composition class is to prepare students for the kinds of disciplined, sustained thinking/writing they are likely to do in the courses they will find in their collegiate curricula, in the careers they pursue, and as thoughtful members of an increasingly complex society. As such, the objective in my English 098 is to have students become comfortable with thinking and writing analytically. Implicit in this is instruction that points the way to helping students know where ideas come from, how they shape who they are, and how they are managed.

In *Classroom Research*, K. Patricia Cross and Mimi Harris Steadman (1996) write:

Metacognition has a two part definition that covers both *knowledge* of cognition and *control* of cognition.... The first part of metacognition is awareness of and reflection upon one's own learning processes, or thinking about thinking, if you will. Learning theory contends that the practice of observing oneself in the act of learning contributes to the ability to understand one's own learning

processes, and to the ability to manage and control it. Flavell (1970, 1976) first identified three main areas of knowledge about cognition that may help learners improve their learning processes: knowledge about oneself, knowledge about the learning task, and knowledge of strategies available to complete that task. (57).

The "thinking about thinking" definition is common in literature about metacognition. However, I believe the definition is too narrow in that it does not clearly embrace the affective, which I believe is partner to cognitive and metacognitive processes in reflection or commenting on what one feels/thinks. A broader definition and one that is implicit in my understanding of metacognition is thinking about *knowing*, and helping students to acquire conscious knowledge of what they feel/think should be the first order of work in the composition classroom. I believe this is essential because, in general, developmental students do not have a sense of themselves as powerful people with "larger-world" experiences. The academic world appears to be outside of theirs, and the demands made by it frequently discount personal

experiences by starting with (and staying with) the text rather than by starting with the student and moving to the text, despite the ubiquitous call for “student centered learning.” Indeed, while “student centered learning” has become a commonly heard phrase, it seems to lack resonance with what James Paul Gee (1996) has termed Discourse, which he describes as sociolinguistic markers or “artifacts” used by a group to identify itself or by members of the group to claim membership (p. 131)

In Gee’s definition we see that starting where students are must include understanding where they have come from, what their Discourse communities look and sound like, how these communities have shaped who each student is at the moment he/she walks into a college classroom for the first time. This is especially critical for the Developmental or non-traditional student who generally does not come from a Discourse community that has embedded in it the rules and mores of the academic community, and as noted by Lundell and Collins commenting on Gee’s work in Higbee and Dwinell (1999), “New Discourses (such as the Discourse of being a student in a school) are acquired or resisted in proportion to their perceived compatibility with the primary Discourse.” (P. 13). For our students their primary Discourse is distinctly different from what they find here. It would seem apparent, if not transparent, that unless students see that who they are and where they have come from is acknowledged and respected by faculty, then we are more likely to encounter resistance, especially in the form of passivity, rather than students eager to acquire the Discourse of our academic disciplines.

In my composition class I begin by assuring my students that they are in the right place by establishing that they have been thinking/learning people for a very long time, and I use the following exercise as the initial effort to have them begin to see where the ideas/beliefs they carry with them have come from and to show that they have in fact been able to exert control over those ideas and beliefs:

There are a number of attributes that signal academic discourse at work, and I trust that you will discover these as the semester goes along. For now, however, I would like you to consider the one attribute I believe most important: Learning to think about what you know and how you know it.

Learning to think about thinking is probably the hardest thing we accomplish consciously in adulthood, especially if the schools we attended did not encourage this process. As children we are completely dependent on our parents and family members for all of our values. As we grow older and perhaps join a church we absorb the values of the religious group to which we belong. As we enter our teen years the beliefs and attitudes of our peers become increasingly important, and throughout all of this the culture itself is imposing its values through TV and other media, including the schools we attend. The result of all this is us---fully wired (though hardly complete) by all the influences that have shaped who we have become. As a way of seeing this concretely, please complete the following assignment for next class:

On a sheet of paper write both the question and your response to the following assignment:

State one thing (your choice) about which you hold a strong opinion that was handed down to you (from family, church, friends). For instance: I believe (do not believe) that homosexuals should have the right to marry. Then answer the following questions:

