

# Reflective Essay: 1

I have learned a lot about myself as a teacher, both from getting experience in teaching as well as the certification process through TILT. I feel confident at this point that I am capable of successfully teaching college level courses. I have acquired many useful skills, many of which came directly from the TILT seminars. In working to develop my teaching abilities I have learned much about how we learn information, good and bad ways to present material, and techniques to help combat common teaching problems to name a few. This reflective essay is helping me verbalize and summarize what I have gotten out of the certification process.

## **Most surprising things I learned about myself**

The most surprising thing I learned about myself is how far I have come in my teaching abilities since starting graduate school. I had no experience teaching beyond volunteer work with a non-profit astronomy group in educating primary school children. At first, I was uncomfortable speaking in front of even small groups. Now I am happy to speak in front of a large classroom. Since I am more comfortable in front of the classroom, I am better able to multitask while lecturing. I have learned to read my students' expressions to gauge comprehension. I am able to dynamically interact with my students in both formal lectures as well as less formal one-on-one interactions.

Another surprising aspect is that I am confident in the knowledge I have to convey to my students in the classes I have taught. As a student I was always impressed by the seemingly endless pool of knowledge my professors were able to draw on in lecture. Many times in teaching my students have had interesting and surprising questions about the content which I was able to answer, or at the very least speculate upon. A very exciting consequence of this is I have been able to incorporate these questions into following semesters as discussion points.

## **My teaching strengths**

Based on what I wrote in putting together my ePortfolio, I think one of my teaching strengths will be to work techniques into the classroom that promote learning and retention of the material. I am fortunate that my discipline, cognitive psychology, has many direct implications for effective teaching. For example, it has been established that information will be better remembered when it is tested rather than just restudied. Therefore, it is important to not only inform students of optimal studying habits, but also build in opportunities for mini-tests of knowledge during class.

Directly relevant to my research is the distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge. It is critically important for students to explicitly learn the material so they will be able to link other information back to it, which also enhances learning, but also to enable them to transfer the material beyond the context it was learned. An education would be almost worthless if the students were unable to take what they have learned beyond the final exam. One way to promote explicit knowledge of the material is to build in activities wherein students link the concepts to other concepts of the course or apply the concept to issues of the students' own interests.

A somewhat unique teaching strength I have is when a student does not understand a concept, I find it a fun challenge to get the right analogy or example that finally lets the student understand. As a student it brought me no end of frustration when I did not understand a concept and my instructor was only able to reiterate the same example given from the book, sometimes changing the phrasing. I have made it a personal mission to avoid this as much as I can in teaching. This is easier to handle in small classrooms, but is possible in larger classrooms as well. When I have a larger classroom, if a student is particularly struggling with a concept, I will either try to have them talk with me after class, or work in different examples in the following session.

### **What I learned through TILT**

I feel I learned a lot of useful skills through the TILT workshops I attended. I have learned techniques I can implement to not only deal with plagiarism when it occurs, but to also help prevent it from occurring at all. I think the suggestion of giving students specific sources to incorporate into their assignments is good on many levels. For the students it helps reduce the perceived work they are having to put into the assignment as the job of finding sources is at least partially done for them. This also reduces the likelihood the less-inclined students will be able to find a ready-made paper on the internet. This workshop also taught me more about the legal processes underlying academic integrity issues, which can be daunting and somewhat inaccessible as a graduate student.

In other workshops I learned how to foster a more dynamic classroom. This is both from my performance as a teacher as well as working in more effective questioning of the students. I think what I have learned from these workshops will be very crucial with my view of teaching and these techniques will help keep the students more engaged and active in their learning.

