

Integration of Technology in English Language Arts: A Women Self-Image Unit

~ by Jayne Marquedaunt

This is my 28th year teaching. I always wanted to teach a class about women's issues and experiences, and last year I got lucky and was able to teach Women in Literature. My first exposure to the Teaching for Understanding model was in the Small Learning Community Four sponsored summer workshop in June, 2001. When I took my second summer workshop which was last summer's 3-day Humanities by Collaborative Design Institute, I knew that I wanted to work on Women in Literature.

My generative topic was Women's Self-Image / Awareness. I wanted to capitalize on the fact that the young women, who are my students, would be leaving school and heading out into the world. This might be their last chance to explore issues, like self-image, before graduating.

I wanted them to understand about women's place in the world, how self-image is influenced by the media, how eating disorders affect image, how we should value ourselves

as women, and on and on. I saw the need for this also because when I was in high school, no one ever addressed these issues in the classes.

So I knew where I wanted to go as a class; it was the getting there that was the issue. The framework really helped me think about the "How" of getting there. I have to say initially I found some of the language of the frameworks to be confusing, but I totally understood what I wanted to teach, so I hung in there. I could see that my goals were embedded in a lot of activities I was planning and books that I was choosing, but I needed help getting to those goals, articulating them, and then looking at the activities to see how well they would move the class to the goals. Working with Joan Soble and Holly Samuels helped everything fall into place. I appreciated their help in planning, and the more we worked together, the clearer the frameworks became. As a result the planning became much easier.

I was lucky that I could

teach this unit twice, and I have learned many things from teaching it each semester. For example, this semester I expanded the unit, both lengthening it time-wise and adding more topics, such as the influence of the prom and graduation on self-image. I also added a short technology assignment and a technology culminating activity which involved using the Internet. For next year I plan to work a novel—Breath, Eyes and Memory—into the unit because it deals with self-image, especially as family and culture affect it.

I have learned that the frameworks model works very well; it just takes time and talking to the right people. I learned that Essential and Understanding Questions helped me focus on what I wanted to teach. I learned that it is good to incorporate ongoing assessments and provide a variety of lessons, especially the kind of variety that lets the students use their real life knowledge and their artis-

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tic skills. I also learned that I can teach and think differently from the way I have always done.

I see now that I can take risks with my teaching and the class will work out well. I've come to understand that I can reach my personal teaching goals because the framework gives me a real way to work through how to reach them.

One other important point . . . a definite highlight of the course, related to the self-image unit, was the "Phenomenal Woman Tea" that the class held in March. Important women in the girls' lives were invited; each guest received a flower as a memento of the affair. The girls decorated and set up the room, and the desserts were made in the Culinary class. It was a highlight because it celebrated us as women with a positive self-image. As a group we read the poem "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou which has become our theme song. This celebration truly expressed the essence of the self-image unit, but it was my work with the TFU framework that helped me help the girls to appreciate themselves in a world that can often make it hard for women to feel like "phenomenal women." Thank you.

The title of the course is "Women Self-Image Unit." You can view this at <http://www.errinc.com/ccdt.htm>.

The site presents the self-image unit of the "Women in Literature" course offered by the CRLS English language arts department. It shows not only the understanding goals but also the performances and assessments of the students. The major emphasis of the site is to show how the understanding goals have been carried out as well as to show actual student work. The self-image unit's role in the course is to help students examine, through reading various literature and then discussing and/or writing about it, the issues related to self-image. This site is a result of participation in a collaborative PROJECT COOL Grant. The members are Jayne Marquedant, language arts teacher; Dr. Reza Namin, Dean of Curriculum and Program at our Small Learning Community Two; Joan Soble and Wendell Bourne, members of the PROJECT COOL Grant leadership team; and Holly Samuels, our school librarian.

I have had a long association with the Cambridge Public Schools. I graduated from CHLS in 1965 and then attended Boston State and received my Bachelors from there in English education and then went on to Northeastern University for my Masters and CAGS degrees, also majoring in English education.

My teaching career began at the original Fundamental School in 1975 where I taught French and reading. The program was great, but in the early part of my career there were many adjustments and changes I had to make in my life to be a teacher. Often, I was overwhelmed with the work involved, but I enjoyed what I was doing.

When Fundamental moved back from North Cambridge to the present campus, I began teaching English. The courses were traditional college preparatory courses, similar to ones I had as a student at CHLS. Since teaching English was what I had prepared for in college, I was excited to be given the chance to teach it. Though I was happy with the curriculum I was given to teach, in the back of my mind, I wanted to teach a class about women and their issues as found in literature. I finally got the chance three years ago to teach "Women in Literature." I love teaching this class because I would have liked to have been a student in such a class in high school. As a teenager, I was never one of the "cool kids" in school; I had all the typical teenage issues. My self-esteem was low, and I did not have much confidence as a student and as a young female. I wondered if my clothes and

hair were stylish enough to be accepted by the popular kids. Wearing make-up was important to me, but my mother did not allow it. I thought make-up would help me feel better about myself. I thought I had to look, dress, and act like the "cool kids" to fit in and be popular. Dealing with boys, relationships, and hormones were topics outside of my thinking as well. I didn't know how to cope with any of these issues, let alone feel a part of the female world. This course would have given me the chance to be aware of the world of women, their issues, and their struggles. I would have received and discussed information that never came up at home. I needed a place where I could feel good about myself as a woman and as a person.