1. I believe I first came to hold this opinion consciously when I was _____ years old.

2. I received this opinion from _____.

3. While there may be many reasons I hold this opinion, the principal reason is _____.

4. I believe this principal reason is compelling because (response must be at least 10 full sentences) _____.

Of course, it is not as if you have never thought for yourself or reconsidered a belief handed down to you, and the purpose of the following exercise is to show that. As a way of seeing this concretely, please also complete the following assignment for next class:

State one thing (your choice) about which you hold a strong opinion that was handed down to you (from family, church, friends) but which you have since changed your mind about. For instance: I was taught to believe that abortion was wrong in every instance but have since changed my mind. Then answer the following questions:

1. I believe I first came to hold this learned opinion consciously when I was _____ years old.

2. I received this opinion from _____.

3. I first realized that the opinion I received was wrong (or not altogether right) when I was _____ years old.

4. The most significant reason I changed my mind about this was because (This response must be at least 15 full sentences.) _____.

The purpose of this assignment is to awaken in students or illuminate for them the idea that thinking is a process that happens from the inside out and that their “inside” is actually quite rich. That is, serious consideration of serious ideas does not happen independently of the previous experiences we carry with us, and that those experiences may be considered or reconsidered and then commented upon (metacognition). So that my students may see clearly what this assignment is getting at, we discuss the interdependence of the affective, cognitive, and metacognitive as preparation for addressing the assignment.

As noted above, attention to the affective, I believe, must be an equal partner with the cognitive and metacognitive in the development of student self awareness and maturation as a learner. The cognitive domain has always been privileged in the academic world and happily so, as allegiance to reason and disciplined thought seems a much better approach to addressing issues and problems than is burning people as sacrifice when the crops fail.

Nevertheless, in higher education the emphasis on the cognitive, often to the exclusion and even the derision of the affective, seems to make teaching a matter of information transmission and learning a matter of passive reception rather than a dynamic engagement in the service of personal transformation. Fortunately, with the shift in paradigm from teaching to learning introduced by Robert Barr and John Tagg (1995) and the work of a number of researchers/scholars on the importance of the affective in education Bower (1992), Bransford, Brown & Cocking (1999), Gardner (1999), Goleman (2005) and Palmer (1998), the affective may well be growing as an essential element in understanding the teaching/learning relationship. As noted by Lee Shulman (2004): “Authentic and enduring learning occurs when students share a *passion* for the material, are emotionally committed to the ideas, process and activities and see the work as connected to present and future goals” (p. 25). While Shulman was writing about teaching/learning in the liberal arts, the idea that students must be emotionally connected to the learning process seems applicable across disciplines. Further, it seems to follow that if we wish our students to be passionate about the work we put before them, we must help them locate the place in the academic enterprise where recognition of emotional response is not only appropriate but necessary.

Similarly, metacognition, while a relatively new concept (Flavell 1979), has gained standing in classroom activity beyond its obvious application as a function in addressing study skills issues. Bransford, Brown & Cocking (1999) argue that a metacognitive approach to instruction can assist

students in more quickly becoming independent learners by engaging in reflective processes leading to clearer definitions of goals and self assessments of progress. (p18). Further, Deanna Kuhn (2000) has argued that metacognition is a skill that develops over time and, as such, is a particularly important part of the learning process for first year college students especially for those in need of remediation (p 67). To this I would add that an equally important part of the process is that what students feel about a subject is a legitimate part of their total response to it, and once recognized they can then begin to consider (cognition) where that feeling came from and to employ reflective strategies (metacognition) to evaluate their positions. As noted by Paul R. Pintrich (2002) as well as Flavell (1979) if metacognition captures awareness of self, which certainly must include awareness of what one feels, then the affective must be part of that process and should be addressed explicitly in instruction (Pintrich, 223).

Finally, it is worth noting that the affective was included as a domain in the original Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964) and that the recent revision of the Taxonomy (Anderson et. al., 2001), which constructs a taxonomy with two dimensions, Knowledge and Cognition, establishes Metacognition as a category within the Knowledge dimension. In the revised Taxonomy, Metacognitive Knowledge is defined as “knowledge of cognition in general as well as awareness and knowledge of one’s own cognition” and includes in the three categories knowledge of self (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 214). It would appear that attention to both affective and metacognitive processes are gaining

standing in the academic community and, as I hope to show, can be consciously hard wired to classroom instruction.