### **Key documents in my ePortfolio**

Directly linked from the home page of my ePortfolio are my CV, experiential learning form, teaching and research statements. From the starting page of my ePortfolio the components of the portfolio are accessible. I have included a video of a guest lecture I gave in the introductory

psychology class this past semester. For teaching evaluations, I have included a summary of my teaching evaluations from the undergraduates I have instructed as well as a written summary from Dr. Vicki Vollbracht who was kind enough to critique my teaching. My teaching materials contain lesson plans, assignments, rubrics, and different tests I have either directly used in my teaching or would use if I had more control over the structure of the course. Finally, are my workshop review forms with my summary of the workshop along with what I am taking away from the experience.

## Reflective Essay: 2

With completing the first term in the Constructed Self class, I was able to benefit from a variety of new things from the class, as well as refresh my memory on things that I already knew, just needed a reminder about.

The biggest hurdle in the class for me was time management. I am a procrastinator and always have been, so completing assignments on time was and still is a challenge for me. I have not come to a full solution to this problem yet, but I did make changes in my life as to how I can manage time management. I found that it was easier for me to focus on homework if I was outside my dorm room, because when in my dorm, I would usually mess around on the internet or take naps. I don't think realistically I will get over procrastination anytime soon, but I can manage it.

With hurdles came hidden strengths I discovered about myself. I've never thought of myself as a leader, but because the class used group thinking in more than one occasion, I found that I am a good leader. I communicate my ideas to the group while trying to balance the ideas of others so the group can come to an agreed upon decision. Obviously, this can benefit me no matter what career I decide to go into, because the ability to take control of a situation and still remain diplomatic with colleagues is a valuable asset to have. Other than this, I can't think of any other strength I discovered. I don't think of myself as egotistical, but honestly, I am pretty happy with the way I am and find it hard to think of strengths I don't already possess.

The highlights of the course for me would probably be the creative portion of the exploration paper. I enjoy expressing myself through art more so than I do in any other medium, so it was fun to be able to take my thoughts and feelings and turn them into a painting.

As for other highlights and insights, I can't really think of any. To be honest, this class didn't really give me any new revelations about anything. Like I mentioned before, it is very difficult to persuade my mind to think differently than it already does. I was already aware of most of the issues we discussed in class, such as the weighing privilege project and the discussions on Malcolm X. Often I found myself spiteful due to the fact I had to write papers that seemed, in my mind, to be repetitive and thusly irrelevant to my education. Also, I didn't enjoy the exploration paper only because it was basically an autobiography and if there's one thing I like less than writing about other people it's writing about myself, in length no less.

Not saying the class was a total waste of time; I did enjoy classroom discussions and Theresa was a wonderful instructor, as well as Lisa. Just I feel I didn't learn anything of value that I already didn't know or hadn't thought about before. I'm a horribly cynic person, and all the talk on social issues and people really disinterested me, because misanthropy's my middle name. I suppose this is an insight, although I was already aware of it in the back of my mind; I need to learn how to care about society, because whether I like it or not I'm a part of it myself. And I am aware that if this "social handicap" of mine isn't abated by the time I have a career, I can be in trouble, especially if I am working with people most of the time.

As for things I would like to delve into this coming term, as well as the one after that, I honestly haven't thought about it. I guess I would enjoy learning subject more about how they relate to individuals rather than society as a whole. I know both are interconnected, but I'd like to sever the whole community aspect and just focus on self. I feel as if a lot we cover are kind of "no duh" situations, which gets tedious. I'd like to see more creative learning involved, as with the creative piece for the exploration paper. I'd like to learn the skills I'd need in other classes, mainly formatting for certain types of writing assignments, such as the research paper we're doing this winter term. Learning how to write, say, 4-page essays without feeling like I'm filling the gaps with absolute garbage would be a nice thing to learn as well. Also, I enjoy the fact we're reading Frankenstein, because I enjoy reading classic literature that I never find I have time for in a leisure setting. Other than that I tend to feel like I'm just in this until the end of the year, like a sheep in a flock, and I can't help but feeling a certain indifference since I know what my ideal course content would be is not realistic and thusly irrelevant to the class.

