

Through the Lens: Discovering Rhetorical Modes

By

Alyssa N. Wood, B.A.

A Project

Submitted to the Department of English

California State University, Bakersfield

In Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

Fall 2020

Introduction

The goal of this thesis project is to effectively guide college-level composition students towards heightened engagement, active learning, and critical literacy skills. The driving principle behind the development of this thesis is the notion that instructors in higher education must be able to anticipate the variability of modern students. Learner variability is essentially defined as the concept that all individuals are unique and diverse in how they learn. Each student brings a different learner profile to the classroom or workplace environment. This thesis project uses a variety of strategies to adapt to this diversity in student learning in order to foster critical thinking, reading, and writing skills that are transferable to any mode of instruction. To achieve these goals, *Through the Lens: Discovering Rhetorical Modes* focuses on teaching and learning strategies that explicitly link student engagement with student reading and writing to explore literal, interpretive, and critical frames of mind. This review of literature will synthesize and explore the ongoing research and rationale that support the basis of *Through the Lens*. The contents of this literature review are as follows: an overview of the research focused on rhetorical reading, a closer look at the implementation of differentiated instruction in curriculum, and the necessity of an immersive framework in the pre-writing, writing, and post-writing stages.

Literature Review

Reading as a Conversation

The importance of fostering valuable student-reading relationships in today's education system is paramount. Reading, at any educational level, has moved away from engaged participatory experience and into the overemphasis of "teaching to the test." In *Readicide*, author Kelly Gallagher details the extent of such disparities, and he attributes much of this loss in

meaningful learning to modern curriculum's misguided focus on state-mandated test preparation. To curb and ultimately reverse the downward spiral of "readicide" in students, Gallagher calls for a wide range of readily accessible books and materials for students to engage with. He also claims that to encourage students as they engage with a text, instruction in reading requires teachers to thoroughly frame the text in pre-reading processes and guide students towards a relationship with their reading material that is rooted in intentionality and personal meaning.

The necessity for implementing more effective reading strategies is poignantly addressed in John Bean's *Reading Rhetorically*. The textbook teaches both instructors and students to read with an analytical mindset and to write with rhetorical insight. Bean emphasizes the indispensability of teaching reading material through an interactive process, and he details several key factors necessary for student success: reading-based discussion activities that promote active learning; an analytical framework for understanding and critiquing texts; a guide for thoughtfully and rhetorically analyzing a text; and a variety of pre-reading, reading, and post-reading strategies designed to benefit every student. Bean additionally notes that questioning a text is not only essential for developing critical thinking skills but that it is central to academic success in college. Bean's interactive process of reading rhetorically is necessary for expanding a student's analytical and critical skills, and it seamlessly guides students through the reading process as they comprehend, analyze, and carefully question their text.

As students progress in the rhetorical reading process, their potential for writing hinges on their strength as a critical rhetorical reader, specifically as they begin to dispute and challenge the effectiveness of their reading materials. Like Bean, Carol Jago details this final stage of the reading process in her book *The Book in Question: Why and How Reading is in Crisis*. She urges for curriculum to develop compelling, higher-level questions that spark students' interests and

encourage a greater appreciation for literature. Jago draws attention to the damaging loss of meaning-making in pre-reading and post-reading questions, and she proposes three types of critical lenses with which a student should view their text: what it says, how it says it, and what it means. Jago attributes a large part of success in rhetorical reading to the same interactive process noted in Bean's text and provides a variety of strategies designed to foster deeper reading and thinking.

Devising a Differentiated Classroom

The traditional approach to learning and classroom instruction was predominantly dominated by printed text and lecture-based teaching. While this "sage on the stage" approach to instruction might have worked for a small margin of students, it has not and will not work for all. In an ever-changing society, instructors of composition must ask themselves how they will be able to maximize their students' potential for active learning. More specifically, developers of college-level curriculum must begin to consider what makes students enjoy learning. This idea lends itself to the theory that a positive learning experience leads to a higher potential for retaining critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. Research into differentiated instruction reveals that this approach to education provides teachers with the foundation needed to successfully motivate students within the classroom. Differentiated instruction and assessment is a framework for effective teaching that provides all every diverse classroom community of learners with a range of different avenues for understanding new information in terms of acquiring content, processing, making sense of ideas, and assessment measures.

Aspects of this theoretical framework can be detected in Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Drawing on decades of research in cognitive development and human intellectual competencies, Gardner argues that all individuals are born

with the potential to develop a multiplicity of intelligences; however, the way society presently approaches conventional testing for people's aptitude for learning seriously hampers their potential for deeper learning and life-long skill sets. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences is further examined in Anita Woolfolk's *Educational Psychology*. Woolfolk traces two lessons established by Gardner: the first being that teachers should take the individual differences among students seriously and differentiate their instruction to connect with each student; and the second being that any discipline, skill, or concept should be taught in several appropriate ways.

