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REFLECTION

I entered Fort Hays State University's Master of Liberal Studies (MLS) program about three and half years ago. That amount of time is easy to quantify. More difficult to quantify is the number of times that friends or acquaintances, upon hearing I am a Virtual College student, have questioned me on the value of online coursework. How can you learn anything without classmates? Don't you miss the interaction with the teacher? What do you do when you do not understand? These questions are rooted in the assumption that the online learning environment is impersonal and isolating. By direct comparison to the experience of on-campus students, yes, the life of a Virtual College student is solitary. In spite of this, my virtual coursework has actually affirmed my humanity, the value of my ideas, and my rightful place within the community of learners. These affirmations became the inspiration for my culminating experience project, "Literary Theory in the Basic Writing Classroom: A Context for Reading and Writing."

Though I do my coursework alone, my experience has been that of connection: I have connected with other students through Blackboard, I have connected with the academic community through online research, and I have connected with my professors by writing papers and reading their reactions to my papers. My happy discovery has been that my ideas matter to others. I have a contribution to make in every course. Unfortunately, not even students in actual classrooms on actual campuses share this experience. Underprepared students on the campuses of both four-year universities and community colleges are assigned to noncredit courses for

remedial work in math, reading, and/or writing. I believe these students deserve an academic experience in which they, too, can connect to the academic community. My experience in particular FHSU courses has fueled this belief.

On a practical level, without certain coursework at FHSU, this project would not have come to be. *Ways of Knowing in Comparative Perspective* (IDS 802), *Origins and Implications of the Knowledge Society* (IDS 803), *Studies in Literature: Theory and Application* (English 812), and *Topics in English: Religion, Heresy, Myth, and Magic* (English 601) provided either background or practical application to my culminating experience project.

IDS 802, my very first MLS class, in 2007's fall semester, asked me to think about knowledge from a variety of angles. Dr. Tim Murphy and Dr. Stephen Tramel (of the filmed lectures) delved into the scientific method as a way of knowing characterized by both potential and limits. The very progress that results from science's close examination of particulars, we learned, still fails to answer our existential questions. The arts and humanities, Murphy and Tramel taught, offer different ways of knowing that may lead to knowledge about the human condition. In these and other disciplines discussed in the course, many factors come into play in the search for knowledge: objective or subjective approaches, the ethics of the knowledge-seeker, and the peer review process. These last two factors play a particular role in the development of my culminating experience project.

IDS 802 taught me the importance of intellectual humility. We studied intellectual humility in the context of knowledge-seeking. I was reminded to be intellectually open and to acknowledge my own negative attitudes that could become self-fulfilling prophecies. However, viewing intellectual humility more broadly, I believe it must undergird my approach to Basic Writing students. In terms of openness, I must seek out innovative teaching strategies for basic

writers. To be intellectually open in this sense means to become a student, myself, of pedagogy for underprepared students. Moreover, intellectual openness demands that I abandon comfortable, familiar teaching methods. Intellectual humility also includes acknowledgement my own negative attitudes. Therefore, I must reflect on my own assumptions about underprepared students. In the past, I have viewed them as remedial – in need of “fixing.” This negative attitude is one I may unconsciously communicate to my students if I am not mindful of it. My project presumes that students possess more potential than previously has been attributed to them. Therefore, I must continue to practice intellectual humility. While this will benefit Basic Writing students, so will my new appreciation for the peer review process.

In IDS 802, we explored peer review as part of the modified scientific method used in the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities. We discussed objection and reply within the academy as a way of knowing. One’s theory must be shared within the academic community; it must be discussed and debated to test whether it can withstand close scrutiny. My project extends this way of knowing to the Basic Writing classroom by using literature to engage learning. Students will think critically to clarify what they mean, provide examples, consider implications, and defend the basis of their literary criticism. In the process, they become active participants in the academic community. Though enrolled in a noncredit course, students can maximize their time by stretching their scholarly muscles. Besides the helpful influence of IDS 802 on my project, I must also credit IDS 803.

I grew up a lot during the spring of 2008 as I took Dr. Art Morin’s IDS 803. It had occurred to me part way through the course that perhaps I had been going through life asleep, unaware of the Information Society’s wide-ranging reach. My lifetime spans the industrial era and the Information Society. This course forced me to consider what changes technology has

brought and what those changes mean for people socially, politically, economically, and educationally. We did some very heavy reading in our textbook, Frank Webster's *The Information Society Reader*, as well as reading Francis Fukuyama and Peter Drucker. Most challenging, we wrote critical analyses of most everything we read. (At long last, I discovered the benefits of multiple readings and margin notes). IDS 803 practically influenced my project by raising my awareness of critical thinking even as it philosophically influenced my project by raising my awareness of the limits of the Information Society.

Dr. Morin specifically trained us to seek out a text's strengths and weaknesses and poor and strong logic. In doing so, he put us students in a position of authority. Never were we required to simply agree with an author. In fact, he urged us to question every idea. Moreover, we questioned one another's arguments on Blackboard, we critiqued one another's papers, and we responded to critiques by others of our own work. He never questioned whether we were "qualified" to do so. (Perhaps he never saw my unimpressively average undergraduate transcript). Dr. Morin empowered us to think critically by expecting us to think critically. That led me to realize how low I have set the bar for my own students (as is common in most "remedial" courses). The personal progress I made in IDS 803 has energized me to set the stage for Basic Writing students to similarly progress. Of course, their progress will look different. However, the process of thinking critically about literary texts that are challenging reading should spur their academic and personal development. The lack of depth in their educational backgrounds calls to mind another way IDS 803 influenced my project.

Some of the negative implications of the Knowledge Society are the life situations of those on its margins. We read, researched, and wrote about the digital divide – a term describing individuals, communities, or nations who lack access to information technology. It is easy for

those of us who “have” to forget the “have-not’s.” Just as Pippa Norris wondered whether the Internet reinforces existing barriers or creates new ones, I wonder the same about remedial education. Working with students on the margins, I wonder if remediation is just another barrier to genuine learning. Though in IDS 803 we discussed exclusion in the context of technology, the course inspired me to consider exclusion in the context of remedial education. This project is my attempt to bring the academic community to students who have been defined as outsiders.

Fortunately, I also took two valuable English courses that are guiding my attempt: English 812 and English 601.

My project is truly based on what I learned in English 812. In the spring of 2010, Dr. Amy Cummins adeptly led our consideration of this question: Where does meaning originate – from the literary work, the reader’s response, the culture from which the work emerged, or the time and culture in which the work is interpreted? In the application of every literary theory, from reader response to new historical criticism, I realized that the reader/critic becomes the meaning-maker. This does not mean that every reading I do reflects my own worldview. In fact, quite the opposite is true. As we applied various theories to various works, we learned to see literature through different eyes. If I am reading with a postcolonial lens, I uncover details and perspectives that I may have missed with a more subjective reader-response lens. Having practiced the application of literary theory myself, I feel prepared to teach it. In fact, the English 812 textbooks will be integrated into my project.