The next assignment, which remains in the “self knowledge” vein, is for students to write a paper of 350-500 words exploring the careers they have chosen and why. This is actually a first draft, though at the time of the assignment I do not tell them that, as the length is consciously designed to have them give broad and general reasons (which are what they are accustomed to) for their career choice. After I have read the assignment, we discuss how it might be improved by layering in concrete detail such as recollecting, if possible, the moment they first thought seriously about whatever career they have chosen and as precisely as possible why they have chosen it so that the writing task has immediate purpose for them as well as meeting the conditions of a classroom assignment. However, the goal of the assignment is to move them from seeing a writing/learning task as something necessarily outside themselves and made only of vague generalities to something that is very much part of who they are. The rewrite addresses the following prompt:

**Personal Essay Assignment:
Assignment Length: 500-750 words**

The purpose of this assignment is to write an essay that addresses the question of your future. As a personal essay you will write this paper in the first person and make an honest, thoughtful effort at coming to terms with why you have chosen (or have interest in) the career you write about. This will include questions such as when did you first think this career was something you

wanted to pursue (see if you can locate the exact time or circumstance), what prompted you to decide on this career, what do you expect it will offer as both personal and financial reward, what real sacrifices do you expect to have to make to attain your goal. Please be sure to address concretely at least one question I asked in the previous draft specific to why you have chosen the career indicated.

This is followed by class time where we discuss how to identify concretely their feelings about the careers they have chosen, to locate them specifically within their personal history, and how to incorporate what they find into pre-writing exercises. In short, what I am after is recognition of their affective responses to the prompt and awareness that they are capable of identifying and commenting on their own feelings. From there we can begin to employ cognitive and metacognitive processes to both help gauge how realistic their choice may be as well as to order their responses to the prompt.

An important part of this process of beginning to see themselves and their worlds more clearly is the class time we spend learning how metaphor can concretize the abstract and illuminate both feeling and thought. In “Ideas in Practice: Fostering Metaphoric Thinking,” Patricia James (2002) argues that, “Metaphoric thinking is a powerful motivator for students because it integrates the affective realm with the cognitive, and it both accesses and affirms students’ prior knowledge”. (p.26). Feelings, of course, can be difficult to articulate, even for those of us who are reasonably sophisticated, but metaphor has the power to connect the vague and abstract to the concrete so that the former may be better understood.

Again, the process employed is what do I feel about this (affective), what might I think about it (cognitive), what might this mean to me (metacognitive). So that they may see this clearly, we begin our exploration of metaphor with the personal. How, for instance, we dress relative to occasion. They respond well to this and express surprise to learn they are walking metaphors sending out concrete signals of identity that may be shaped or altered depending on mood or event. From there we discuss how other identities may be discovered through metaphor. For instance, why churches do not look like city halls or what it might mean to have to pass a metal detector before entering ones school. Why I wear a tie to class and what they might think if suddenly I arrived in jeans and a t-shirt. We have fun with this exercise, but so too is it a serious attempt at finding ways to concretize complicated feelings for examination and recognize that meaning exists all around us. When metaphor is expanded to include “analogy, simile, symbol, metonymy, and personification” (James, p. 26) students become more positively self conscious and more aware of their connectedness with the environments they find themselves in and their purpose for being in each. For some it is powerful enough that they begin to see that the world around them is not as random as they originally thought and that connections can be made in formerly unseen ways. What is essential in the exercise is that students are able to use metaphor as a tool to access personal experience and perhaps even more importantly that they are able to affirm that these experiences have a place in the scaffolding of new knowledge.

While they are working on the career assignment and considering

metaphor as something more than a literary term, I assign “The Achievement of Desire,” a memoir by Richard Rodriguez which addresses the difficulty he experienced reconciling what he termed the “non-rational ways of knowing” at home and “reflectiveness” at school. For Rodriguez the “non-rational” ways of knowing are seated in the affective and “reflectiveness” is located in the rational. In an exchange with Dr. Patti Owen-Smith of Oxford College at Emory University, Dr. Owen-Smith noted that we seem to do very little “reflectiveness” in higher education because it is seen as less cognitive and more affective. While Rodriguez was explicitly locating “reflectiveness” at school only in the cognitive domain, I agree with Dr. Owen-Smith that it should include the affective, and I have designed the assignment to allow my students to comment on Rodriguez’ use of the term as a reinforcement of their understanding of both the affective and the cognitive.

