Reflection on Applying Metacognitive Approaches in the Classroom
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A. What specific questions related to the teaching of your discipline were you seeking to answer?

      i. How can I get my students to engage more thoughtfully in their reading and interpretation of literary texts?

      ii. How can I get my students to engage more purposefully, with their own voice, in their writing?

B. What metacognitive strategies (Student engagement techniques) did you employ?

      i. Silent Socratic dialogs in a literature class – after I read a poem and provided some context, students would freewrite a response about what they found most significant in the poem for 4 minutes. They would give their writing to the student on their right. They would read the commentary and write a response (for 3 minutes), ending with a question, then return it to the first student. They would read the comments and write a reply to the question, and at the end add a question of their own. Repeat 2 or 3 more times. Following the written portion of the activity we would have a group discussion about what they wrote and discovered about the poem and their various interpretations.

      ii. Personal Essays in a Literature and Nature class – after looking at models of nature writing in which the authors wrote from a 1st person point of view, I encouraged students to keep a nature journal in which they write daily observations and commentary after spending at least 20 minutes in a quiet place outdoors. I also allowed students to write their analytical essays about the authors and their texts in a more personal style as we saw in some of the models.

C. What were your findings?

      i. In the Silent Socratic dialog, the students were engaged more thoughtfully and their interpretations went much further and deeper than a normal class discussion in which only a few students speak and the others agree. The students were pleasantly surprised at the varied responses to the poem and said they got a lot out of hearing all the different interpretations. Our follow-up discussion was much more interesting and far-ranging than a typical class discussion. The students claim they understood the poem much better, but in addition they had a better understanding of how to interpret a poem as a result. They learned that writing their

thoughts and asking and answering questions with other students was critical to developing a better understanding of what they were reading. They said they never would have interpreted the poem that well without this process.

    ii. Personal Essays – the students enjoyed the relaxed expectations that came with writing in the 1st person. As a result their writing was clearer and more meaningful. Their writing began to take on a more intentional tone as they wrote more directly about what they observed and what that meant to them. They were agreed that this approach made them more interested in their subjects, made them pay more attention to what they were saying in their writing, and that they enjoyed writing them much more than any typical academic essay.

D. What surprised you most about your findings?
    i. How quickly the students engaged with these strategies and put themselves into the assignment – it seemed to reveal a hunger for this kind of personal engagement with active learning. In fact, they didn't see it that way; they saw it more as fun and creative.

    ii. It didn't really surprise me too much, because I know we are all more energized by activities in which we can be creative and find personal meaning.

E. How has your approach to teaching evolved as a result of participating in this initiative?
    i. I feel more confident in my experiments with new strategies. By working with others and sharing ideas, I don't feel so alone in challenging the status quo, but I also feel energized by the positive feedback and stories from other faculty. I am more comfortable trying new things and I'm anxious to share ideas with my colleagues.

    ii. By sharing our work with other Sepche faculty, I realize the challenges are common throughout higher ed, but we are onto some state of the art practices in helping our students develop long-term learning.

F. What are your next steps?
    i. Build in more opportunities to use both of these strategies in my classes.

    ii. Look more closely at how my courses are designed in order to build a more intentional, scaffolded approach to develop reading and writing skills.   For example, use the personal essay to build

confidence in voice, then introduce levels of formality in logical, purposeful gradations.

      iii. Create a mechanism for collecting student feedback about the effectiveness of these strategies. I currently use a mid-term survey in some classes, but I need to develop one for every class.

G. How will you share your findings with your colleagues?
      i. I'd like to continue working with this group, if we are to continue.
      ii. I've offered to chair the Faculty Development Committee of the Faculty Senate in order to have some input regarding development opportunities for sharing best practices and current theory.

      iii. Plan some workshops or presentations to share some of these activities.

H. What improved practices did you discover or confirm in the process of participating in this project?
      i. Confirmed that there is brain-based research supporting the kinds of student-centered learning activities that I have found effective.
      ii. Confirmed that colleagues are finding many of the same strategies effective in their own courses, in their own ways.
      iii. Confirmed that engaging the students in ways that stir their curiosity, creativity, and collaboration is much more effective than traditional models of teaching in higher ed.
      iv. Confirmed that student-centered learning activities require more intentional planning, more improvisation, more risk-taking, and more letting go of control on my part.

I. Would you participate in a future project?
      i. Certainly.

J. If you answer to question "I" was "yes," what might you do differently to improve student outcomes?
      i. Start to apply these strategies earlier in the semester, gauge their effectiveness, tweak them for improvements, and take advantage of opportunities to share ideas with other faculty more often throughout the semester.

K. What variables or outcomes would you have liked to measure that weren't measured in this effort?
      i. I'm not sure yet, but I would like to collect more written feedback from students about the strategies that work (or don't) for them – so far I have mostly received oral feedback.

ii. I need to revise some of my assessment rubrics to capture the effects of these strategies.

L. What variables or outcomes did you feel could not be measured but would be important to measure?

i. Excellent question (difficult to answer). The excitement, the level of student concentration and engagement, the creative input, the fun factor, the mindfulness (or presence of mind in writing and speech), the sense of meaningful learning – these are very important, if not essential.

ii. I read somewhere that: "Not all important things can be measured, and not all things that can be measured are important." It doesn't mean we stop looking for ways to measure important things, but just because we have trouble measuring something doesn't mean it isn't important. Maybe some of the most important things cannot be turned into data.

3. Please provide any other feedback you would like to share that would contribute to our collective understanding of your experience of the project and that might inform our future efforts.

Now that we've got a year of this done, it would be nice to have more opportunities to work with SEPCHE and share our findings. I got a lot of inspiration from our group meetings and would like to continue.