Know, Be, Do: Structured Reflection in First-Year Seminars

FYE Conference

20 February 2012

KALAMAZOO COLLEGE

Kalamazoo College

- Kalamazoo College is a private liberal arts college in southwestern Michigan
- 1,400 students, with a student faculty ratio of 14:1
- Founded 1833, oldest college in Michigan, a long history of educational innovation
- The K-Plan: combines rigorous coursework in the liberal arts with in-depth experiential programs

Kalamazoo College

- 85% of students study abroad through immersion programs for three to nine months
- Over 70% of students participate in course-based or co-curricular service-learning
- Over 50% engage in career internships or externships
- All students are required to complete a senior capstone project, known as the Senior Individualized Project (SIP)

Kalamazoo College

- Kalamazoo's National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data and Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) data suggest that the K-Plan is a powerful combination
- Students need to connect the disparate parts of the K-Plan through deliberate, intentional, ongoing reflection—this needs to be structured to happen

First-Year Seminars

- Fall term, required for all first years
- Fully credited academic courses, small, taught by full-time faculty
- Topics chosen by faculty; all feature:
  - Critical thinking and discussion
  - A variety of types of writing (short assignments with opportunities for revision)
  - Information literacy ("Survivor in the Library")
  - Intercultural-international component

Structured Reflection Project in K's First-Year Seminars

- Pilot program in six seminars funded by the Teagle Foundation (2009, 2010)
- New project for pilot program using SR in six seminars and in related **ACADEMIC ADVISING**, funded by FIPSE (2011-2014)

Teagle Project Goals

- Pilot project to make Structured Reflection a more intentional part of the First-Year Seminar, First-Year Experience, and advising programs
- Help students learn this critical tool of experiential learning and understand its relevance to their K-Plan

Teagle Project Goals

- Practice SR so that it becomes a habit of mind and heart
- Develop a set of common reflection questions that can be used in first-year courses
- Develop a set of rubrics to be used in grading and responding

Goals for Today's Session

- Deepen our collective understanding of structured reflection
- Provide practical, usable, replicable models of structured reflection
- Take some time for our own reflection and consider how we can build it into our work

Structured Reflection Exercise

- Choose something you know something about—a topic, an idea
- What is your knowledge base? (books, research, classes)
- Put this information in the left-hand vertex of the triangle

Structured Reflection Exercise

- At the top vertex, list your assumptions PRIOR TO GAINING YOUR KNOWLEDGE about the "knowledge item" you just identified
- At the right vertex, list your experiences with this item

Structured Reflection Exercise

- On the arms of the triangle, describe some of the learning that has taken place through the intersection of these three points
- In what ways would your learning be diminished without the intersection of these three components? Reflect!

