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FTCP Capstone Project
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Using the Team-Based Learning model in the Composition Classroom

While I learned many teaching techniques over the course of the year through FTCP and applied them in various degrees, Team-Based Learning changed my pedagogy. Before becoming a Teaching Assistant at MSU, I taught creative writing in various settings to youth, and facilitated a course in youth work through the University of MN. While facilitating the course in youth work, I learned to utilize active-learning techniques and it opened my eyes to a new form of teaching. At a FTCP session I was reminded of these techniques, realizing I was familiar with some of them but unfamiliar with the term “active-learning,” and employed them in the classroom during the fall semester. I absolutely loved the idea of active learning, and since I taught at 8 a.m. on Mondays, active-learning techniques were essential. When Dr. Ross briefly introduced Team-Based Learning, a method that takes active-learning a step further, I wanted to try it. I soon learned that in order to accomplish this I would have to redesign my entire course.

I met with Dr. Ross who directed me to the book Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching by Larry K. Michaelsen, Arletta Bauman Knight, and L. Dee Fink, eds. Over winter break, I ordered the book, and read it. The team-based model relies on dividing the entire class into teams of six or seven students who work together for the entire semester. The teams do in-class assignments together, take tests together, and even give each other a grade at the end of the semester. In general, the method is not utilized in composition courses because the class is writing intensive, which requires a lot of individual work versus teamwork. I contemplated this, and realized that the students in my

composition course had a hard time critically reading the academic articles required to write their papers. In composition class, critical reading is not only essential, but is as important as writing. I decided that I would design a composition course that was a hybrid of both team-based learning and individual learning techniques. Students would form teams and critically discuss academic articles, prepare to write papers, and workshop each other's papers upon completion. This meant that each team would need to write papers on the same academic articles, and on the same research topics. Students would still write the papers individually. While the team-based learning book had many models to look at such as science and math courses, the method wasn't applied to a course in the way that I had applied it. I consulted with Dr. Ross, and Dr. McClure, the T.A. Director of the English Department, when I had the new syllabus ready. Both professors gave me input. Dr. McClure reminded me make sure the students knew what the team-based model meant, and to fully explain it on the syllabus, and he also offered me encouragement. Dr. Ross offered advice and encouragement, and even emailed the syllabus to Dr. Fink, one of the authors/editors of the team-based learning book, and Dr. Fink sent me an email with advice! The syllabus was complete, and I was ready to teach (Please see the attached syllabus.)

On the first day of class, I introduced the students to the idea of team-based learning, and had them take a sample test using IF-AT forms both individually and in teams. The students enjoyed the scratch off tests—one said it was “like the lottery.” I somewhat followed the team-based learning book, and used a few different methods that would help me to put the students into teams. I referred to the book, in part, to divide the class up into teams—I set out to spread out the students' assets and liabilities (meaning their experience, and attitudes), avoid preexisting, cohesive subgroups, and foster the perception that none of the teams was given a

special advantage. I had the class write a short essay, and fill out a questionnaire that determined how they felt about their writing skills, for example if they felt they were a strong, or weak writer, and where they had traveled and attended high school, and if they ever worked full-time. I looked for students who were already friends, and took notes to split up the pre-existing cohorts. I put all this information together to form four teams of six or seven students alongside trying to diversify the groups based on gender, etc. The next class period, I explained to the students how I determined the teams, and divided the class. The teams came up with names, one of them is the “A-Team,” despite the fact that most of them have not seen the eighties television show or are Mr. T fans. From this point, I had the students participate in icebreakers within their teams, and then we shared information with the whole group.

There were many rewards and many challenges. I met with Dr. Ross when I needed advice, and to make sure I understood the method. After meeting with Dr. Ross, I supplied the team captains with blue first place ribbons. While I was apprehensive about this, the students loved it. They wanted to take the ribbons home. I had to design multiple-choice tests for the chapter of our common composition text that the students would take individually, and then as teams. The students had a hard time on the individual tests, but kept improving on the team tests. I surveyed the students as to why this happened, and they found it easier to succeed at the tests when they were able to discuss them. Since there was such a disparity between the team and individual test scores, in the end I omitted the individual scores.