Steven Lynn’s *Texts and Contexts: Writing about Literature with Critical Theory* explains literary theory in a straightforward, reader-friendly way. Moreover, Lynn presents the vocabulary that accompanies each theory, chapter by chapter, in definition form. This will be effective for my sharing it with Basic Writing students, for whom academic jargon is like a

foreign language. Lynn breaks into reasonable steps the application of theories. Best of all, his sample, in-process essays display how essays evolve – a visual aid for basic writers. This book is important to the literary theory section of my research paper.

Also important to my research is Deborah Appleman's *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents*. Appleman argues that each individual holds a bias or perspective through which we frame our life experiences. In the same way that intellectual humility is necessary, an awareness of theory helps one to leave one's worldview behind, opening the way to seeing the world from a different perspective. For adolescents, the various literary theories become new lenses through which to see literary texts. Appleman names the theories, expands on each, and provides classroom activities so that students can apply the theories. She recommends texts that may work. Best of all, Appleman is inclusive. Her chapter entitled "Lenses and Learning Styles: Acknowledging Student Plurality with Theoretical Plurality" proposes that underprepared students can benefit from working with literary theory. Appleman's book will reinforce my argument that reading, thinking, and writing are skills that reinforce one another and can be centered on literature.

The notion of the staying power of literature underlies my culminating experience project, and English 601 in the fall of 2010 drove that home for me. The course title, Religion, Heresy, Myth, and Magic, is meant to encompass the many ways that mythic thinking is expressed in human life. Though mythic thinking stands in opposition to the critical thinking of the scientific method, I actually experienced glimpses of mythic thinking in IDS 802, when various guest professors commented on intuition or emotion as a way of knowing in the arts or religion. Dr. and Mrs. Luehrs provided many examples of the persistence of mythic thinking in the Knowledge Society, proving the old saying that "the more things change, the more they stay

the same.” Ancient mythologies, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the hero’s journey, demons, magic, and witches – all of these endure and keep our interest. All are expressions of the human search for meaning in an existence that is filled with unanswerable questions. In this course, I learned in a new way how we use stories to sustain us on our search.

My new appreciation for the power of the story, reinforced during English 601, increases my desire to use literature with basic writing students. I also presume, based on my classroom experience, that many Basic Writing students have had little introduction to literature. This is unfortunate, for their longings for success and acceptance are as timeless as the ancient myths. In literature, they may find parallels to their own experience, just as I connected with the ancient classic *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and Gilgamesh’s grief for his deceased friend. Dr. and Mrs. Luehrs delved into mythic thinking from a historical perspective, again affirming how the human experience remains unchanged from age to age and culture to culture. Knowing this, why should students on the academic margins be denied access to literature? This course has spurred me to share the power of the story with Basic Writing students. Besides improving their reading and writing skills, they can learn more about themselves.

Quite simply, the MLS program has enriched my life. I have a renewed appreciation for the edifying nature of education. My culminating experience project calls into play a variety of skills and beliefs that I have developed while in this program. Close reading, critical thinking, research, and writing are practical skills that will make my project possible. Intellectual humility and an appreciation for the power of the human story both support and infuse my project. The two IDS courses and the two English courses I discussed prepared and empowered me to take on this project. My strongest desire is to give underprepared students a chance to experience what I did.

ABSTRACT

Beyond Skills-and-Drills: Literary Theory in the Basic Writing Class

In this essay, I argue that a skills-and-drills only curriculum is insufficient in basic writing courses at community colleges. Though prerequisite, noncredit, precollege writing courses were created to address students' writing deficits, research documents little success. Mina Shaughnessy and Mike Rose advocate that colleges should acknowledge basic writers as novices in the world of academic writing. Rose, in particular, asserts that basic writers should engage in college-level work even if their grammar and punctuation skills are still developing. To accomplish this, I suggest the incorporation of literature and literary theory into the basic writing class, so students can interpret and write about what they read. This approach integrates reading and writing, challenges students to think critically, and offers them college-level work in what is called a remedial class. The noncredit basic writing class can become a time of rich preparation for underprepared students, engaging their interest, encouraging retention, and qualifying them for college-level coursework.

RESEARCH

The Gates Foundation in April 2010 pledged to provide \$110 million for research to improve developmental education in the nation's community colleges (*Community College Times*). While researchers attempt to improve developmental education from an institutional perspective, individual instructors labor in the classroom helping underprepared students improve their skills in math, reading, and writing. Many instructors remain untouched by research developments that appear in professional journals targeted to college administrators. Moreover, many community colleges operate outside the realm of innovative program redesign. The Achieving the Dream initiative aims to transform community colleges so that low-income students and students of color succeed; however, it operates in just 24 states (Achieving the Dream). This means that most instructors, including adjunct instructors, must learn from personal research, experience, or idea-swapping with colleagues. Though such practices are typical for all educators, instructors in noncredit, basic skills courses are fully occupied with their high-needs students.

In writing classes, the English department-provided textbooks and the department-specified educational outcomes set the curricular framework. However, to encourage academically-challenged students in active learning, most instructors need sources beyond the textbook. Especially because underprepared students are more likely than others to drop courses (Pearson), the burden is on instructors to provide rich, engaging course material. One method that deserves exploration is the use of literature in the basic writing class. I will argue for the teaching of literary theory in the basic writing course so that students can enjoy the cognitive benefits of integrating reading and writing, and so that students in the noncredit course can enjoy the academic benefits of college-level work.

The Role of Community Colleges

Almost half of all undergraduate students are enrolled in the more than 1,000 U.S. community colleges, according to a 2009 report by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University (Jenkins, Jaggars, and Roksa). Other research finds that underprepared students enroll in community colleges at higher rates than other institutions (Parsad and Lewis 36). Among community college students, 29 percent report “having taken some remedial coursework in their first year” (Provasnik and Planty 11). The numbers are difficult to track because not every student who is identified as in need of remediation actually enrolls. Or, students enrolled in remedial coursework do not complete their courses. Other research, cited by Melinda Gates, finds that almost 60 percent of community college students take at least one remedial course (*Community College Times*). Whatever the numbers, clearly, community colleges welcome students with high learning needs.

Community colleges emphasize access to education. In fact, 95% of community colleges have open admissions policies (Provasnik and Planty 10). With open admissions come students who may lack basic skills in reading, writing, and math. Though such students pose significant challenges for institutions, community colleges have nonetheless retained open admissions policies. In fact, “there is almost universal consensus among community colleges that serving underprepared students is an important part of the community college mission,” (Oudenhoven 37). Besides open admissions, community colleges offer lower tuition rates, undergraduate transfer credits, associate degree programs, and workforce training.

