



California Acceleration Project

Supporting California's 112 Community Colleges
To Redesign their English and Math Curricula
And Increase Student Completion

<http://cap.3csn.org>

Relevant, Thinking-Oriented Curriculumⁱ

Sample Classroom Practice

Source-Based Argument Essay

This assignment occurred about 7 weeks into the 18-week semester of Katie Hern's accelerated class at Chabot College, an integrated reading and writing course one-level-below college English that is open to students with any placement score. Students could choose either of the following topics for their first formal synthesis essay, which was written after two less-challenging in-class papers. The assignment drew upon two chapters of the nonfiction book *Opening Skinner's Box: Great Psychological Experiments of the 20th Century*. Students were required to evaluate conflicting views on a debatable issue and write a 4-page essay arguing for their own position, using ideas and information from the text to support their stance. Guidelines for the assignment included: "Show that you have carefully read chapter 6 or 7 and that you have fully digested and considered the different viewpoints and evidence on all sides of the debate," and "Show you are really thinking about the topic – these are complex questions, so don't settle for easy answers."

Prompts

What causes addiction?

Chapter 7 features a debate on what causes addiction. Alexander argues that drug addiction is not caused by physical dependence; instead, he says, it is a "way of adapting to difficult circumstances" (Slater 161). Other addiction researchers argue that drug addiction is a physical response to the chemicals in drugs (see Slater 162-165). Where do you stand?

Were Harry Harlow's experiments on monkeys ethical?

Harlow's research taught us about the nature of attachment and what infants need. But in the process, he did a lot of damage to the monkeys in his experiments. Do you think his research was ethical? Do the benefits (knowledge) outweigh the costs (harm to living creatures)?

Sample Classroom Practice

Statistical Analysis Quiz

The following was part of the first quiz in Myra Snell's Path2Stats class, a one-semester pre-Statistics course with no minimum placement score at Los Medanos College. During week 3 of an 18-week semester, the quiz asked students to analyze a spreadsheet of data from 189 pregnant women along six attributes: age (18 or younger, over 18), low birth weight (birth weight less than 2500 grams: yes, no), smoking status during pregnancy (yes, no), labor (history of premature labor: yes, no), physician visit during first trimester (yes, no), and mother's weight at last menstrual cycle (100 pounds or less, greater than 100 pounds).

Prompt

Medical researchers conducted a study of the factors potentially associated with low birth weight. Low birth weight is a concern because premature or very small babies are at greater risk for a variety of health problems. They collected data from 189 women who gave birth at a hospital in Massachusetts in 1992.

- (1) Choose a variable that you think may be associated with low birth weight. Explain why you think this variable may be associated with low weight births.
- (2) Pose a question to investigate that involves the variable you chose and the variable low birth weight.
- 3) Create a graph to explore the relationship between the variable you chose and the variable "low birth weight." From your graph, create percents that will provide a convincing comparison to answer your question. Show enough work to demonstrate how you calculated the percents. In your answer also write an accurate interpretation of the percents.

Extra credit: Make a statement about the relative size of the percents to describe whether the percents are significantly different in size.

ⁱ Excerpted from "Toward a Vision of Accelerated Curriculum & Pedagogy: High Challenge, High Support Classrooms for Under-Prepared Students," by Katie Hern, in conversation with Myra Snell. Forthcoming monograph, 2013. LearningWorks: Oakland, CA.