An Inquiry Concerning the Teaching of Critical Thinking in an Advanced Placement Literature and Composition Class

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Graduation Year
2006

Document Type
Thesis

Degree
M.A.

Degree Granting Department
English

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Keywords
critical thinking, discourse communities, defamiliarization, critical classroom, originality

Abstract
This project is intended to serve as an exploratory investigation of inquiry-based teaching in an Advanced Placement (AP) literature and composition course. The rigid curricular constraints of AP courses and the assessment-based guidelines for teaching such courses can challenge the value placed in teaching students to think critically. This project seeks to draw attention to the difficult terrain that teachers navigate when trying to foster environments that facilitate inquiry-based learning while at the same time holding students to the standards set by the curriculum. As an exploratory study, the project aims to identify important issues and questions concerning inquiry-based learning as they have been disclosed by a specific classroom context, that of a twelfth-grade AP literature and composition course I have taught.

In addition to drawing from information and insights, along with personal experiences, derived from a specific classroom context, I examine research and scholarship on the concept of inquiry-based learning. In particular, I consider the scholarly work on invention, discourse communities, and critical pedagogy to offer the most relevant insights to the issues I identify and the questions I raise. The first part of this study consists of examining such areas of scholarship in "dialogue" with one another. That is, I consider the implications the various scholarly works have for one another, particularly in the context of the AP course I teach. Because this study is exploratory in nature, the second part of my project consists of detailed summaries of the major scholarly works I have examined. Thus, this project serves as a preliminary inquiry for future study, and it serves to help teachers make informed decisions about developing and implementing inquiry-based teaching strategies that can take root in the rocky terrain of assessment-based curricula.

Scholar Commons Citation
The literature class gives a teacher the opportunity to engage students in discussions about the ideas expressed in literary texts. This exercise benefits students in two ways: firstly, it gives them an opportunity to express their own ideas about life and relationships, values and beliefs, and interests and dislikes; secondly, it forces them to use a more complex set of structures and a more "advanced" range of vocabulary. As a language teacher in a literature class, you can exploit this situation by engaging students in group and pair activities to read sections of texts and then give their