Though students in an automotive technology program need not take academic courses, most of the associate’s degree programs require the usual math and English credits. Law enforcement and fire science are two associate’s degree programs that may attract students uninterested in a university education. However, these programs require the very math and

English courses that future police officers and fire fighters might have been hoping to avoid. To place students in the appropriate course level, colleges use an incoming student assessment process.

Placement tests like the COMPASS test assess reading, writing, and math skills. After the assessment process, students may face one or two semesters of noncredit basic skills courses.

“Not only are many students still alarmingly underprepared for college, but they too often have developed an active aversion to mathematics, English, and the educational process more generally” (Roueche 2). For them, a different path through the educational process is needed.

Literature Review

Community colleges have devised numerous paths leading to college-level courses. Thomas Bailey cites Dolores Perin’s analysis of remediation among fifteen colleges, in which she identified more remediation programs than colleges (Bailey 20). Some community colleges use a cohort model staffed by developmental education specialists. In the cohort model, student groups take noncredit, basic skills classes together that are removed from academic departments. This raises questions regarding the exclusion of underprepared students from the wider campus community. Most community colleges use the prerequisite model, an approach that may cause “resentment among students, who fail to see the relevance of . . . noncredit courses” (Otte and Mlynarczyk 16). Within math, reading, and English departments, stand-alone or a series of noncredit, prerequisite math, reading, or writing courses exist to address students’ deficits. Donald General, a New Jersey community college president, criticizes this “attempt to develop basic skills in isolation of the student’s academic interests or social relevance” (*Community College Times*). Nevertheless, this so-called deficit model continues to thrive, even as a few more innovative models are emerging. Blended models look promising; these combine reading,

writing, and credit-bearing content courses. An innovative accelerated model places basic writers in freshman English composition along with “a companion course that provides extra academic support” (Community College Research Center). Unfortunately, these newer approaches are not yet widespread.

The journal *New Directions for Community Colleges* dedicated an issue to the question of whether community colleges are well-prepared for underprepared students. Jim Barr and Pam Schuetz remark that some colleges still view underprepared students as academically deficient (8). Because community colleges must report a “lack of progress with underprepared students over the last 40 years” (Barr and Schuetz 8), these researchers recommend that colleges must change both this perception and the usual approaches to basic skills. Also calling for change, other critics target the widespread deficit model, with which several problems are associated.

A deficit-model basic writing class is designed to remediate and not educate. Although enrolled in college, students are limited to developing basic skills. The deficit model involves “the frequent segregation of students into skill and drill classes devoid of academic content” (Kozeracki 1). Thus, basic writing courses may unintentionally prevent students’ academic progress. By ignoring “other processes of critical thinking and writing” (McBeth 82), the skills-and-drills approach excuses students from deep learning. Developmental education specialist Sherrie Nist objects to how “we still pigeonhole students . . . by still operating from this deficit model” (Stahl 23). This pigeonholing affects instructors, also.

The deficit model sets the stage for negative attitudes among instructors. Student potential can be difficult to acknowledge among those labeled as deficient. Denise Green warns that instructor attitudes can result in an exclusion of challenging coursework:

. . . teachers operating under a deficit model curriculum do not trust students' abilities to think critically and arrive at conclusions that approximate the right answer. The deficit model does not provide students with opportunities to think more critically, take risks, and problem-solve without penalty. (25)

Furthermore, the Center for Community College Student Engagement's (CCCSE) *Heart of Student Success* report warns of the damaging effect on students of instructors' beliefs that "some students cannot or will not succeed" (Roueche 8). Students can become discouraged.

Clearly, the deficit model can taint student attitudes. Bailey stresses how trying it is for students to invest time and money: "while not earning credits toward a degree, . . . [students] are often surprised and discouraged when they learn that they must delay their college education and in effect return to high school" (22). With this in mind, the low retention rate is understandable.

The overemphasis on skills-and-drills that excludes academic content, plus negative attitudes among instructors and students, all contribute to basic writing's "perpetual state of crisis" (Goen and Gillotte-Tropp 91). A way forward may require a jettisoning of the "historical and persistent trend in literacy education to treat reading and writing as distinct and separate processes" (Goen and Gillotte-Tropp 91). Though writing requires higher-order thinking and ordering processes, the approach of basic writing pedagogy has been to keep it as simple as possible. "In an era of insistent concern with the higher-order skills for a flexible labor force, the complex area of literacy and communication has been shriveled to grammar and punctuation" (Grubb 7). Fortunately, research both supports and calls for basic writing to go beyond basic skills.

The Role of Writing: Basic or College-Level

Departing from the deficit model in search of improved student outcomes, the CCCSE calls for increased expectations rather than the lower expectations associated with basic writing instruction (Roueche 8). This combination of inclusion in the academic community and more challenging course content holds great promise for basic writing students.

But how can one expect “academic writing” from students who lack grammar skills? Before addressing this question, it is worthwhile to consider what writing means to college students in general. Beginning in 1997, researchers Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz followed 400 Harvard College students from their freshmen through senior years. The Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing interviewed students for insight into their attitudes and writing abilities (Sommers and Saltz 126). Though Harvard students may not share common academic backgrounds with community college basic writing students, the Harvard students’ comments on the role that writing plays may hold true for all college students, remedial or Ivy League.

Sommers and Saltz learned of “the central role writing plays in helping students make the transition *to* college” (127). All students must change their status from outsiders to campus community members. Underprepared students encounter a variety of instructors, teaching styles, textbooks, and new vocabularies associated with content-area courses. Writing is a process by which they can assimilate, organize, and reframe new information and experiences. These benefits are universal among underprepared and college-ready students. At Harvard, Sommers and Saltz found “that the comments of the weaker and stronger writers are indistinguishable, except that the weaker writers often speak with even greater passion about the role of writing in helping them make the transition to college” (129). The weaker writers gained “a sense of academic belonging” (Sommers and Saltz 131), and this statement speaks to the need for

inclusion in the academic community. Basic writing courses can position students as outsiders. At the same time, the focus on skills development leaves little room for deeper intellectual engagement. Together, these two realities can prevent a successful transition to community college. Basic writers are perceived as needing to “catch up.” However, there is another way to view these students, borrowed from Sommers and Saltz’s description of the Harvard freshmen.

Sommers and Saltz depict their students as novices in the writing trade. Indeed, their research found progress in writing to be “a slow process...with losses and gains each time a new method or discipline is attempted” (Sommers and Saltz 145). Similarly, Mina Shaughnessy speaks of “the apprentice writer” (30) and David Bartholomae of the “beginning writer” (*Study* 259). Of course, Harvard demands of its freshmen expectations far beyond those in a skills-and-drills basic writing class. However, Sommers and Saltz remark that even Harvard could be tempted into a less-rigorous curriculum:

In fact, it might seem illogical or unfair to ask novices to perform the moves of experts. One could imagine another pedagogical approach that recognizes freshmen as beginners and asks them to write a series of exercises that are more technically suitable to their skills – to construct paragraphs or two-page reports, instead of being asked to write ten-page arguments, or even not write at all. (133)

One could easily substitute “basic writers” for “freshmen” and “five paragraph essays” for “two page reports.” The parallel between Harvard freshmen and basic writers is clear: all are beginning writers who must participate via their writing in their respective academic communities. Though they may not contribute at the same level as more-experienced students, basic writers nonetheless must learn to write by writing.