Structured Reflection Triangle

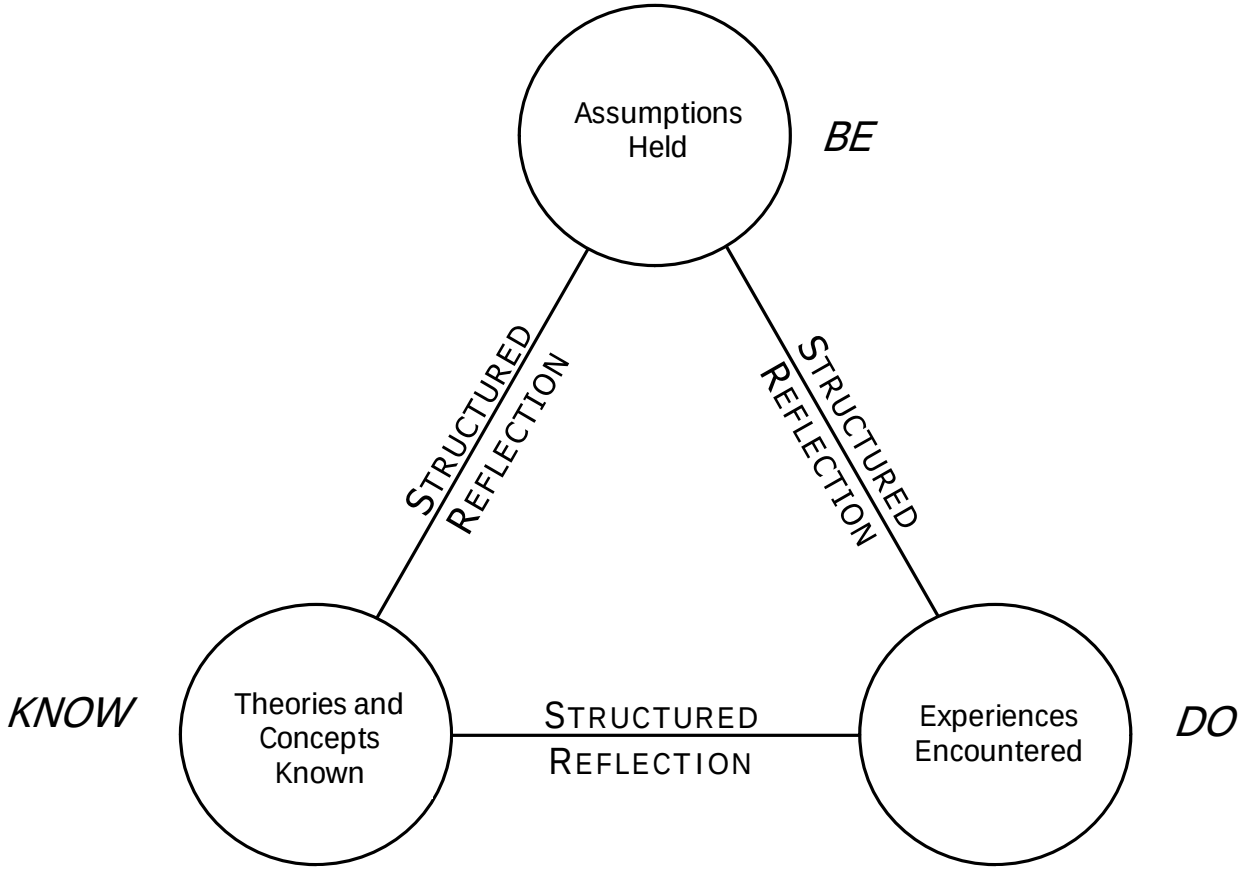


Figure adapted, through many recursive conversations at Kalamazoo College, from: "Culture, Religion, and Nationality: Developing Ethnographic Skills and Reflective Practices Connected to Study Abroad," by Carol S. Anderson and Kiran Cunningham. In *Integrating Study Abroad Into the Curriculum: Theory and Practice Across the Disciplines*, Elizabeth Brewer & Kiran Cunningham, eds. Stylus Publishing, 2009.

What is Structured Reflection?

Reflection is **CRITICAL THINKING** that supports learning objectives by expecting students to make astute observations, to demonstrate inductive or deductive reasoning skills, and to consider multiple viewpoints, theories, and types of data.

- Connors and Seifer, CCPH, 2005

What is Structured Reflection?

Reflection is **INTELLECTUAL WORK** that differs from the dominant academic culture by intentionally engaging the whole person, connecting community experiences with academic content, and cultivating students' awareness of themselves as active participants in public life.

What is Structured Reflection?

Reflection is an **ACTIVITY** that contributes to the creation of educational environments in which a diverse population of students thrives by acknowledging the influence of people's identities and contexts and inviting students to construct and share their own sense of meaning.

Structured Reflection…

- Can take many forms
- Can be used with different teaching styles and in a variety of class settings
- Allows students to draw on personal experiences, where they are "experts"
- Develops analytical and critical thinking skills
- Connects theory with practice

Structured Reflection in Advising

- What do you care most about accomplishing while at K?
- What is your favorite class this quarter? Why?
- How have your K experiences to date connected to or corresponded with the K-Plan?
- What does breadth mean to you? What does that look like for next quarter/year?

Structured Reflection in Advising

- What were your expectations about (classes/professors/advisors/social life/co-curriculars, goals for your education, etc.)?
  - How have your expectations for the future changed?
  - How have your experiences so far coincided with your expectations?
  - How have your experiences not aligned with your expectations?