Rodriguez’ memoir explores the cultural disarticulation that many students who are first in their families to attend college experience, the pull between the comfort of home/neighborhood environments (Discourse communities), no matter how impoverished, and an environment to which they aspire, which appears alien and frequently unaccepting. The assignment for that reading exercise follows:

At the top of page 172 Rodriguez writes: “What Hoggert understands is that the scholarship boy moves between environments, his home and the classroom, which are at cultural extremes, opposed. With his family, the boy has the pleasure of an exuberant

intimacy---the family's consolation in feeling public alienation. Lavish emotions texture home life. Then at school the instruction is to use reason primarily. Immediate needs govern the pace of his parents' lives; from his mother and father he learns to trust spontaneity and non-rational ways of knowing. Then at school there is the mental calm; teachers emphasize the value of reflectiveness which opens a space between thinking and immediate action."

For next class be prepared to discuss the juxtaposition between the "non-rational ways of knowing" at home and "reflectiveness" at school. Also, in what way do you think reflectiveness "opens the space between thinking and immediate action"?

Or, given our conversations about the relationship between the cognitive and the affective, do you believe Rodriguez' use of "reflectiveness" might be applied to both?

The purpose of this assignment is to introduce students to an author who reflects on his past from a far removed present so that we can see that process at work. Class discussion is usually animated, as many students have a visceral reaction to what they see initially as Rodriguez' betrayal of the family system. I encourage this reaction as it underscores the legitimacy of an affective response and emphasizes the efficacy of "talking" to an author. Following their initial response to Rodriguez, we talk about that reaction in the context of their own circumstances. While I try to stay on the outskirts of their specific familial relationships, as

they can be more emotionally charged than I wish to deal with at this early stage in the semester, I do steer them toward thinking as concretely as possible about where they are now and where they wish to be in the future with equal specificity (the career essay is the foundation for this discussion) and what stresses the shift in "place" is likely to cause as they make the transition from neighborhoods where poverty and lack of education are the norm to a world that operates under a very different set of rules and expectations. These class discussions serve as the foundation for the following writing assignment:

In the "Achievement of Desire" Richard Rodriguez writes in his first paragraph: " The primary reason for my success in the classroom was that I couldn't forget that schooling was changing me and separating me from the life I had enjoyed before becoming a student."

What Rodriguez describes in his essay is what sociologists call cultural disarticulation. This occurs especially in the case of students who are the first in their family to attend college. While it can take many forms and is felt more keenly by some than by others, it recognizes that education is transformative and that transformation, while usually described as moving toward something is also a process of moving away from something.

First, in a paragraph of a few sentences write a description of what you think Rodriguez' essay is about. What is the major problem that he describes, what evidence does he provide to illustrate the problem. Then write a letter to Rodriguez of roughly 350-500 words telling him what you

thought of his essay. This can be a letter showing sympathy or telling him how you are going through something similar to what he describes or arguing that you think he is wrong in assuming that education means having to wrestle with a dislocation from family, friends and neighborhood. What I am looking for here is an honest, first person response to the essay.

As noted above, given that virtually all students in my classes can expect to face the challenges of moving from one cultural milieu to another, of adding a Discourse that may cause conflicts with Discourse communities they have been a part of, this memoir resonates for them in much the same way it would have resonated for their instructor had it been available in 1968, when he experienced the pull of the polar forces of neighborhood and family on one end and the pull of what Rodriguez describes as an emerging world of reflectiveness and academic challenge on the other. We examine together the forces of comfort and relationship that may cause confusion and turmoil and, again, begin with trying to locate first the feelings (affective responses) and then to examine how those feelings may be ordered and commented upon (cognition/metacognition). And of course, my personal history is included in the discussion. I am always moved when I recognize that most of my students handle confusion and turmoil (personal/academic) as something to be regarded as failure rather than the first felt steps toward clarity.