I asked the students to journal about the team-based learning model early on in the semester to see how it was received. After taking the first team test, 19 out of the 22 responses were overwhelming positive. One student wrote:

When we took the team test on Monday I think it went very well. I really enjoyed working with my team and I think it is an overall good idea. It gives us a chance to connect with people that we don't really know. Our group worked pretty well together and we all came to a final decision without argument. It was nice to take an individual test and then follow it with a group test to hear what everyone else thought. There were only a few times that we had different opinions on the answers, but we put it all together to make sense of it by using each other. It was also nice to go over the test more than once so that it will help me in the long run when it comes to taking a final or midterm. Individual tests followed by group tests is a good idea in a college level English class.

I noticed that the atmosphere in the classroom became communal very quickly. For example, on the second team test one of the male students in my class was giving high-fives to a female student on his team when they scored a correct answer. These students met three weeks prior. In my previous composition class, this type of camaraderie took a half of a semester to build. When the students weren't even to midterm, I asked each one of them to comment on the team-based model during individual conferences. Once again, the response was positive. One student told me she made friends because of her team. Another student told me that although she tended to be shy and disliked group work in general, but she liked her team, and was beginning to feel more confident discussing assignments with them. I didn't get any negative responses.

The academic results were also encouraging. When comparing the results of my fall composition student grades to that of the spring, the grades on student papers went up. While there are many other determinants when comparing two classes, such as the students themselves, I still found the results uplifting. On the first paper in which the students summarize an academic article, while the amount of students scoring Bs and Cs remained the same, there were

8 As in the spring versus 5 As in the fall. The second paper in which the students are required to critique an academic article showed a significant increase. This paper can be considered to be the most challenging, and requires strong critical reading skills. The fall class scored 6 As and 8 Bs while the spring class scored 14 As and 2 Bs. Both classes scored 5 Cs. I feel the difference is that students were able to meet in teams and discuss the article, and the criteria to which they evaluated that article. I encouraged students to help each other. Students reported that the team discussion helped, and critiquing each team member's paper along with having their own papers critiqued helped them on the paper.

The biggest challenge I faced with the team-based model was making sure all the students used the class time significantly. Often times, one team would finish an in-class activity before the rest, or one team would take a long time. This is challenging considering a team consists of six or seven students, and as an instructor, you can not move on to the next group activity while an entire team completes the first one. Therefore, I had students individually read assignment sheets on D2L or material in the common text when their team completed an activity, or journal.

Yet, it is also hard to monitor whether or not significant learning experiences are occurring in the teams. This model really relies on the students taking control of their learning, and to learn from each other. As the instructor, it is my job to create significant learning experiences, and monitor that, yet I could not monitor all the teams all the time. I had to learn to let the students go. After each team-based activity, the class came together as a whole, and the team captain of the day shared what each team learned, and we had a class discussion.

As a part of the team-based learning model, the students give each of their team members a grade at the end of the semester, which in my class is worth 10% of the final grade. I had the

students discuss the criteria they would use within their teams when grading, and had them give each other midterm grades. Students responded positively to the process in their journals and in class. The criteria ranged from regular attendance to being prepared. The results ended in students giving each other positive feedback and constructive criticism, such as Student A contributes to our discussions but needs to attend class more often. After the midterm grades, I noticed a few students who scored lower volunteering to be the team captain, and trying to take a more active role in the team. I feel that the communication and social skills required to complete team-based assignments will help the students prepare for future jobs.

The team-based model came with challenges, but also rewards. I felt so excited about the results, that I gave a presentation on team-based learning at the MNSCU Center for Teaching & Learning conference on Realizing Student Potential 2006: Defining & Fostering Student Success where I shared the method with other instructors. I have also been in contact with Dr. Fink via email—he has been encouraging and is interested in hearing feedback on how my approach to team-based learning worked. Dr. Ross has been supportive through out, and I will continue to share the results of this project with him.

Taking the team-based approach has changed my view on teaching and given me new enthusiasm. The FTCP sessions and the new methods I have learned from them expand beyond team-based learning to active-learning practices, to ways to evaluate my pedagogy, to learning how to put together my portfolio. I look forward to using all of these methods, and continuing to improve my team-based model.

