Overcoming the “Matthew Effect”: Enabling Student Potential through Integrative Curricular Design

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What’s the Problem?

CLA Reading/Writing Challenge:

90 min. to respond to a writing prompt

Some topics (“ill-structured problems”)

Should our company buy this airplane?
What are the relative merits of two plans to reduce urban crime?
What’s the Problem?

Rubric designed to assess:

• Evaluation of evidence
• Synthesis of data
• Inferential reasoning
• Consideration of alternative perspectives

CLA-Type Challenges

1. Unpacking
   - Stepping into a text
   - Charting its hierarchy of ideas

2. Critiquing and Connection-making
   - Stepping back from a text
   - Considering contexts, alternatives, & perspectives
Why has the challenge increased?

The “Matthew Effect”
in reading: Keith E. Stanovich*

“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.” KJV Matt. 13:12

Why has the challenge increased?

The “Matthew Effect”

“Reading” in the academy: Two roads diverged

Reader-response theory
  • strategies (remedial)
  • practices (expert)
But Not a New Story

“The great obstacle to general education is the fragmentation and specialization of the academy.”

It's Time to End “Courseocentrism”

“To make a long story short, we became terrific at adding exciting new theories, fields, texts, cultures, and courses to the mix, but we’ve been challenged, to say the least, when it comes to connecting what we’ve added.”

Gerald Graff, Inside Higher Ed, January 13, 2009
Response to *Academically Adrift*

All university managers might like to read 40 pages of this book a week for the next five weeks and produce a 20-page report on ‘Countering Academic Drift: Developing Critical Thinking in the University.’

*Times Higher Education*

So we did. . .except that it took 5 years.
Reconceiving General Education

Experts:
- Skills are not separate from content
- Connect parts to the whole
- Connect the whole to larger contexts (meta-cognitive)

Reconceiving General Education

How could these principles be applied to enhance course design and encourage students to experience Gen Ed as integral to their education?

How might such a redesign counter the Matthew Effect?
Internal Institutional Imperatives

1. Student Competencies
2. Planning, Vision, and Goals
3. Inclusive & Transparent Task Force
External Imperatives

1. AAC&U
2. LEAP
3. External Review & Accreditation
4. Recruitment & Retention
# 2015-2016 School of Liberal Arts and Sciences Core Requirements

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Major:</th>
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<td>Brnc ID:</td>
<td>Date Admit:</td>
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**English Writing:** (9 credits, but CMP 115 may be waived by SAT of 550 or testing)
- CMP 115 Intro to Expository Writing
- CMP 120 Expository Writing or BHP 100 Honors Seminar: Great Ideas I
- CMP 125 Research Writing or BHP 150 Honors Seminar: Great Ideas II

**Reading:** (3 credits may be required)
- CNC 100 College Reading

**Foreign Language:** (6 credits, Level 1 & 2 of the same language, or proficiency equiv. to at least one year of study)
- Ch 100 Chinese I or ITA 101 Italian I
- Ch 101 Chinese II or ITA 102 Italian II
- FRE 100 French I or RUS 101 Russian I
- FRE 101 French II or RUS 102 Russian II
- GER 100 German I or SPA 101 Spanish I
- GER 101 German II or SPA 102 Spanish II
- ITA 100 Italian I or FOR 100 Core

**Mathematics:** (3 credits, MTH 100S - Math Skills Lab may be required)
- MTH 102 Finite Mathematics or MTH 210 Calculus I
- MTH 105 Algebra and Trigonometry