If basic writers are kept from writing their way into their academic communities, the traditional reason has been their lack of readiness. However, academic content would not only provide challenging writing topics but also create a meaningful context in which to practice basic skills. In general, instructors have not approached basic writers this way. Rather, “critical thinking, complex problem solving, and abstract reasoning... are traditionally considered not within the realm of immediate possibility for most remedial students, who are assumed to need basic skills instruction first” (Levin and Calcagno 188). However, some experts argue that writing cannot be reduced to a skill.

Sommers and Saltz describe students who moved beyond the novice writer stage as students who discovered writing to be “a means for discovering what matters” (146) (even for students who began as weaker writers). Mike Rose disdains the claim that “writing is a skill or tool rather than a discipline” (“The Language” 341). Indeed, workbook or online grammar exercises, used exclusively in basic writing class, present writing as a mere skill. Here lies the task of writing instructors: to cultivate skills within the larger framework of literacy and language. Skills-only instruction deprives students the experience of “conveying something meaningful, communicating information, creating narratives, shaping what we see and feel and believe into written language” (Rose, *Lives* 109). In this larger context, where does one place basic skills?

It seems that basic skills and the writing process relate to one another in a necessary tension. As said above, a basic writer – a novice – can practice spelling, punctuation, verb usage, and sentence structure in the midst of an assignment that requires critical thinking. “Writing is, after all, a learning tool as well as a way of demonstrating what has been learned” (Shaughnessy 88). Though Rose calls for a “demanding curriculum that encourages the full play of language

activity and that opens out onto the academic community rather than sequestering students from it” (“The Language” 358), community colleges have emphasized basic writing skills. In the academic disciplines, though, Shaughnessy refers to instructors who worry less about writing errors than writing teachers do, preferring to discern through their students’ papers what has been learned in history, psychology, or sociology class (121). In fact, many basic writers are concurrently enrolled in introductory psychology and other content-area courses. These students must undertake academic writing whether or not their basic skills meet college standards.

Both Rose and Shaughnessy agree that students who attempt academic writing, while benefitting from the heavy intellectual work, will doubtless commit writing errors. Here again, skills and the writing process tug at one another; Rose lauds the “error that crops up because a student is trying new things [as] a valuable kind of error, a sign of growth” (*Lives* 151). However, the aim of basic writing courses is to reduce or eliminate error. As a result, instructors assign less-demanding writing assignments, many of which are types of personal writing found in basic writing textbooks.

Composition theorists debate the merits of personal or academic writing. To simplify this discussion, one can associate personal writing with Peter Elbow and academic writing with David Bartholomae. Delving into the debate with basic writers in mind, Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk remarks that “at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is still not widespread agreement about the most appropriate type of writing to assign in composition courses” (4). Elbow devotes “more time and attention to writing than to reading” (Mlynarczyk 9) because most other university courses involve heavy amounts of reading and little writing. Bartholomae’s “students read key texts and write critically about their reading” (Mlynarczyk 9). Mlynarczyk argues that basic writers must experiment with personal writing “in order to acquire

genuine academic discourse” (5). Moreover, she posits that “students from previously marginalized groups – women, immigrants, students of color, working-class students” (22) especially benefit from self-expression through personal writing. She ignores, however, another factor that affects basic writers perhaps more than their social status.

Among recent high school graduates, the educational backgrounds of basic writers are less rich due to a limited exposure to literature – a result of the No Child Left Behind’s narrow focus on test scores. Susan Stewart Lehr blames overuse by elementary teachers of basal readers. Furthermore, “the narrow focus of textbooks and the perceived goal of teaching literacy in order to pass a standardized test will contribute to the decrease in the number of adults who engage with quality literature” (Lehr 32). Thus, a privileging of basic writers’ needs for self-expression seems unwise. Rather, college should provide them with long-overdue, complex encounters with language through literature and academic writing.

However, in basic writing courses within the widespread deficit model, little academic writing is assigned. John Langan’s *College Writing Skills* is a basic writing textbook. Langan is the successful author of a series of textbooks that support basic writing programs’ emphasis on skills development. *College Writing Skills* addresses the steps of the writing process, logical development of a thesis, the usual patterns of essay development, and sentence skills. One descriptive essay prompt asks students to “write an essay about a particular place that you can observe carefully or that you already know well . . . pet shop, doctor’s waiting room, Laundromat, bar or nightclub . . .” (Langan 193). In spite of the personal nature of these topics, students may experience little personal satisfaction. The Harvard students’ feedback indicated that “when they do not see a larger purpose for writing other than completing an assignment...the conditions for learning and thinking do not always exist” (Sommers and Saltz

146). Academic writing assignments, however, require the critical thinking that underlies learning.

In particular, basic writers need ample opportunities for critical thinking but are denied these opportunities by the structure of basic writing programs. Rose blames the programs' assumption that grammatical error signals some fundamental mental barrier to engaging in higher-level cognitive pursuits: "until error is isolated and cleaned up, it will not be possible for students to read and write critically, study literature, or toy with style" (*Lives* 141). Instructors who supplement a textbook like Langan's with college-level reading can organize writing assignments around literary texts that demand more of students. But first, instructors must believe that basic writers possess the intellectual abilities to do so. Shaughnessy argues that basic writers are often unfairly dismissed: ". . . even the poorest of [essays] can be seen to contain propositions that could lend themselves to development in the academic style" (237). After all, prerequisite, basic skills courses should help students work at college-level. To do so, and to serve students, the basic writing course must include more than sentence drills and personal essays.

The Interrelationship of Reading and Writing

Research continues to support the connection between reading and writing. Nevertheless, remedial educators have isolated reading from writing. Even at the college level, E.D. Hirsch proposes a separation of literature from composition (in Salvatori, *Reading* 185). Of course, any individual who reflects upon personal acquisition of spoken and written language finds that speaking, reading, and writing overlap and reinforce one another. Children learn their names by hearing them spoken. Seeing their names written on paper or personal belongings, children eventually copy the letters. Literacy emerges from this cognitive interaction of speech, letter

recognition, and the act of writing those letters. For basic writers with literacy deficits, both reading and writing skills can develop together.