The emphasis of the web site is to show how the understanding goals have been achieved through sequences of performance, instruction, and assessment that are reflected in the student work.

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The Teaching for Understanding in Brief

The Teaching for Understanding framework, developed during the Teaching for Understanding research project, is an approach to thinking about curriculum and instruction that is designed to help teachers guide students toward genuine understanding. It specifies five interacting elements to use in planning and carrying out instruction when understanding is the goal.

GENERATIVE TOPICS:

topics selected for study that are both important in some discipline and engaging to students and teachers.

UNDERSTANDING GOALS:

explicit and public statements about what understandings have been developed and achieved, so that students can grasp what they are expected to learn.

THROUGH LINES: course length understanding goals.

PERFORMANCES OF UNDERSTANDING:

opportunities for students to use what they know actively and thoughtfully in new situations in ways that develop and demonstrate the understandings regarding the understanding goals.

ONGOING ASSESSMENT:

frequent checks by students and teachers of how understanding is developing throughout a sequence of instruction. Ongoing assessment is formative (a learning experience) and not merely summative (a final judgment such as a score or grade).

A Teaching History of "Women in Literature"

Teaching for Understanding is the planning basis for the self-image unit which culminates my "Women in Literature" course. The web site shows not only the understanding goals but also the related performances created by the students. The emphasis of the web site is to show how the understanding goals have been achieved through sequences of performance, instruction, and assessment that are reflected in the student work.

The self-image unit's role in the course is to examine through reading, writing, and discussing various pieces of literature, the issues related to self-image. These readings include poems, short stories, and magazine articles as well as novels.

At this point a short history of the course might be helpful. I became interested in Teaching for Understanding three summers ago when I chose to attend a three-day summer workshop sponsored by Project Zero and teachers from School 4 at CRLS. I took the workshop because I was starting to feel that I was not being as successful in my teaching as I would like to be. One outcome from the summer workshop was that I recognized that I was not adequately connecting my classroom to the outside world, nor was I making connections between the various pieces of literature and overarching themes of the course. What I was teaching were concepts, ideas, and works of literature in isolation. Where were the connections to what was happening in other classrooms and other subjects? How could I make my class relevant to my students' lives? How could I make a connection to the world outside of school?

Through collaborating with Joan Soble and the members of the CCDT team, taking more workshops, and frankly, after doing some deep thinking, I started to focus on improving my curriculum to deliberately help students make these

connections. It was not easy because my approach to teaching had been a unit-by-unit approach, or read a work of literature, have some discussion, have a test and then move on to the next piece of literature. When I first implemented my new approach of using teaching for understanding, the students didn't seem to "get it." I was having trouble "getting it" and teaching it. The task seemed overwhelming at times.

As a result I decided to focus only on my Women in Literature class as the place where I would strive to make these connections and to use the TFU framework to think through my plans. The first year the result was creating a self-image unit as part of the course, and the second year incorporating into the unit the novel *Breath, Eyes and Memory* with the self-image unit while aligning the unit as a whole with the English Language Arts department's learning expectations. My goal was to have the students connect the self-image issues of the characters in the book to the self-image issues discussed in the unit.

The next step has been the creation of the self-image unit web site, featuring the understanding goals, assessments, and performances. The site contains pedagogical tools, such as throughlines and understanding goals, many examples of student work, such as collages, essays, evidence of students examining the site, and even my personal biography.

I hope this many faceted site has something useful for everyone. The five understanding goals have lessons for achieving each goal, each accompanied by an assessment. There are a series of throughlines that can be adapted for other TFU work. It's even fun to view all the students with their collages or read their comments about their work. There are questionnaires on self-image and eating disorders as well as sources of information for anorexia and

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bulimia as well as appropriate short stories and poems with discussion questions all relating to self-image.

By using the framework I have been able to take the self-image unit as well as the themes of women's struggles and finding one's identity, and connect these themes to the books and to the lives of each of us. The young women, particularly, have been able to learn not only about women's issues and coping strategies from the literature but also about themselves as learners and people. An important result is that the connections and frameworks are becoming clearer.

I have enjoyed this curriculum work; I wish I could have started this earlier in my teaching career. I was reluctant at first to change my teaching, fearing failure, but I feel good now because the unit and the course have proven to be successful. The students have enjoyed being part of the class, and their comments have indicated that the course has given them something to think about.

The web site and the course are my legacy to the high school and the CRLS English Language Arts department. Anyone anywhere can access the site and see the TFU goals and the ways they have been implemented, and, I hope, sense how much fun this site was to create and what a great learning experience it has been for me and the students. ▼▲