**World History:** (6 credits)
- HIS 150 World History to 1500 or HIS 151 World History since 1500

**Literature:** (3 credits)
- ENG 205 Understanding Literature or LAW 204 Law, Lit and Film in America
- ENG 208 Arthurian Legends in Literature or LIT 250 Masterworks of Western Lit I
- ENG 210 Major American Authors or LIT 251 Masterworks of Western Lit II
- ENG 211 Major British Authors or LIT 310 Russian Lit from 1868-1950
- ENG 213 Literature and Mythology or LIT 311 Russian Lit from 1850-1917
- ENG 214 Myths and Literature or LIT 312 20th Century Russian Literature
- ENG 215 Satire and Comedy or LIT 313 Contemporary Russian Literature
- ENG 217 Intro to Shakespeare or LIT 315 Tolstoy
- ENG 219 Literature and Violence or LIT 317 Dostoevsky
- ENG 220 Literature and Society or LIT 322 German Lit & Film in English Translation
- ENG 221 Literature and Psychology or LIT 325 The Folktale
- ENG 224 Science Fiction: The Human Link or LIT 340 Hispanic Lit & Film in English Translation
- ENG 226 Black American Literature or LIT 350 French & Francophon Lit & Film in Translation
- ENG 229 Multi-Ethnic Lit in America or LIT 370 European Short Novel
- ENG 230 Women in Literature or LIT 390 The Bible as Literature
- ENG 230 Major Poets or LIT Any Lit course in Foreign Languages
- ENG 270 Major Poets or LIT Any Lit course in Foreign Languages
- ENG 275 Posthumanism: Bodies and Tech or LIT Any Lit course in Foreign Languages
- ENG 290 The Short Story or LIT Any Lit course in Foreign Languages
- ENG 295 Human Relationships in Literature (Honors) or LIT Any Lit course in Foreign Languages

Total: 18 credits
Key Elements of New Model

1. Discipline-based requirements
2. Iterative practice of key skill sets
3. Vertical integration of content areas
4. Invitation for curricular renewal
5. General criteria for course inclusion
6. Inclusion of interdisciplinary options
Key Elements

2. Iterative practice of key skill sets

- Writing (2)
- Speaking
- Quantitative
Key Elements

3. Vertical integration of content areas

- Second Disciplinary Perspective
- Two Upper-Level Courses
- Bridge to Minors
Key Elements

5. General criteria for course inclusion

- Big Questions
- Assignment Design & Sequence (keyed to Student Learning Objectives [SLOs])
- Primary Texts
A Virtuous Circle

Sample SLOs:
• Evaluating arguments
• Analyzing/Critiquing evidence
• Writing for audience and purpose
• Speaking for audience and purpose
• Reasoning with quantitative data
• Thinking scientifically

• Support disciplinary habits
• Support meta-cognition across disciplines

Criteria for Core Courses
• Big Questions
• Assignment Design & Sequence
• Primary Texts
“[For experts,] abstraction is replaced by perception [and, as a consequence,] a so-called ‘given’ problem situation is not really given since it is seen differently by an expert than it is perceived by an inexperienced person….”

Experts Vs. Novices

- Master methods of inquiry while retaining facts & details
- Recognize features & patterns missed by novices
- Organize knowledge around disciplinary “Big Ideas”
- Analyze problem space qualitatively before solving
- “Conditionalize” knowledge to specific contexts

Expertise in Sociology

“The sociological imagination, I remind you, in considerable part consists of the capacity to shift from one perspective to another, and in the process to build up an adequate view of a total society and of its components. It is this imagination, of course, that sets off the social scientist from the mere technician.”

Bridging the Expert/Novice Divide

The Dilemma:

Covering Content vs. Teaching Habits of Mind

The Solution?

Thinking of Content as “Tools,” not “Facts”
The “Ill-Structured Problem (ISP)”

“There is initially no definite criterion to test a proposed solution, much less a mechanizeable process to apply the criterion.”

Scaffolding ISPs & Assignment Design

- Interactive Components
  \textit{Structured brainstorming with feedback}
- Meaning-Constructing Tasks
  \textit{Disciplinary “problems” based on meta-reading}
- Clear Explanation of Writing Expectations
  \textit{Guidelines for successful completion}

Sociology 101: Course Project

The Sociological Analysis of a Television Program

Phase I: Program Selection & Initial Observations
Phase II: Further Observations & Analysis
Phase III: Thesis Statement & Supporting Evidence
Phase IV: Finished Paper
Phase 1: Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate understanding of three core theoretical perspectives (Functionalism, Conflict Theory and Interactionism) because:

  You need to know something to learn something (Willingham).
- Use theories as tools of analysis
- Avoid being a mere technician:
  Think “playfully” about future uses (Mills).

