

Reflective Analysis and Discussion

When I began working with this class, I realized that the texts I had chosen for this class would be challenging for the students. However, due to commentary from other international students who found philosophy to be the most challenging subject, I thought the text would be a good experience for them. This is a subject all students will have to take if they plan to obtain a degree from Gonzaga, which encouraged me to include a philosophy section for this class. The text chosen, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, by Rene Descartes, is actually used in a philosophy class at Gonzaga. However, after reading the evaluations and reflecting on the process, I would concede to either choosing a different text or creating better scaffolding materials. I would also want to shorten the process and make it more organized. I have noticed the positive and negative impacts this process made on the students. The activities and examples were quite helpful for them, but the lack of involvement in their writing process did not serve them well. Many voiced they would have liked a more step-by-step process, working through each essay section, and to have had meetings with the professor(s). Although I offered to meet with them, the lacking requirement seems to be the culprit with this issue. Only three or four students actually made appointments with me then to go over their paper. I did give extensive and detailed comments on each student's paper, but, comparing the two essay processes, a check-in with each student *during* the process would have been better.

Students also commented about a lack of clarity in the objectives for the class and assignments. I realize that I should have taken more time to explain *why* we were doing particular activities/assignments, their importance, and how they all connected and/or contributed to each other. I tried doing this with most of the assignments, but I know there are more areas where I could have done a better job of communicating these ideas. This comment would also be

applied to the need for variety in writing assignments. Students should know what they are doing and *why* they are doing it so they don't feel as if their time is being wasted or are being given busy work. Unfortunately, we did not implement a great deal of writing in this class. The only writing assignments they every received were summaries, outlines, argumentative practice writing, and their essay drafts. From the semester prior to this one, I had worked with another professor from this class who implemented in-class journal writing. With this prior experience, I was under the impression that we would once again have journaling opportunities for every class, or at least every other class. I liked how the previous professor used journaling in the class and I saw great potential for using it in UNIV 109 and my own future classes. However, for this class, it did not work out that way. I wish there had been more variety and I will be sure to stress this factor in my own curriculum.

Student comments about what was and would have been the most helpful for each text used has shown me what students really need. As I have stated before, I know that steps are needed to help students achieve their end goal, but how to do that in the proper order was something I struggled with in the beginning. From teaching in Gonzaga's ESL Community Outreach (GECO), a graduate student-led free ESL class open to the Spokane community, and tutoring students, I have gained strength in helping students understand material in multiple capacities, using metaphors, pictures, basic explanations, and the like. Although I have had success with scaffolding, I realize I still have room for growth. In regards to the struggles I have had with scaffolding, I think my stumbling block was the transfer from individual and small group scaffolding to large-scale scaffolding in a classroom setting. Most of my scaffolding experience has been catering to the needs of individuals and being able to spend one-on-one time with each student. This intimate time allows me to only focus on that one or couple of students

and gives me the ability to change my approach immediately based on their needs. In a larger classroom, I found that, due to the large number of students, one-on-one time with each student is nearly impossible to do during class time. I am still able to adjust as necessary, but I have to weigh my adjustments according to the benefit of the *entire* class, rather than just one or two students. Meeting the needs of each student is important to me as a teacher, but my lack of experience catering to the needs of a larger class was something I had never done before.

The feedback about the reading guides was very helpful as well. After introducing *Meditations*, I created a reading guide for the students. I now know I should have introduced it much earlier, but it was nice to see how helpful students found it to be and wished one had been made for the following text, *What is Morality?* by James Rachels. In all actuality, I did make one for the students, but the lead professor decided not to introduce it in or to encourage students to practice reading strategies. Comments about the *Meditations*' PowerPoint activity were also encouraging. Before students could gain a point for answering the question, they had to find support for their response in the text. To see and hear how helpful that was for them makes me feel confident in my abilities and shows me that this may be a good activity to keep in my pocket for the future.

By reflecting on the process of co-teaching UNIV 109, I have been forced to look at my own teaching style and process. Through turning theory into practice, I have had to confront my struggles, but also recognize my strengths. The response cards I asked students to fill out were helpful as well. After reading them I could come to specific conclusions about their progress, needs, and my own evaluation. The reflections have also helped me with the progress of developing my own curriculum. Taking my mental notes and putting them on paper ensures that I will have all of this qualitative and quantitative data available for future reference. I have

learned much about myself and have grown personally and professionally. This semester has taught me so much about scaffolding and how to pay attention to students' needs. I now feel as though I could do it all over again with greater efficiency.

Lastly, I would like to comment on my personal experience with the students. Over the course of the semester, I saw many changes with the students' writing and personal attitudes. Their transformation was great to experience and an honor to be a part of. When I first began working with the students, hardly any of them smiled in class. About three or four weeks after I began assisting and teaching, everyone in the class was more energetic, came to class on time, and, by golly, they were smiling! I know I had something to do with that. Influencing students beyond academics is what makes teaching worthwhile for me. Working with the students one-on-one also helped me see what kind of errors students are making in their writing – generally and culturally – how each student varies in their abilities, and what editing strategies are most effective for students. The feedback system I used on their papers proved to be very helpful and effective. Students even came up to me and told me how much they liked it and even requested that I follow the same system when working with them on their next essay.

The lessons I have learned have impacted me greatly. I have discovered strengths (clear communication, availability, effective comments, effective course materials, encouraging and engaging students, flexibility in lesson plans, improving students writing skills) and weaknesses (introducing materials in the proper way and time, providing clear and distinct objectives for each assignment) in my teaching and have gained the proper tools through experience to modify and enhance my materials. I am also more aware of what students' needs are at this level and how to meet them. Still yet, despite the challenges I faced, I believe this was an overall wonderful experience due to the knowledge I have gained *from* all of the challenges.