At this point in the semester, about the fifth week, my students are generally comfortable with the terms

affective, cognition and metacognition and are beginning to see that their personal experiences, clearly identified and carefully considered, can inform their thinking and writing and in many cases provide a context for new concepts. It is encouraging to note that the great majority are both thinking and writing more concretely. Certainly, we work in class on developing reasons, examples and details in their writing, and like all composition instructors I point out where claims may be made more concrete as they work through drafts of their assignments. But I believe, too, that by this point they have become more skilled at thinking about themselves in concrete terms (some have become quite adroit at employing metaphor) and seeing their experiences as a valuable part of the thinking process even if those experiences feel awkward or difficult., and I am convinced that this contributes to increased skill in writing concretely. Of equal importance, I believe the process allows them to find reasonably safe passage toward the Discourse community of a college environment.

As noted above, the purpose of a developmental composition class is to prepare students for the kinds of writing they are likely to encounter in their college courses, and so the next assignment, while keeping them in the realm of personal experience, begins to move them outward to objective analysis:

Profile Essay: *In this essay you will write a profile of someone who has made a major difference in your life. This can be one member of your immediate family, a close friend, a coach, a teacher, etc. Your task will be to focus*

on one, two or three characteristics of that person which you believe make(s) him/her worthy of selection. However, this essay is not the first step toward sainthood, so if the person has a flaw you should feel free to work it into the essay, though of course that is not necessary to the assignment. You are to write this profile so that when your audience (me) is finished reading it, he will feel as if he has learned something important or essential about the person you have written about and why that person has so deeply affected you. This essay should be written in the first person. Also, since you will likely encounter shifts in time, be careful about verb tense.

The assignment length is 500-750 words.

The principal objective of this assignment is to work on developing observational/ analytical skills and maintaining objectivity despite closeness to your subject.

The goal of this assignment is to begin moving toward the analytical essay, but my job as the instructor continues to be emphasizing that the connection between their identified person and themselves comes first from within. However, the difference between this and the preceding assignments is that I am more demanding of detail and example to show where that connection came from and why it has been so important to them. Happily, I do not usually have to demand too sharply, as most students by now have a reasonably good grasp of writing as a messy process but one not necessarily without personal direction and benefit. They can start

from within, gauge their affective response, consider that response (cognition) and move toward the metacognitive process of developing strategies for ordering their ideas. None of this is happening fluently nor is it happening for all, but it is happening.

In the next assignment, a review of something they have strong feeling about, the dominant theme of the course becomes analysis. Of course, they have been doing this all along, but now we can put a name on the process without it seeming so “academically” alien to them. Also, I will remind them for the rest of the course that analysis *begins* with an inventory of what we already know` or perceive, what we feel about it, and moves toward a reconsidered, though not necessarily changed, response based on additional information. The Review assignment follows:

In this essay you will choose a movie, novel, work of art, music CD, video game, or performance you have seen or heard and write a review of it. The review must make a judgment (evaluation), establish the criteria you have used to make that judgment, and provide evidence that the criteria have been met.

The assignment length is roughly 750 words.

Remember, in general, *judgments (evaluations) are frequently subjective. The job of a reviewer is to make a judgment that is based on **criteria** (standard, rule or test on which we base our judgments) and **evidence** (support that is consistent with the criteria we have selected). As I hope you can see, while many people make*

judgments, they are publicly useful only insofar as they are based on sound criteria and supported by compelling evidence.

And so we start this unit with each student being asked to make a judgment about anything he/she feels strongly about, and then I ask them to explain the criteria they used to reach that conclusion. This is not at all easy and usually takes two class hours of conversation about what is meant by criteria, and while there is generally some discomfort and frustration that attends the process, the foundation for moving from affective response to cognition to metacognition has been well enough established that they are able to progress through the process with a firm understanding of what we are trying to accomplish. Once they have understood what criteria are and how to apply them to a judgment, we move to providing evidence in support of the judgment. At this point I introduce samples of reviews for study and discussion, with an emphasis on looking for what criteria the reviewer seems to be applying and what support is provided for the judgments rendered.