Cheryl Hogue Smith theorizes that basic writers with poor reading skills “are sometimes classified as basic writers because their writing betrays their misunderstanding . . . of texts they are writing about” (670). Similarly, Goen and Gillotte-Tropp find that student performance on the reading section of a placement test results in placement in basic writing, “suggesting that students’ difficulty constructing meaning *from* texts may be a significant source of their difficulty constructing meaning *in* texts” (91). The separation of reading from writing eliminates the opportunity to practice reading within a writing context, and writing within a reading context. Clearly, the ability to interact with texts as a reader influences the ability to create texts as a writer.

If poor reading sets the stage for poor writing, it also can lead to negative attitudes toward self and school. To mitigate this, Smith suggests that students must “become more constructive critical thinkers and less fearful performers of academic tasks” (675). Rose acknowledges the “fear of failure” (*Lives* 154) that haunts students.

Particularly for basic writers, Francine Falk-Ross finds the social-constructivist theory of learning effective because it involves modification of lessons and instruction to “suit the needs of individual class members” (279). She cites the New Literacy perspective as appropriate for basic writers because it sees students as “authors and meaning makers” (279). The “social interaction between reader and text” (Falk-Ross 279) is strengthened by writing activities that include: before, during, and after reading techniques, journal entries, and writing assignments. Most importantly, students construct meaning in their written responses to texts. When students apply various literary theories, students become the experts on a text.

This assumption of authority by the student leads to a higher level of engagement. With this in mind, Mariolina Salvatori disdains instruction that separates reading and writing (*Conversations* 173). She argues that instructors who combine reading and writing may find their students grow in surprising ways:

. . . teaching reading and writing as interconnected activities . . . might be an approach appropriate to developing the critical mind – an approach that might mark the difference between students’ participating in their own education and their being passively led through it. (*Conversations* 173)

Particularly for basic writers, their marginal academic status often leads them to passive participation in their education. The obvious example is their being assigned to the noncredit class by admission counselors. It is possible, though, for basic writers to “take control of their learning through active, meaningful reading and writing” (Maloney 672).

The Benefits of Literature

The inclusion of basic writers in the academic community should not be seen as an oppressive attempt to make students conform. After all, when the very retention of students is at stake – a valid concern in community college basic writing courses – inclusion is the more practical stance. To welcome them, to prod them to think, read, and write in English class – to do all this is to make them better students in English and their other courses. Most students are proud to have reached community college; indeed, many are the first in their families to do so. The noncredit basic writing course can provide college-level content that engages the student *and* enables the student to succeed in future college-level courses. Though composition theorist Gary Tate insists, “I have no interest in spending my few remaining teaching years helping students learn to write better papers in biology or better examinations in the health sciences”

(178), basic writing instructors must avoid this mindset. The very academic divisions that Tate finds both oppressive and artificial (177) have yet to be realized by underprepared students. Instructors must prepare students to qualify for “the academy.” Once enrolled in college-level courses, students can discover for themselves whether the academy empowers or oppresses them. Literature can be the challenging material that keeps students enrolled and prepares them for college-level work.

Beyond a mere skills-and-drills approach, literature provides a reason to write, so that personal writing topics need not dominate the basic writing course. Shaughnessy explains that such meaty content relieves “the writing teacher of the task of fabricating writing situations” (88). Such fabrication relies heavily on personal writing. Traditional basic writing textbooks privilege personal writing topics. These are problematic, though, when used exclusively. Such topics allow students to remain in a comfort zone of their own perspectives and experiences. A definition essay writing prompt such as, “What is your definition of a hero?,” enables the student to rest in his or her own assumptions, unchallenged by others. In addition, personal writing topics allow students to recycle the same experience across the various modes of development. Thus, a football player may write a process analysis essay on the running back position, a narrative essay on a winning season, a descriptive essay on an emotional game, and a compare-contrast essay on coaching styles. Though the student experiments with the different modes of writing, there is little practice on the types of papers required in college-level content courses. The argument essay is the obvious exception. However, this mode is taught as one among many, not as a main writing mode for college courses. Plus, the prompts for argument essays are still personal in nature and require no research. In a sense, because literature is so rare in basic writing, to include it as a source of writing topics creates a writing-across-the-curriculum within basic writing class.

Instructors can ease students' comprehension of literary texts with assistive reading techniques that, often, beneficially, require writing. Christopher Gould observes that literature "provides basic writers the opportunity to respond holistically to a difficult text, thus offering an alternative to the analytic procedures of workbook exercises" (62-3). Because such reading may trouble students at first, instructors must lead them to become active readers. "To preview texts, take layers of notes . . . and to formulate questions" (Maloney 667) involves multiple readings of a single text, done individually, in small groups, or as a class. Besides multiple readings, the pre-reading strategy of "activating background knowledge" (Fournier and Graves 33) asks students to recall what they already know about a topic by free-writing in response to an instructor-provided prompt. Student responses can be shared aloud so that students can learn from one another. During-reading strategies include reading aloud (Fournier and Graves 33), during which the instructor can pose "factual and inferential guiding questions" (Fournier and Graves 34) about events in a literary work. Students can write their predictions. Another during-reading activity can be asking and/or writing questions for clarification (Falk-Ross 286). The post-reading strategy of summary writing (Falk-Ross 286) enables the comprehension necessary for work with literary theory. Application (Fournier and Graves 33), another post-reading tactic, can be the use of the literary lenses. Salvatori finds that her students' writing matured as a result of their "increased ability to be reflexive about the reading of highly complex texts" (*Reading* 179). When students read literature with the aim to apply theory, their purposes for reading, and in turn, writing, are established.

Literary Theory for Basic Writers

In their content-area courses, all students must read and write about specific texts. To provide basic writers with literature, instruct them in theory, and to invite their written explanation of how a piece might be interpreted is to link reading, writing, and critical thinking. Through these activities, basic writers engage in the scholarly processes that will be required of them in college-level courses. Rose warns against the common assumption that students must master modes like narrative before they move on to more complex analysis (*Remedial* 205). In the basic writing classroom, Rose urges that students be introduced to academic topics that “require the student to work from text” (*Remedial* 210). What role, then, can literary theory play for basic writers?

Literary theory can introduce students to areas of thought they may encounter in other content-area courses. In addition, “every discipline involves reading and writing, interpreting data, and constructing arguments” (Lynn xi), so basic writers who read and write about literature using literary theory are making the most of their noncredit basic writing course. Reader-response and New Criticism require the intellectual exercises of close reading and reflection. Other theories may transfer more directly to content-area courses. Historical and post-colonial theories can raise students’ awareness of historical eras represented in literature, and all that an era encompasses socially and politically. This heightened awareness no doubt can help students in history courses. Likewise, Marxist and feminist criticism can spur students’ thinking about social class and gender issues, which can prepare them for courses from history to sociology to women’s studies. Psychological criticism is easily transferrable to the introductory psychology course taken by many first- and second-semester freshmen. Thus, the noncredit course becomes immediately relevant to the students’ academic pursuits.