Woolfolk details Gardner's argument that anything worth knowing has different representations and multiple connections to various ways of thinking. This theory expands traditional thinking surrounding students' abilities, and it provides instructors with new paths for teaching rhetorical discourse. This thesis project uses Gardner's theory as a guiding philosophy for implementing a variety of teaching strategies designed to foster a multiplicity of intelligences, specifically ones that are transferable to various areas of curricula.

Published in the *International Education Journal* in 2006, Pearl Subban's article "Differentiated Instruction: A Research Basis" provides readers with an exhaustive examination of the studies and investigations surrounding differentiated instruction as an approach to active learning. The fields of research Subban presents relate to student diversity, learning styles, brain research, and Howard Gardner's theory on multiple intelligences. As previously mentioned, Gardner's theory is a departure from the traditional view that intelligence is a single, measurable unit. Subban's article takes Gardner's theory and builds upon it with further research into brain cognition and maximizing the engagement of students while learning. She implements Gardner's theory as one of several necessary voices whose research in adapting to student needs has been instrumental. The article highlights Gardner's proposal of a need for problem-solving in

education to avoid the trap of outdated instruction that causes students to think that if they aren't capable of achieving traditionally, then they will not achieve in any field. Subban draws on Gardner's founding principles to remind instructors that this closed and rigid approach to instruction, unfortunately, minimizes opportunities for students who possess a propensity to learn in other nontraditional ways. Subban's exploration of the research behind differentiated instruction is a guiding voice in this thesis project, and the founding philosophies she presents will be put into action through the text's diverse learning opportunities, specifically through its implementation of multiple reading and comprehension strategies.

In their book *Leadership for Differentiating Schools and Classrooms*, Carol Ann Tomlinson and Susan Demirsky Allan highlight the key components of effective differentiated instruction as well as research that supports implementing it in the classroom. This book extensively explores how educators can develop responsive, personalized, and differentiated classrooms. According to the authors, differentiated instruction occurs when instructors efficiently respond to the learning needs of a particular student or small group of students rather than the more typical pattern of teaching the class as though all individuals in it fit into the "one size fits all" mold. This process requires instructors to consistently assess what a student learns, how he or she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he or she has learned is a match for that student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning. The authors of the text explain to educators that differentiation can occur in four ways: through content, process, product, and learning environment based on the individual learner. They also provide practical strategies for implementing these responsive approaches to teaching within the classroom. This thesis project draws on Tomlinson and Allan's philosophies and establishes frequent reading activities, brief writing prompts, and opportunities for discussion and collaboration as a way for

teachers to have ongoing access to student assessment. This is necessary for teachers to assess not only the needs of their students, but it allows them to reflect on their own teaching strategies and readjust according to student interests and learning profiles.

John Bean's *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* takes a "pragmatic nuts-and-bolts approach to teaching critical thinking" for educators from any academic discipline. One guiding principle of Bean's text is aimed not at simply improving student writing but rather at improving student engagement with course work, and as a result of this, advancement in student learning, reading, and writing will thus inevitably ensue. Among a wide range of practical application strategies, Bean guides instructors to learn to design interest-provoking writing and critical thinking activities and incorporate them into student courses in a way that encourages inquiry, exploration, discussion, and debate. Bean also stresses the importance of providing students with a blending of various learning strategies on a range of current issues to maximize student engagement and opportunities for active learning. Bean's strategies for maintaining student engagement parallel those found in Tomlinson and Allan's text, and they largely correlate with the theoretical framework encompassing differentiated instruction.

An Immersive Framework

A large portion of the philosophies guiding this thesis project is rooted in maximizing student engagement to promote active learning as well as transferable reading and writing skills. While instructors may maintain student engagement in the beginning stages of the reading and critical thinking processes, many lose interest and subconsciously abandon this mindset in the later writing stages. Because of this thesis project's emphasis on student interest profiles,

Through the Lens implements a subcategory of differentiated instruction and presents interactive student roles as opportunities for writing and discussion. This specific approach to designing assignments may be referenced in a variety of ways and may be used interchangeably (e.g., exploratory, immersive, interactive role, and participatory lens activities or assignments).

James Moffett's *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* presents an argument for a student-centered, process-oriented literacy curriculum. Moffett's pedagogical theory of discourse suggests that writing as a medium of human communication requires continuous adjustment of the interdependent relationships among writer, reader, and subject. He notes that to produce authentic discourse, writers must consistently engage in opportunities that allow them to practice varying degrees of distance between them as writers and their relationships with their audience and subject matter. The writing stages of this thesis project reflect several aspects of this author's principles. While Moffett does not specifically detail the use of immersive writing prompts in his text, he advocates for a variety of writing assignments that subject students to varying levels of complexity. This thesis project approaches the process of developing collaborative discussion prompts and writing assignments with the same mindset urged in Moffett's text. *Through the Lens*'s exploratory writing assignments are versatile in that they may be used as discussion prompts or in a more formal rhetorical debate. They require students to subconsciously readjust their cognitive process in order to view various arguments and texts from different perspectives. Doing so guides students to carefully and thoughtfully examine the relationships between writer, reader, and subject that Moffett describes as the pillar of effective rhetorical discourse.