Again, while this and the final two assignments require the application of objective analysis, I want my students to understand that their initial affective response (like/don't like/not sure) is the starting point of the thinking/writing process and before they can go further they must develop as best they can an inventory of where that initial response has come from. Thus the first analytical assignment is constructed specifically to elicit a strong affective response:

Argument Assignment #1

Question: Should homosexuals have the same rights to civil (state approved) marriage as heterosexual couples?

In thinking about a response to this question you will need to consider what the secular purpose of marriage is in our culture. How the marriage of homosexuals would contribute to or detract from that purpose. You certainly will want to investigate your affective response. That is, what is your first intuitive response to the question? Where do you think you learned that response? If you have not changed your mind since that initial response, what evidence do you possess to support your present position? If you have changed your mind since your initial response, what made you do so? What evidence do you now hold in support of your current position?

You may present your position in one of three ways:

- 1. You agree that homosexuals should be permitted the same rights to state sponsored marriage as heterosexuals*
- 2. You disagree that homosexuals should be permitted the same rights to state sponsored marriage as heterosexuals*
- 3. You are ambivalent. That is, you can see merit in both sides of the argument.*

We will discuss patterns for developing each of the three structures during the next three class periods.

What I have found in my practice is that roughly 75% of all students will have an immediate negative response to the question, and virtually all the male students will respond negatively. Further, while the question frames the conversation in the context of state-

sponsored marriage, many students immediately want to quote the Bible as the source in support of their objections to homosexuality in general. This is fine, and while the great majority of discussion time will be spent on the civil aspect of homosexual marriage, the first class is given over to examination of Leviticus, as that is where the most pronounced injunctions to homosexuality can be found. Of course, Leviticus is also where one finds rather severe penalties for sowing fields with two kinds of seeds, wearing garments made from two kinds of material, and tattoos (which in prevailing fashion most of my students sport) , not to mention Yahweh's indirect endorsement of slavery. The purpose of the conversation is, of course, not to denigrate religious beliefs, but to help students locate where their initial reaction to homosexuality might have come from and to consider if the conditions/circumstances of their lives may have changed between first receiving their belief that homosexuality is wrong and their immediate present.

I am, of course, extremely careful that they understand I am not attacking either the Bible or their religious beliefs. Indeed, I endorse any response as authentic. What I point out, however, is that in the realm of analysis reference to the Bible creates a rhetorical problem. If they quote it, I counter with the inconsistency of argument. To put it another way, they can't both have a tattoo *and* use Leviticus as an argument against homosexuality. While we have been working on analysis in one form or another all semester, this is where the idea of rhetorical problem solving is introduced and discussed at length. This is more than locating what one really thinks and then finding examples and

details in support of it. It is here that they must begin to consider the *design* of thinking.

In the end, some will fall back on the Bible because they must. And so I counter. And then we move on. On the other hand, a fair number of students do seem to grasp the idea that a paper can be constructed architectonically, with stresses and bearings carefully calculated, and I do see some rather impressive (if still shaky) attempts at constructing rather than simply writing the paper.

Despite the attention paid to the religious argument, once we turn to the issue of state-sponsored marriage, that is where we stay or at least try to stay, as inevitably we have to acknowledge that the roots of civil law are anchored in the same soil as religious law, the presumed separation of church and state notwithstanding. Happily, at first the conversation in class is loud and occasionally borders on the chaotic, which provides the opportunity to model appropriate academic discourse. I am always pleased to see that order is quickly restored; and despite a few expected flare-ups, my students recognize that the process for thinking and discussing employed with less controversial issues is also applicable to one about which there is much disagreement.

It is important to note here that as the instructor I am careful to focus on the *process* of arriving at a thesis for their paper and thoughtfully constructing the argument. We discuss again that they have to examine their initial reaction (affective), locate its genesis, consider new information (cognition), then decide if a change in their thinking is in order and what strategies they will need to employ for their analysis

(metacognition). As I do throughout the semester, I assert that my role is to ask questions, not to make value judgments. They ask my opinion and I give it along with support for my position, but what I stress, as I have throughout the semester, is that good writing must come from what they thoughtfully and honestly believe rather than what they perceive I wish to hear. My experience so far is that some of my students will alter their initial response as a result of class discussion, and some dramatically so, and it is interesting to note that many are surprised to learn that a thesis expressing ambivalence is as valuable as one taking an unequivocal position ; but what is encouraging is that many are able to demonstrate through the completed essay that they have learned to listen to themselves, evaluate new information, and construct “designed” responses to a difficult essay assignment. Again, I do not claim fluency has been achieved, but the struggling seems more coherent.