Structured Reflection in Advising

- What are some of the academic challenges you have encountered at K?
- What learning tools/study strategies did you use in high school that are working at K? That aren't working?

SR in First-Year Seminars (and Elsewhere) Helps…

- Evaluate process of writing by using in-class short writings ("habits of the mind")
- Use metacognition, asking: How do you approach learning? Or think about learning? Do projects? Write essays?
- Personalize course work, bringing the personal to the content of course
- Understand <u>structures</u> that shape people's lives and opportunities (for example, institutionalized racism vs. acts of personal meanness)

Sample Prompt: In-class Reflection on a First Paper

- Describe your process for writing this paper
- What might you do differently for your next paper?
- If you were to continue working on this paper, what would you try to improve?
- Later prompt: How did your earlier paper contribute to the process of writing this one?

Sample Prompt: End of a Class Discussion

- What was the most interesting thing you heard during discussion today?
- What topics would be worth exploring further? Or, ask a question worth exploring.
- *Can be used in many other contexts*

Sample Prompt: End of Term

- What seminar readings, exercises, or assignments were most challenging, interesting, or rewarding for you? Why?
- What are the most important things you learned in this seminar?
- How might you use this learning in the future?

One-in-Three: Cancer in America
Dr. Laura Furge, Chemistry

- Required structured reflection assignments
  - 1 practice & 3 graded reflections
  - Each no more than 3 pages, double spaced
  - Some revised
  - Responded to and graded using rubric
  - Grades averaged (15% of course grade)

One in Three: Why Are You Here?

- When you considered you choices of FYS, **what drew you to this seminar**? What personal experiences have you had that would lead you to an interest in this course? *[personalizes course]*
- What did you think this course would be about? What did you **hope to gain from taking this course**? *[uses metacognition]*
- What do you know already about cancer survivors? What do you think **the experience of a cancer survivor** would be like? *[connects to service-learning component]*

One in Three: What Does this Mean to You?

- We are nearly finished with *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Skloot). Based on your reading, **how is the Lacks family similar to or different from yours?**
- Think about the support networks available to Henrietta and her children. **Reflect on your own support networks.** What kind of support networks does your family have? What kinds of support networks do you think you will find useful in college? What kind of support do you hope to give others and to receive for yourself? Is any person an "island" to themselves?

One in Three: Survivor Profile

Writing prompt AFTER meeting with your cancer survivor:

What was the most striking thing about your interview? Give specific details that are relevant to describing the most striking part – a quote from the interviewee, description of their personality and/or physical appearance, description of something in their personal space (home or work), etc. Go beyond generalizations such as "I was struck with how brave they were." Or, "I was impressed with how easily they talked about their disease." **Give the details that create these reactions.**

One in Three: Applicable Principles

- Think hard about what you are writing (if it's not interesting, stop and ask yourself why)
- Use sensory information to give "life" to the writing
- Remember details to make the writing authentic (depth)
- Keep revising until this happens
- NOT "*He was wearing dark glasses, brightly colored socks, and Converse sneakers.*"

One in Three: Looking Ahead

CONTEXT

Dr. Vivian Bearing, the main character in Margaret Edson's play *Wit,* has lived her life by the use of intellect and high standards of scholarship, never thinking about her "soul." She has lost the true "soul" of Donne's poetry [her specialty] as he probes the nature of the human soul with heartfelt questioning.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

It is easy when in college or pursuing education to focus on the goal of doing well on an exam, getting high marks, graduating with honors, going to the best graduate school, etc. without attention to development as a person or development of a passion.

One in Three: Looking Ahead

Assignment:

- In what ways have you seen parallels between your own academic pursuits and Dr. Bearing's?
- In what ways do you think you will intentionally try to cultivate yourself as a person with a soul/passion in the coming 4 years?
- What parts of *Wit* resonated most with you and why?