The development of immersive writing assignments in this thesis project was done with thoughtful consideration of Erika Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. The author draws on pedagogies of multiple theorists, including James Moffett, to address the ongoing

divide between student success and an instructor's approach to the teaching of writing. After exploring the theories behind each of her teaching philosophies, she provides prospective educators with a guidebook for implementing more effective classroom practices, including the use of cross-disciplinary texts, prewriting techniques, writing workshops, and collaborative learning. This thesis project uses Lindemann's "Developing Writing Assignments" chapter as a heuristic for designing interactive writing assignments. Developing a curriculum according to Lindemann's established principles will remind college-level instructors of their expectations for students as they progress throughout each rhetorical mode.

John Bean's previously mentioned *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* dedicates its entire seventh chapter to exploratory modes of writing. In a portion of the chapter, Bean clarifies common misconceptions surrounding exploratory assignments and provides his rationale behind developing interactive writing prompts as an effective tool for engaging students in the writing process. Some aspects of his argument can be seen below:

- Exploratory writing prompts present students with higher-order critical thinking problems
- They change the way students approach course readings
- They create higher levels of class preparation and richer discussion
- They are more enjoyable to read and often help instructors get to know their students better, fostering better student-teacher relationships
- Lower-stakes immersive writing prompts help instructors assess learning problems on the spot

Bean's chapter proceeds to offer teachers an extensive list of practical ideas for incorporating both low-stakes and high-stakes exploratory writing assignments.

Statement of Purpose

As previously established, higher education must be able to anticipate the diversity of students to foster critical thinking, reading, and writing skills that are transferable to any academic field. Traditional delivery of instruction misguidedly follows a "one size fits all" approach and still struggles to maintain student engagement in all stages of rhetorical conversation with a text. To combat this loss of foundational skills, *Through the Lens: Discovering Rhetorical Modes* has redesigned the way instructors approach pre-reading, reading, and post-reading assignments for students with diverse learning profiles to succeed. To reinvigorate student engagement and enjoyment in the composition classroom, this rhetorical reader implements varied opportunities for individualized instruction throughout the reading and writing stages. The differentiated instruction in this text is student-centered with a focus on appropriate assessment tools that are fair, flexible, challenging, and engage students in curriculum in meaningful ways. Allowing students to engage with learning materials and strategies in a multitude of ways helps cement subject comprehension, a vital tool presently needed in composition courses.

Through the Lens bridges the gap in existing scholarship by taking traditional modes of rhetoric and adjusting the way instructors approach teaching them to new habits of mind. The text presents instructors and students with immersive and exploratory assignments throughout each rhetorical mode and chapter. As educators, we must not only change our frame of mind to anticipate the needs of students from a variety of backgrounds but focus on teaching strategies

that explicitly link student engagement with student reading and writing to succeed in any field of study. This thesis project presents college-level students with the foundational skills needed to comfortably, efficiently, and successfully navigate the realm of rhetorical conversation.

Working Bibliography

Anson, Chris M., Joan Graham, David A. Jolliffe, Nancy S. Shapiro, and Carolyn H. Smith.

Scenarios for Teaching Writing: Contexts for Discussion and Reflective Practice.

Urbana, IL: NCTE in cooperation with Alliance for Undergraduate Education, 1993.

Aristotle. *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*. Trans. Lane Cooper. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960.

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical*

Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Bean, John C., Virginia A. Chappell, and Alice M. Gillam. *Reading Rhetorically*. New York: Longman, 2004.

Burke, Jim. *The English Teacher's Companion: A Completely New Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession*. 4th ed., Heinemann, 2013.

Corbett, Edward P.J. *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. 3d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Gallagher, Kelly. *Deeper Reading*. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers, 2004.

Gallagher, Kelly. *Readicide*. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers, 2009.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983.

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Berkenstien. *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: Norton, 2007.

Jago, Carol. *The Book in Question: Why and How Reading is in Crisis*. Heinemann Publishers, 2019.

Larson, Richard. "Discovery Through Questioning: A Plan for Teaching Rhetorical Invention."

- Contemporary Rhetoric: A Conceptual Background with Readings*. Ed. W. Ross Winterowd. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975.
- Lindemann, Erika. *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. 4th ed., Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Meyer, Anne, et. al. *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice*. E-book, CAST Professional Publishing, 2014.
- Moffett, James. *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*. Boynton/Cook, 1983.
- Subban, Pearl. "Differentiated Instruction: A Research Basis." *International Education Journal*, 2006, pp. 935-947.
- Tomlinson, Carol A. and Susan D. Allen. *Leadership for Differentiating Schools & Classrooms*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000.
- Woolfolk, Anita. *Educational Psychology*. 14th ed., Pearson Education, Inc., 2019.