The final essay of the semester is again an argument and addresses the following prompt:

Abortion is a difficult issue because it cuts more deeply into the collective consciousness of our culture than just about any other question. Unlike homosexual marriage, it cannot so easily be separated out into a secular issue of contracts and a social issue of behavior that is perceived as deviant. It is, at base, an issue that addresses the conflict between the importance of individual conscience and the cultural mandate that human life should be protected.

Nevertheless.....

In an essay of 750-1,000 words agree, disagree or express ambivalence that a woman should have a constitutionally protected right to an abortion. Since Roe vs. Wade rests primarily on a person's right to privacy, you will have to establish that privacy is a protected right and that it extends to a woman's right to an abortion.

In this essay you may qualify abortion rights as you wish. However, you must fully develop your qualification.

This is an essay that requires you to carefully build an argument. In addition to the usual attention to grammar and sentence structure, my evaluation will be based on how well you design your argument.

The prompt here is consciously layered with choices that must be made before the thesis can be established. Again, however, we start with their initial affective response to the idea of abortion: where did that response come from? Has it been reconsidered in a while? From there we study the 2nd, 5th, 9th and 14th Amendments as well as materials on both sides of the argument, and then discuss the rhetorical moves that must be made to follow the prompt. While this is a difficult assignment, I am always pleased to see a degree of sophistication in both the thinking and the writing that demonstrates clear and often remarkable progress from the first writing efforts of the semester. It is also worth noting that class discussions almost never exhibit the roughness experienced at the beginning of the Homosexual unit, indicating, I believe, a

“settling” in to the process of academic discourse.

Conclusion:

While my course is composition, I believe the same processes employed are applicable across academic disciplines. In mathematics, for example, an approach that begins with a discussion of what students have experienced and how they feel about those experiences would seem more reasonable than beginning immediately with a raft of problems. To say (again) here is the Mathematics, here are the processes for solving problems (which they have certainly seen before), now here are twenty five problems to solve (which for most students will be an exercise in cringing rather than engaging), cannot result in either an awakening of why the processes are employed as they are or an appreciation of the aesthetics involved. How much better might it be to start with a frank discussion of what they feel when sitting in a Mathematics class? Where that feeling came from? How to come to terms with it? And from there begin to see how symbol can be manipulated not simply as a problem to be solved but as a process to engaged. Beyond that, whether in writing classes, mathematics, science or social sciences, we must pay attention to the Discourses students bring with them and employ our skills as teachers to:

Respect through rhetoric and practice the students’ primary Discourses acquired in family and community; engage students recurrently in meaningful practice in situations where real learning is the goal; provide full disclosure of the terms of success through ambitious and

meaningful practice marked by frequent, supported interventions by trusted ‘masters’ who guide the learners toward patterns and ways which are ‘right’ in the context of the new Discourse; build explicitly on what students already know; and disclose the essential features of higher education, its values, and the nature of its practices. (Higbee & Dwinell, p. 17)

My developmental writing students come into my class with a distinct feeling of alienation from the academic enterprise in general and writing in particular, and for most of them this is the feeling they bring into each classroom, especially at the beginning of college careers. They tell me this both during individual conferences and in class discussions. I believe the antidote to this is for them to recognize that they have been thinking people all along and to value the beliefs they bring to class as essential to who they are even as we challenge them to see those ideas in a larger context. However, this cannot happen unless we first assure them that those values and beliefs will be respected. From there we can engage in a process of discovering what they feel, what they think, why they think it, and then examine consciously if what they think can be supported or must be reconsidered after analysis. I believe this process requires attention to the affective and metacognitive as well as the cognitive. Or as I tell my students during the first class session, what we will be about is learning to converse with ourselves without being thought more than a little daft.

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