My expectations for the class are basically the same as my feelings I just recited in that I don't really have any. I just hope I am able to complete assignments and critically think about the topics we are discussing. And by the end of the term I'd like to be able to pass the class with an A or B.

My education is entirely in the instructor's hands, which ironically, I'm not supposed to allow myself to do after reading Freire in this exact same class. As for self-expectations, again, nothing really comes to mind. I hope I will be a little bit more open and optimistic about things. And if not, then I hope to at least be able to handle such an optimistic class course. I know last term I could become so cynical after what I could only call an idealistic session that I'd be in a horrible mood for the rest of the day, which was both physically and mentally exhausting. But I'm still going to ask why, and challenge ideas brought up in discussions, and I hope that is enough. In fact, I think that *is* enough, plus the paperwork.

Again, I am not trying to be negative in any of this, because I don't feel any of it as a negative aspect to the class. I'm just indifferent, plain and simple, and that's no one's fault but my own. My college experience thus far has also been uninspiring for me; not just this class. I came here hoping to have my eyes and ears opened and to be able to see things differently in the world, but so far this has not happened and it's looking as if it's only getting harder for it to happen. But to end on a better note, I have learned things, although not awe-inspiring, while I've been here and I hope to continue. I love constantly adding to my random knowledge database, just in case I ever go on Jeopardy or Cash Cab.

### Reflective Essay: 3

I have been a student at California State University Channel Islands (CI) for 5 semesters, and over the course of my stay I have grown and learned more than I thought possible. I came to this school from Moorpark Community College already knowing that I wanted to be an English teacher; I had taken numerous English courses and though I knew exactly what I was headed for was I ever wrong. Going through the English program has taught me so much more than stuff about literature and language, it has taught me how to be me. I have learned here how to write and express myself, how to think for myself, and how to find the answers to the things that I don't know. Most importantly I have learned how important literature and language are.

When I started at CI, I thought I was going to spend the next 3 years reading classics, discussing them and then writing about them. That was what I did in community college English courses, so I didn't think it would be much different here. On the surface, to an outsider, I am sure that this is what it appears that C.I. English majors do. In most all my classes I did read, discuss, and write papers; however, I quickly found out that that there was so much more to it. One specific experience I had while at C.I. really shows how integrated this learning is. Instead of writing a paper for my final project in Perspectives of Multicultural Literature (ENGL 449), I decided with a

friend to venture to an Indian reservation and compare it to a book we read by Sherman Alexie. We had a great time and we learned so much more that we ever could have done from writing a paper. The opportunity to do that showed me that there are so many ways that one can learn that are both fun and educational.

The English courses also taught me how powerful the written word and language can be. Words tell so much more than a story. Stories tell about life and the human condition; they bring up the past and people and cultures that are long gone. Literature teaches about the self and the world surrounding the self. From these classes I learned about the world, its people and its history; through literature I learned how we as humans are all related. By writing about what we learn and/or what we believe, we are learning how to express ourselves.

I know that my ability to write and express my ideas, thoughts and knowledge has grown stronger each semester. I have always struggled to put my thoughts on paper in a manner that is coherent and correct according to assignments. I can remember being told numerous times in community college to "organize your thoughts" or "provide more support and examples". These are the things that I have worked on and improved over the past couple of years and I feel that my work shows this. The papers I wrote when I first started here at C.I. were bland and short. In these early papers, I would just restate what we learned in class and what I had found in my research. I did not formulate my own ideas and support them with the works of others. The classes I have taken the past couple semesters have really help me shed that bad habit and write better papers with better ideas. I have learned how to write various styles of papers in different forms and different fields. I feel confident that I could write a paper about most anything and know how to cite and format it properly.

There are a couple of things that I do feel I lack the confidence and skill to perform, and that is what I hope to gain from participating in Capstone. I am scared to teach because I don't know how to share my knowledge with others-students who may have no idea what I am talking about. I hope to learn more about how teachers share their knowledge as part of my Capstone project.