English 101—Section 28
 Minnesota State University
 Spring 2006

Course Name: Composition
 Course Credit: Four (4) units
 Course Meetings: M, W 4-5:45 p.m., AH 327
 Instructor: Trisha Shaskan
 Office: Armstrong Hall 206A
 E-Office Hours: T 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
 Office Hours: M,W 3-4 p.m. & by appointment
 Office Phone: (507) 389-1022
 E-mail: trisha.shaskan@mnsu.edu
 Desire 2 Learn Site: <https://d2l.mnsu.edu/>
 Center for Academic Success: Memorial Library 132
 CAS Phone: (507) 389-2726
 CAS Website: <http://www.mnsu.edu/learn/>

“...writing is not a performance but a generosity.”
 -Brenda Ueland

Welcome to Composition 101! This class is designed to help you to improve upon both your reading and writing skills in relation to writing college-appropriate papers.

This semester, we will work to accomplish the following course competencies, as required by Minnesota State University:

Students will be able to:

- (a) demonstrate and practice strategies for idea generation, audience analysis, organization of texts, drafting, evaluation of drafts, revision, and editing.
- (b) write papers of varying lengths that demonstrate effective explanation, analysis, and argumentation;
- (c) become experienced in computer-assisted writing and research;
- (d) locate and evaluate material, using PALS, the Internet, and other sources;
- (e) analyze and synthesize source material, making appropriate use of paraphrase, summary, quotation, and citation conventions;
- (f) employ syntax and usage appropriate to academic writing and the professional world.

Required Text:

McClure, Randall, arr. Composition, English 101, A Rhetoric and Reader for Minnesota State University, Mankato. Boston: Pearson, 2005.

Recommended Text:

Hacker, Diana. dianahacker.com/pocket: A Pocket Style Manual: Fourth Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

The following information regarding Team-Based Learning is from:

Michaelsen, Larry K., Arletta Bauman Knight, and L.Deer Fink, eds. Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching. Sterling: Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2004.

Why are we utilizing team-based learning?

Team-based learning can “transform the quality of student learning” (Michaelsen, 4). This class will use team-based learning because it allows students to meet each other, and have meaningful discussions in class. This method of learning means there will be less lectures from me, and more discussion within the teams of students. Research shows that students in classes that utilize team-based learning want to come to class. Team-based tasks require cooperation, and allow members to gain interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills. All of these skills will help you when you enter the job force.

How will we use Team-Based Learning in this class?

Students in this course will, in part, utilize team-based learning. This means you will be put into teams comprised of 6 or 7 students. You will complete in-class activities (such as critical reading questions), RATs (Readiness Assessment Tests, which are tests on the reading material), and workshop each other’s essays in these teams. You will be placed in a team, and remain in that team for the duration of the semester unless the Instructor deems it necessary to change the composition of the teams.

This approach will vary from small group work because you will evaluate each of your team members’ efforts, and participation, which will count as a part of the final grade for this course. (Please see the Peer Assessment Form). In turn, your team members will evaluate your effort, and participation in team assignments, RATs, and workshops as a part of your final grade.

RAP/RAT

Here is the sequence of events for the Readiness Assessment Process:

1. Individual Readiness Assessment Test
2. Team Readiness Assessment Test
3. Appeal
4. Focused discussion of any remaining questions about the test

RAP stands for Readiness Assessment Process. For each chapter of reading material, you will take a **RAT** (Readiness Assessment Test) both as an individual, and as a team. You will receive an individual score (or grade) on the RAT, and a team score (or grade) on the RAT. This is a test on the material you were assigned to read in the common text. For example, you will have a RAT on Chapter One. After taking the RAT both as an individual, and a team, your team may make an appeal concerning any question on the test. This means, if any of the teams think one or more of their answers should have been counted as correct, they can submit a written appeal to the Instructor, making reference to the reading material in the text that supports their answer (10).

Grading System:

Since the class will be utilizing team-based learning, you will be graded by the Instructor individually (on individual essays, and for the in-class assignments, and homework), as a team (on assignments and RATs), and by your peers.

The Instructor will utilize the traditional A, B, C, D, F marking system. To better calibrate the grading system for essays in this course, a standardized grade sheet is used. Please see the attached essay-grading sheet.