Importantly, literary theory can help basic writers move from the academic margins to positions of academic authority. This may be a new and empowering experience for someone with a shaky academic history. Already, students come to basic writing after being labeled underprepared. It is not surprising, then, that Maloney describes basic writers as “doubtful they can ever succeed” (665). When faced with difficult reading, basic writers “think that confusion and frustration represent some defect in their capacity to learn” (Smith 671). Indeed, texts can prove difficult for all students, especially complex texts that are open to multiple interpretations. Salvatori finds that such possibilities can overwhelm basic writers, who “defend themselves by reducing [a literary work] either to the assumed reality of the text (i.e., the message . . .) . . . or to their own subjectivity” (*Reading* 179). Both reactions make reading “a one-way activity” (Salvatori, *Reading* 179). Thus, burdened by self-doubt or an academic label of deficiency, students may approach literature with inhibition. A poem or a novel may be viewed as the all-powerful word of the author that is not to be questioned by the underprepared student. However, when approaching a text by means of a literary theory, students can, in a sense, shed their academic identities.

Personal experience need not be the method of interpretation, according to Deborah Appleman, who advocates the instruction of multiple literary theories to adolescents. She describes a student of color who felt “the focus [move] away from her” (119) during a Marxist/social class reading of a work. The literary lenses require the student to step into a new perspective, which depersonalizes (Appleman 119) the process. When a student becomes a feminist/gender critic charged with interpreting a text, it is the basic writer label that is pushed to the margins. Moreover, Appleman finds that “reluctant learners” (112) are quite capable of learning literary theory. In fact, “kids on the margins seem to be savvier about theory”

(Appleman 112) because they have experience negotiating their place in school and the world. Basic writers share a similar experience in academia. Furthermore, even as literary theory empowers basic writers, it also requires them to interact with literature more actively.

Students, applying literary theory, benefit as both readers and writers through active reading, as opposed to passively receiving the words on the page. Inhabiting a theoretical perspective, students must pull from the text words, images, and constructs that speak to that theory. Kathleen McCormick speaks of Wolfgang Iser's "wandering viewpoint" (McCormick 13) – that of readers who "open up to the text . . . and transform their expectations of how they think it will develop" (McCormick 13). Though Salvatori observes that "this is precisely the kind of activity – demanding, challenging, constantly structuring them as they structure it – that our students are either reluctant or have not been trained to see as reading" (*Reading* 179), literary theory can be the tool that makes active reading easier. Students read with purpose, "uncover the often invisible workings of the text" (Appleman 3), and seek to construct meaning within the guiding mindset of a literary theory. Especially when more than one theory is employed, students must stretch to see the text in different ways, unlike any passive reading experience they may be accustomed to. Appleman repeatedly speaks of students as meaning-makers who are, through the use of literary theory, able to "reshape their knowledge of texts, of themselves" (127). As their knowledge is reshaped, students may be able to see their own writing in new ways and move toward improving it.

Rose observes that "reading and writing are intimately connected in ways we are only beginning to understand" (*Remedial* 202). As students become more constructive readers, this constructive reading can carry over to the reading of their own and their peers' writing. Falk-Ross's students, in an integrated basic reading-writing course, completed a fruitful peer review

process of I-search papers, thanks to students' improved reading skills. Falk-Ross notes that "critical thinking and interpretive response were used more frequently" (284); plus, "students collaboratively used higher level forms of information analysis, such as critiquing text for deeper meaning and usefulness" (284). One student revised his paper for the better, making "changes [that] were clear indications of an expansion in his approach to reading and reflection with regard to text" (Falk-Ross 285). Clearly, basic writers who undertake critical reading of literature can transfer such critical reading skills to their own writing.

The course catalogue description of Basic Writing at Garden City (KS) Community College states: "The main objective of this class is to teach students the basic parts of an essay. This course will concentrate on how to write complete sentences, use them to make paragraphs, and learn the basic grammar of standard written English" (GCCC). So, the progression from sentences to paragraphs to essays can be organized around literature through application of literary theory. Students' writing practice will be less mechanical and more reflective. Writing can become a way of knowing about literature. Richard Paul and Linda Elder remark that "the essential first steps in learning to write substantively are to find a subject worth writing about, [and] to discover something significant to say about it" (32). As literary critics, basic writers will learn to write by writing, though danger lies in the complex territory of communicating their critical interpretations.

Basic writers will be doubly challenged by writing on complex ideas; nevertheless, the elimination of error is an unreasonable objective. Rose insists that "error cannot be isolated and removed; it can reemerge whenever a student moves onto a task that challenges him or her in new ways" (*Remedial* 109). Besides, instructors tolerate some error already. Bartholomae reports that the University of Pittsburgh's evaluation of basic writers' final papers includes "allowances

for the kinds of errors most of us make” (*Teaching* 102). Based on her analysis of student placement essays, Shaughnessy estimates that “in an essay of 300 words an average academic reader is likely to tolerate between five and six basic errors” (122). Most basic writers must improve to reduce their errors down to five or six per essay. However, skills-and-drills need not be the exclusive pedagogy. Having been active readers of literary texts, students can begin to review their own writing from an intellectual distance. Guided by the instructor, basic writers can edit and revise for grammar and sentence-level error as part of their full engagement with language.

Literary Texts and Suggestions

Discussions about the Western literary canon naturally arise when it is time to choose texts. Appleman associates a fixed canon with “the hegemony of the sort of ‘cultural literacy’ proposed by Alan Bloom and E.D. Hirsch” (10). Lynn asserts that “the standards used to construct ‘the canon’ are the invention of mostly male critics and scholars” (23). Even as the canon has relaxed in recent years, long-taught texts – classic literature – still retain their places on syllabi. What should instructors consider when choosing texts for basic writers?

Rose observes that “too many people are kept from the books of the canon...because of misjudgments about their potential” (*Lives* 234). Indeed, many of our underprepared students have also been educationally underserved. Quite simply, their high school education did not include great books. Appleman speaks to teacher mindset in an anecdote about Michael, a high school teacher who included literary theory in a lower-level English course. His colleagues deemed literary theory (and the texts) appropriate only for AP students (119). In basic writing, such a mindset would perpetuate the students’ remedial status. Instructors must expose students to a variety of texts, along with appropriate academic support.

As instructors introduce literature and theory to basic writers, they should consider students' cultural backgrounds. Instructors can smooth the transition by including works by authors with familiar-sounding names and backgrounds. A broad range of texts can allow "immigrants and refugees...to see themselves and their circumstances in the works they read" (Appleman 84). Of course, no culture or race is a monolith. Still, "to determine and honor the beliefs and stories, enthusiasms, and apprehensions" (Rose, *Lives* 236) of students, instructors must attend to their students' responses to a work and be prepared to adjust future offerings as needed.

In addition, instructors must consider how best to guide the reading process. Literary conventions, author biographies, and guided discussions can help open up a text for reluctant readers. Length of a text is also important. As instructors assign literary texts for the first time, it may be safest to start with poems or short stories that can be read aloud in class. What follows are a few suggestions for texts that can be read in class.

