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CLE Design Proposal

(1) Application of Constructivism: “The Definitive Detective”

I will create a CSILE (computer-supported intentional learning environments) for the purpose of providing an environment that will structure the study of detective fiction as a literary form. Students will have access to resources and readings that will enhance their explorations.

The environment will include a database into which students can enter discussions, notes, reflections and other processes, and retrieve their own or other’s contributions for the purpose of articulating ideas and preparing written responses to various ill-structured discussion themes.

(2) Learning problem

Today’s students don’t read. They watch television or use a computer to surf the Web, play games, and/or download music. They are missing one of life’s great pleasures—reading well-written prose, engaging with an author to share thoughts, feelings, other viewpoints, fantasy, intense situations, logic, everything that is available in the world’s continuing process of creating literature. One aim of this activity is to introduce students to the satisfactions of reading for the sheer enjoyment that a book can provide.

A second, but equal objective is to introduce students to *The Puzzle*;

. . .the detective novel does not fall under the head of fiction in the ordinary sense, but belongs rather in the category of riddles: it is. . .a complicated and extended puzzle cast in fictional form. . .Mankind has always received keen enjoyment from the mental gymnastics required in solving a riddle; and puzzles have been its chief toy through the ages. (Wright, 1927) 2

Today’s students watch *Law and Order* or *CSI* on television, with no sense of the significance of what they are watching. So the issue here, the “learning problem” is for students to tangle with *The Puzzle*, to read the great detective stories, and encounter the intricacies that have fascinated our species for generations.

(3) Target Audience and context.

High school Juniors and/or Seniors; this will be a quarter-long segment of their college-prep English class (Literature). (Schwartz (1989)2 proposes a 6-week period for this “unit”) OR a college freshmen English class.

These are students with experience in “the Canons” of English and American literature, that are bored, and don’t read for enjoyment that much, that need to be piqued by new ideas regarding

the study and appreciation of fiction writing. Detective fiction is an accepted genre for teaching such a study.

It is characteristic of human nature to become comfortable with what is familiar to us. As one finds satisfaction in reading the detective novel and is led to recognize that a basic formula exists, an eagerness to read more of this genre should follow. There are five basic elements in the detective story: the milieu, the victim, the criminal, the suspects and the detective(s). The plot centers around the question of “who done it,” which keeps the readers’ attention, building excitement from the elimination of several suspects to the surprise ending. . . . (Clayton, 1989) 3

Beginning as an expression of conservative, bourgeois, ethnocentric Anglo-American values, the detective story has expanded to accommodate a much greater diversity of social values and ideologies until, in the aftermath of the Cold War it seems on the verge of becoming a truly global mythos. The stages through which this transformation has occurred suggest that the genre had a dynamic that kept pushing against the seemingly rigid boundaries of the formula. Cawelti in (Delamater, 1997)

(4) **General Knowledge Domain**

English/America literature; some interdisciplinary features: Reading, writing, history, social studies, science

(5) **Learning Outcomes** (objectives)

- Learners will encounter The Puzzle, the complicated and extended problem around which Detective Fiction is built.
- Learners will gather information, and experience the solution of The Puzzle.
- Learners will stretch their own reasoning skills and logic through the detective’s solution to The Puzzle.
- Learners will explore cultural issues—life beyond their own—in detective fiction.
- Learners will discuss ethics as described in the stories.
- Learners will explore dynamics which lead to actions.
- Learners will consider the logic of human motivation.
- Learners will engage with some of the problems of the human situation: racial injustice, alienation, greed, ambition, loneliness.
- Learners will discover significance and interplay of plot and character. (Buehl, 2001) 137, 153
- Learners will be able to distinguish *detective* fiction from other forms of mystery writing.

- Learners will improve their abilities to make valid judgements about literature by experiencing good books, investigating and discussing what makes them memorable.
- Learners will develop an appreciation of, even an enjoyment of, the genre being studied. They will begin reading detective fiction for their own amusement and gratification.
- Learners will experience reading-with-understanding at several levels (short stories, novels, essays).
- Learners will actively experience use of a database.

(6) Learning activities

- Access to a Web resource that provides scaffolding for a study of the form of literature;
- Web resource includes a database, where information from students can be “browsed, retrieved, linked and commented on” (Land, 2000) 8;
- Students work in groups on selecting the specific stories or books, and in the examination of same;
- Students collaborate on responses to the various discussion points, as well as providing their own insights;
- The on-line environment provides avenues to the goals of the course, including multiple methods of collaboration, discussion and reflection;
- Students engage in purposeful activities relating to the goal of the environment: students go directly to the literature source to read the work of the highlighted authors, and then evaluate, compare, and comment upon the result;
- Students will engage in writing activities based upon their reading and their discussions;
- Provide on-line readings, references to televised objects, and possibly streaming video to illustrate movie renderings;
- Students will write essays for on-line and F2F discussion by peers.
- The course includes “face time” in the classroom for team activities, along with the on-line discussion and reflection opportunities
- Several of the evaluation activities are presented as team projects: ex: character and plot studies are collaborative. (Buehl, 2001) 137, 153
- Sample reading activities include books and short stories, which will be selected by the students for focus and discussion.
- Database will include discussions, notes, reflections, which will be retrievable for use in required writing activities.
- The on-line environment allows students to work on activities on their own

(7) Assessment

Students will select two sources, from different periods in the history of the detective novel.

(One must be classic; the other Golden Age, Hard Boiled or Current) They will read each work, then study it for plot and characters. Discussion questions will be proffered at intervals: questions relating to detective fiction generally, and to the different historical periods. Students will discuss, and the discussion will be archived in the database. Students will also write their own reflections. Students will interface on teams for certain of the activities—studying The Puzzle, plot and character, and author background—based upon the historical periods (i.e., groups will be formed around selections) and students will discuss, and make notes based upon team interactions. They will mentor and review each other in these activities, and build comparisons and dissonances as they move through the works.

All of these activities will be available to the students for a final essay, in which they will compare their two works, and discuss the comparisons. They will share these essays on-line with their peers.

References

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