Grading Criteria/Graded Work:

| Individual Items: | Points | Percent of Grade |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| A. Essay #1 Summary | 100 | 10% |
| B. Essay #2 Critique | 100 | 10% |
| C. Essay #3 Explanatory Synthesis | 200 | 15% |
| D. Essay #4 Argumentative Synthesis | 200 | 15% |
| E. Essay #5 Compare/Contrast | 100 | 10% |
| F. RATs (Individual portion) | 150 | 10% |
| G. In-class assignments/homework | 100 | 10% |
| Total Points & % | 950 | 80% |

| Team Items | Points | Percent of Grade |
|--|---------------|-------------------------|
| A. RATs (Team portion) | 150 | 10 % |
| B. Peer Evaluation (see attached sheet) | 50 or 60 | 10 % |
| Total Points & % | 1150 or 1160 | 20% |

Conferences:

- ✓ Two individual conferences are *required* in this class to discuss your writing and other work.
- ✓ Please take advantage of my office hours throughout the course to receive individualized instruction and feedback on your writing. Additional help is available through the Center for Academic Success.

Attendance:

- ✓ Quizzes will be announced, as will due dates, and homework assignments in-class only. Your team will also rely on you. Thus, attendance is crucial to your success in this class.

Midterm Student Feedback:

- ✓ I value your opinions. Throughout this semester, I will regularly ask you for your feedback on my teaching as well as course policies, materials, and projects.
You will be asked to complete an anonymous midterm feedback form so that I can make adjustments to the course or clear up any misunderstandings about this section of English 101.
You will be asked to complete a course evaluation form at the end of the semester as well.

Essay Submission:

- ✓ All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned date—no exceptions.
- ✓ The office staff **will not accept** any work. You **must** submit your work to me.
- ✓ Also, all drafts in this class must be typed. I will not accept rough drafts or final drafts that are handwritten or sloppily done.
- ✓ Computer glitches and lost papers are not acceptable excuses for late work. Always back up your files.
- ✓ Specific submission requirements are noted on each assignment sheet.
- ✓ Students **must** submit a draft for feedback and effectively complete all aspects of each writing assignment unless otherwise noted on the assignment sheet. If not, I reserve the right to not accept the essay. For example, students who change their topic must still complete all stages of the writing process for the new topic.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged reproduction of another's words, ideas, or work.

Two of the most common instances of unintentional plagiarism are 1) when students fail to acknowledge the IDEAS from a source and 2) when students receive too much outside assistance. While acknowledge the ideas of others will be discussed at length during this course, ***please be aware that if someone else writes passages of your text for you, then this act is plagiaristic, academically dishonest, and cause for penalty.***

Consult the Undergraduate Bulletin for policies on plagiarism and academic honesty. Severe penalties result from plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

Late Work:

Late work will **not** be accepted in this class. You need to be responsible and make arrangements to get your work to me on time.

Revision Policy:

- ✓ One goal of English 101 is for students to revise their essays **before** submitting them as final products to be evaluated. As you revise your works in progress, you are encouraged to take advantage of my posted office hours, to e-mail me with questions, and to schedule appointments with the Center for Academic Success for outside assistance.
- ✓ However, students in English 101 can revise **one** essay that was submitted on time AND received a grade of “D” or below. The permission to revise is contingent on meeting with me to discuss revision strategies. ***Revisions cannot earn a grade higher than “C” and are due within 2 weeks from the date the essays were returned.***

Guidelines for Online Communication:

You are welcome to email me with questions or concerns *related to the course*. I will check email during my e-office (online office) hours—T 11a.m. –1p.m. I usually respond within 24 hours, but I do **not** respond to e-mail received on the weekends.

This class uses online communication for academic purposes. With all forms of class communication, remember that anything you say (or write) is permanent, either in the minds or inboxes of your classmates. Therefore, respect each other online. Students who receive inappropriate online communications should contact me immediately.

You are expected to regularly check D2L and MSU email for course communications.

Note for Students with Disabilities:

Any student who qualifies for accommodation for any type of disability should see the instructor.

Tentative Paper/Portfolio Due Dates and Conference Schedule

****Note:** These dates are TENTATIVE. I reserve the right to change them at any time.

SUMMARY

Rough Draft: 2/6/06
Final Draft for evaluation: 2/13/06

CRITIQUE

Rough Draft: 2/22/06
Final Draft for evaluation: 3/1/06

****Spring Break – No Class- March 13-17**

EXPLANATORY SYNTHESIS

Rough Draft: 3/20/06

Final Draft for evaluation: 3/27/06

ARGUMENT SYNTHESIS

Rough Draft: 4/12/06

Final Draft for evaluation 4/19/06

COMPARE/CONTRAST

Final Draft for evaluation 5/3/06

**Finals Week May 8-13

CONFERENCES:**#1: Week of 2/20/06**

#2: Week of 3/20/05