Appleman recommends Gary Soto's poetry; it is complex yet accessible to readers of various levels. Moreover, as a first-generation Mexican-American, Soto would be easily relatable for Latino students. "Teaching English from an Old Composition Book" is a narrative poem about an evening ESL class for immigrant adults. It lends itself to reader response, biographical, and social class theories. In a Monday-Wednesday-Friday class, one theory could be taught, applied, and written about each class period. Or, instructors could assign brief response writing on each theory, with students choosing one to expand into a paragraph or essay.

Here is how instructors might work with reader response theory. Ideally, students could take turns reading the poem aloud for the full class before breaking up into smaller groups for a second reading. After the first reading, the instructor should address any difficult words,

highlight specific images, and lead students to a general understanding. Once assembled in small groups, students could work with reader-response worksheets on which they list: personal qualities and experiences that relate to the poem and corresponding words, phrases, or lines from the poem. This might serve as pre-writing for a longer assignment. How would this help student writing?

Reader response theory requires students to reflect on the text's effect on them as readers. As such, reflection becomes a form of metacognition. This engagement, Salvatori finds, results in "the improvement in writers' ability to manipulate syntactic structures" (*Reading* 178). Appleman provides a reader response diagram on which students list a work's textual features that affected their reading: "vocabulary, the length of sentences, use of punctuation or italics" (36). Using this, basic writers can gain awareness of how specifics contribute to the text as a whole. This awareness can make students more effective constructors of texts. In addition, reader response theory places authority in the students' hands, which Judith Langer and Arthur Applebee name as an essential component of effective instruction. Ownership, a task with point, and a sense of purposefulness (Langer and Applebee 185-6) galvanize student writing. In application of reader response theory, students reflect and construct meaning as they write.

Another text instructors might include is Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*. On one level a children's book, *The Giving Tree* is nevertheless multi-layered. Both feminist criticism and ecocriticism would be appropriate theories to apply. Like Soto's poem, this story could be read in class. With the instructor covering the basics of the ecocritical and feminist approaches, students could re-read the text with those lenses in mind. The book's length, while do-able for basic writers, offers a substantial number of events over a range of time that would provide enough material for an essay assignment. The illustrations are also telling. Small group work

might include completing a graphic organizer that provides space for students to record story events and images that speak to the critical perspective. Students could also interpret the illustrations using both theories.

Feminist, ecocritical, and the other theoretical perspectives can be effective means through which basic writers become college writers. Smith remarks that “we need to teach students to become ‘others’ for their own texts” (675) in order “to produce more academically serviceable prose” (675). Obviously, students act as ‘others’ when they apply literary theory. Gould refers to this distance as “the detachment of spectatorship, [which] is, of course, the intellectual stance privileged by academic communities” (61). Of the three types of assignments that Rose identifies for basic writers, analysis of “assumptions and orientations” is important because it (*Remedial* 209) “allows students to begin writing academic discourse early on” (*Remedial* 207). Inhabiting a theoretical perspective, students naturally write from a point of distance. Students practice what they will be doing in content-area courses.

Obviously, among the almost endless options for literary texts, instructors must choose texts that work for both instructors and students. Whatever the work of literature, students will interweave reading and writing through the literary lenses. This should be their consistent activity with every text. Creative instructors will employ wall charts, literary theory cards, graphic organizers, and discussion groups as some of the means to work with theory. Writing assignments should flow from these activities. The writing assignments may be sentences, paragraphs, or essays – whatever the instructor determines. What literature and theory provide is the content about which to write and a challenging thinking process that engages students. If instructors choose longer literary works, in-class reading may need to be divided into

manageable sections, with built-in discussion and reflection time to ensure that students are keeping up.

Short stories can be used for longer readings that still can be accomplished during class time. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "The Handsomest Drowned Man" lends itself to mythological criticism of heroes and cultural identity. "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner could be interpreted through the social class lens; or, the post-colonial lens could look at the 'other,' as represented by two outsider characters in the story. Writing assignments, as with poems, should center on the application of theory. As students write on their substantive topics, instructors should discuss spelling, grammar, and mechanics within student papers.

Conclusion

Mark McBeth identifies the self-defeating loop of the deficit-model basic writing approach:

The [assessment] test designated where students were placed; if they were placed in remedial courses, they normally followed a routine of skills and drills designed to ensure that they would pass the test at the end of the course; often, other processes of critical thinking and writing were relegated to a position of lesser importance, and, as a result, . . . [students] enrolled in their freshman composition courses still underprepared to complete the types of college-level thinking and writing expected in that sequence. (82)

Though skills-and-drills remediation keeps it place on community college campuses, alternative approaches must be considered. This paper has argued that basic writers should read literature and interpret it through literary theory.

The above research documents the trouble with exclusive skill-and-drills courses, the interrelationship between reading and writing, the reality of the novice writer, the importance of developing critical thinking skills, and the need for basic writers to become academic writers. It is not difficult to address these issues. Best of all, instructors need not wait for their institutions to change. Instructors can incorporate literature and theory at their own pace.

As instructors experiment with literary theory in the basic writing classroom, students interact with language in ways perhaps new to them. They become active thinkers in the classroom as reading and writing are connected for the purpose of analyzing texts from a variety of perspectives. They become writers who communicate on complex topics. When they work on basic skills, they do so in the context of academic content. Basic writing, though noncredit, becomes a college-level course. It is time to take students beyond skills-and-drills and into the college classroom.

REACTION

The Culminating Experience Project allowed me to pull together various threads that run through my personal, professional, and academic lives. Personally, I believe in the magic of literature. Professionally, I seek to create a humane and engaging classroom environment. Academically, I appreciate multidisciplinary approaches. Overall, I found this whole process fulfilling. At the same time, I believe that my research on the use of literature and literary theory in the basic writing course can go beyond my own self-indulgence. My research findings will be useful in several areas. First, my project generated premises and approaches that I will use to help basic writing students at Garden City Community College. Second, my research can benefit other instructors. Finally, my findings can add to the field of basic writing scholarship.

As long as community colleges remain open-access institutions, underprepared students will remain a sizeable part of the student population. Though I read of various four-year universities that have cut remedial education, none of my research identified such cuts in community colleges. Underprepared students are here to stay. In my research, I did not question why recent high school graduates are underprepared for college-level writing. Nor did I question the effectiveness or fairness of the COMPASS test or other assessment tests. Though both questions merit study, they are complex enough to constitute major research projects on their own. Instead, I chose to focus on practical ways that I as an instructor could make basic writing class worthwhile for students.