Note: These Learning Objectives incorporate both “Unpacking” and “Connection-Making”.
Using Conflict Theory, infer the following from your initial observations of the program:

**Conflict Theory**: What types of people currently have power? Who is most likely to have it in the future? From what sources do individuals derive their power? How is power gained and lost?
ISP: Phase 1

- Develop a one-sentence definition that you think best summarizes how Conflict Theory sees and understands society.
- Write a one-paragraph summary describing how, based on your definition, the society depicted in your program looks when seen through the lens of Conflict Theory. What can Conflict Theory tell us about the important rules for how the society works?
- Propose one question about your program that Conflict Theory would help to answer.
Assignment Design and Whole-Course Conception

- Model for Structuring Lectures & Discussion
  - Built in Schema for Organizing Concepts
  - Converting Debate into Discussion
- Context for Interpreting Sociological Research
- Application Questions on Exams
Outcomes

- Better Quality of Written Work
- Richer Assessment of Written Work
- Development of Habits of Mind
- Minimal Sacrifice of Content
- Cross-Disciplinary Applications for Non-Majors
- Passion for Sociology
Scaffolding to Counter the Matthew Effect:

• Study Guides for test preparation
• Worksheets for class notes
• Reading Guide
• Reading Questions
Scaffolding Communication Law

Using a trade book instead of a text book:
Text book:
A manual for instruction
Trade book:
For the general public
Reading Issues Communication Law

- Difficulty detecting nuance
  *What a difference one word can make*

- Difficulty distinguishing linguistic contexts
  *Legal vs. colloquial*

- Difficulty decoding complex sentences

- Difficulty interpreting idioms

- Difficulty distinguishing argument from exposition

- Difficulty seeing both the forest and the trees
  *Connecting the ideas to the whole*
Six Aspects of Text Complexity

- Relationships: interactions among ideas/characters
- Richness: amount and sophistication of information
- Structure: how text is organized and progresses
- Style: author’s tone and use of language
- Vocabulary: author’s word choice
- Purpose: author’s intent in writing the text

*Reading Between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals about College Readiness in Reading.* Report from American College Testing, Inc.
## Degree of Text Complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of Text</th>
<th>Uncomplicated</th>
<th>More complicated</th>
<th>Complex</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Basic, straightforward</td>
<td>Sometimes implicit</td>
<td>Subtle, involved, deeply embedded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richness</td>
<td>Minimal/limited</td>
<td>Moderate/more detailed</td>
<td>Sizable/highly sophisticated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Simple, conventional</td>
<td>More involved</td>
<td>Elaborate, sometimes unconventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>Plain, accessible</td>
<td>Richer, less plain</td>
<td>Often intricate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Familiar</td>
<td>Some difficult, context-dependent words</td>
<td>Demanding, highly context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Conveyed with some subtlety</td>
<td>Implicit, sometimes ambiguous</td>
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Examples from Communication Law

“Fear of serious injury alone cannot justify suppression of free speech and assembly. Men feared witches and burnt women.”

Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes
Whitney v. California, 1927

Madisonian premise (Virginia Resolutions, 1798): “the right of freely examining public characters and measures”
Examples from Communication Law

“We do not have the right to not be offended.”

-N.Y. ACLU

“Although the Sedition Act was never tested in this Court, the attack upon its validity has carried the day in the court of history.”


Lewis: “With that, the Sedition Act was found unconstitutional 163 years after it expired.”
Learning to Read like an “Expert”

Reading Guide:

As you read each assignment, consider and answer the following questions; they will help you to make sense of the material.

1. What does the title of the article/chapter suggest about what the author intends to do in this reading?
2. As you read, ask yourself about any sentence: Why would I highlight this passage? (Why is it important?)
Reading Like an “Expert” (cont.)

Reading Guide:

3. Write a one-sentence summary of the article/chapter:
   • What does article/chapter say?
   • What is the goal of the article/chapter?

4. Answer the following additional questions:
   • What is the author arguing?
   • What are the key terms in this article/chapter?
   • Can you define them?
   • What are the key ideas in this article/chapter?
   • Can you explain them?
Application to Your Discipline

• Assume that your goal is to address the inequities fostered by the Matthew Effect. Select a challenging assignment you typically include in one of your classes, perhaps one that tends to yield disappointing results.

• Consider how you might redefine the assignment, re-contexualize it, or offer it with stronger support so as to both challenge the more advanced students and enable increasing success for those who may be struggling.