The information I uncovered during the research process confirmed my gut-level instinct that reading and writing support and reinforce one another. The research has provided me with a strong justification for incorporating the reading of literary texts into the basic writing class. However, the research also enlightened me to the fact that I cannot just assign students to go home and read on their own. Basic writers usually struggle with reading. That means an effective

approach must involve the use of assistive reading techniques during in-class, out-loud reading of literary works. Prior to this project, I had little idea how to help students gain reading skills. Fortunately, many of the scholarly articles I read included research-based, practical techniques. These can be easily incorporated in class. Best of all, reading techniques almost always involve putting pen to paper, so my students will not sacrifice writing time for reading. I now have a theoretical basis that rationalizes the importance of allowing reading and writing to interrelate. I began this project looking for a way to beef up the writing topics for basic writing students. My research confirmed that applying theory to literature does provide more challenging writing topics. Even better, it also confirmed that students' critical thinking skills will be engaged, they will become better prepared for college-level writing, and their reading skills will likely improve. This new understanding gives me a sense of urgency to go beyond the predominately skills-and-drills approach.

However, students still need grammar, and I was fortunate to gain a new understanding that effective grammar pedagogy plays out in the revision process. Yes, I have always required that students revise first drafts of papers. But as I read the research, I discovered how grammar lessons can center on revision and replace grammar exercises. Furthermore, I came to appreciate that the use of literary theory requires a mental distance from the words on page that is the same mental distance that allows students to better act as editors of their own writing. This makes me more confident in student writing as a basis for grammar lessons than before this project. Two journals were particularly helpful in guiding me to the above realization. I will continue to read the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* and the *Journal of Basic Writing* to gain more ideas on teaching grammar in the context of student writing.

Beyond my own work as an instructor, other basic writing instructors may find my project useful. Many instructors are faced with 15-20 basic writers who have been reluctant or disengaged students, who often have poor reading skills, and/or are second-language learners but no longer categorized as ESL. These instructors likely lack the time to engage in research, especially adjunct instructors who have other jobs. Because my project pulls together various theories on reading, literary theory, and writing, instructors can efficiently garner new approaches without a big investment of their own time. In addition to being overloaded with high-needs students, the full-time instructors of English in community colleges usually have master's degrees in literature or communications. Thus, dealing with poor readers is outside of their training. Just as I learned a few things about helping reluctant readers, basic writing instructors can likewise gain from my project practical ways to help their students read literature. Instructors of college-level literature courses, who are accustomed to working with students who can already handle literary texts, may be frustrated by the poor reading skills of basic writers. The in-class reading suggestions will allow such instructors to scaffold reading assignments.

In addition, my project suggests specific texts and possible activities related to those texts, so instructors who try literary theory can do so without time-consuming searches for literary texts. Plus, my project can be put to use in a flexible manner. The literature and activity suggestions in the project lend themselves to one-time use or can span several weeks. I suggested several short texts that would work for in-class reading. Instructors can take my suggestions as given or tweak them to suit their students.

Another useful setting for the teaching of literary theory to basic writers is in Adult Basic Education. More specifically, GED preparation instructors would accomplish several goals at once by implementing my research. Students' literacy skills and critical thinking would be

exercised by the reading and application of literary theory. This would prepare students for the reading required for several sections of the GED test, in which students must read passages in science, history, and other disciplines before answering questions on those passages. Plus, writing assignments centered on literary texts would help develop skills needed for the GED essay test. As students practice writing, the GED instructor can incorporate grammar in preparation for the grammar portion of the GED. The scaffolding techniques I present will be helpful for the instructor's mixed group of nontraditionally-aged students as well as unsuccessful high school-aged students.

I could target both of the above by presenting my work to the appropriate decision-makers. The Dean of Academics and the Director of the English Department would be two people at Garden City Community College with whom to share my findings. Additionally, the Director of the Adult Learning Center at GCCC would be my contact for reaching out to GED instructors. In-service gatherings typically include break-out sessions for specific disciplines. My project could be presented at in-service sessions for full-time instructors, adjunct instructors, and at the Adult Learning Center. Plus, at GCCC, the Teaching and Learning Center offers short seminars to instructors who seek to improve. Such a seminar would be an appropriate forum in which to share my findings.

Eventually, my project can contribute to the body of research on basic writing. However, at this point, my project is still a proposal. Throughout my work on the Culminating Experience Project, I read many research articles on the integration of reading and writing in basic writing courses. Having implemented something new in the classroom, the authors then shared the results of their innovative approaches. Now that my project is complete, it, too, can be

introduced in the basic writing classroom. Once I have implemented, evaluated, and adjusted my approaches to the realities of actual students, I can prepare my findings for publication.

The *Journal of Basic Writing* and the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* proved most relevant to my project; these journals might consider my findings worthy of publication.

Community college instructors have been published in the *Journal of Basic Writing*. Moreover, the editorial staff includes community college instructors, including Rebecca W. Mlynarczyk, whom I quoted in my paper, so this journal is clearly open to research from sources other than large universities. This publication shares theory, research, and teaching practices that contribute to the field of basic writing, so my project clearly suits *JBW*'s purpose and audience. It requires 15-25 page manuscripts in MLA style, which my project matches. However, because most *JBW* readers are already involved in community colleges, I will need to edit my paper to exclude the facts and figures about community colleges and the numbers of students in remediation. I will need to add the results of my project after I have implemented it. Like other scholarly journals, *JBW* uses a blind peer review process that will allow my project to stand on its own; my no-name status within this field of research should not be a barrier.

Submission to the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* will require more effort on my part. First, this journal refuses to accept class projects or dissertations. Therefore, I must revise my paper after putting it into practice, so I can present it as a finished research project. This will include developing a way to measure the results of using literature and theory in the classroom. Often, both qualitative and quantitative measures of results are necessary because gains in reading and writing can be difficult to measure. When I cited research from Francine Falk-Ross and Wendy Hall Mahoney in this journal, both included qualitative and quantitative results. As a quantitative measure, I could ensure that students re-take the COMPASS test that

landed them in basic writing in the first place. Qualitative measures can include student reflections on their attitudes toward their writing abilities plus my own observations. This journal requires APA style, so I would need to convert my paper to meet this requirement. *JAAL*'s readership includes middle school and high school educators. My paper is specifically addressed to those at the community college level. However, I am encouraged by the basic writing and reading research that *JAAL* has published for the post-secondary audience. At the same time, I am cautious about *JAAL*'s 15-20% acceptance rate of submissions. It is clearly a competitive process. Of course, *JAAL* requires a blind submission of research projects for peer review. It would be a significant accomplishment to be accepted for publication in *JAAL*.

Though this essay marks the end of my Culminating Experience Project, I see it as a beginning. As a basic writing instructor, I can begin to experiment with literature and theory in the classroom. I can begin to use student writing as a basis for grammar lessons. Other basic writing instructors can do so also and share their results with me. GED instructors, who work with similar students, can use my research to help their students achieve passing test scores. On a broader scale, if my research is published, anyone involved in basic writing can begin to try new ways of helping students become better readers and writers. It is time to begin.

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