Rubrics and Evaluation

Adapted from Dr. Bruce Mills (Kalamazoo College English Department)

√- , √ , √+	Criteria
	Does the writing represent a **thorough** effort to address writing prompts?
	Does the writing capture the essence of the incidents/experiences/issues through **concrete details**?
	Does the quality of the details presented go **beyond the obvious**?
	Does the description and discussion get at the **complexities** of the incidents, experiences, and/or issues?
	Do the reflections reveal the author's **engagement** with the matters being discussed?
	Does the narrative seem honest and personal? Is the writing fresh and original? Is the writer writing from **personal knowledge or experience**?
	Do the reflections refer specifically to the **readings to illuminate** remarks?
	Have the reflections as a whole shown an **effort to make connections** across experiences?
	Does the writing reveal the risks that lead to striking **insights**? Does the writing reflect insight?
	Is the sequence of the writing logical and effective? Is the writing **grammatically sound?**

One in Three: Survey Findings - Benefits of SR

- 94% agree – SR helped me to think critically about issues related to my personal experiences as they relate to this class and college
- 88% agree – SR helped me to think critically about issues related to this class
- 81% agree – SR helped me to think critically about how the assumptions and experiences I have influence how I learn
- 84% disagree – SR is tedious and not very useful in getting me to think
- Evenly split on favorite prompts (i.e., those that relate personalize, habits of mind, metacognition, SL connection)

n = 32 students from 2009 and 2010

One in Three: Benefits of SR

- Students demonstrate
  - Increased engagement
  - Increased motivation
  - Increased learning/performance

- Supports research on SR in science classes
  - **Promoting Interest and Performance in High School Science Classes** Chris S. Hulleman, *et al. Science* **326**, 1410 (2009)
  - **Writing About Testing Worries Boosts Exam Performance in the Classroom** Gerardo Ramirez, *et al. Science* **331**, 211 (2011)

Teagle Project Reflection: Benefits

- One of the biggest strengths is not just the assignments themselves but also the time for students to reflect in a quiet place before regrouping for discussion.
- In the next term students reported that they missed structured opportunities for quiet reflection.

Lessons Learned

- SR takes many forms
- SR is not "touchy-feely"
- SR can help students improve many types of writing by emphasizing the importance of specificity, the need for pre-writing and revision, the necessity of engagement with the work, etc.
- Once students are comfortable with using the SR triangle in class, transfers to advising easily

Strategies

- Set the table: present a detailed structure and rationale from the beginning
- (Almost all) guidelines and prompts should be detailed and specific
- Vague, too “global” directions and topics can get soggy feedback
- However - open-ended questions can stimulate the imagination

Strategies

- Develop grading/response rubrics to ensure assignment goals are being met and consistently evaluated
- Provide students with rubrics ahead of time to decrease anxiety about expectations

Strategies

- Make structured reflection work in your existing courses, training sessions, service-learning
- Modify existing prompts and assignments
- Share best practices among colleagues
- Involve peer mentors and alums; they are effective partners
- "Name it and claim it:" Say what you are going to do, do it, say what you did, use common language

Strategies: SR is Best When Students Can…

- Draw on personal experiences and be "experts"
- The more relevant the experience, the more effective the response
- Write about out-of-class experiences (interviews with cancer survivors, service-learning projects, etc.)
- Reflect on readings, discussions, films and other materials directly related to course work and shared by fellow students and peers

Student Voices

- "Sixteen people [in a seminar] who didn't know each other can come together and not only discuss the material, but reveal personal connections."
- "A community flourishes if mutual respect and openness of discussion are present."

First-year focus groups, winter 2011

Student Voices

- Students watching themselves learn
  - "I really, really hate to be seen as wrong. This often keeps me from participating. But if I can't overcome the fear, I'll never be right, or even contributing."
  - "I've learned that I can be a leader through my writing and my voice. I now feel that I am not alone in my thinking."

Student Voices

- Learning from the community in service-learning projects
  - "I had not realized how hard it is for some kids to even make it to school, let alone do well. There is a whole world of obstacles to success that I had not really thought about."
  - "There are a lot of prejudices that are present within our society that not only go unnoticed but which are the norm. Seeing things in a new light, especially things which have been ingrained in our lives and minds – assumptions and prejudices based on where we come from, who we are, how we were raised – seeing the things and really thinking about them and challenging them."

Student Voices

- "I learned so much about other cultures during my high school trip to Europe. I was fascinated by everyone and everything I met. I couldn't wait to tell my friends about my trip when I got home, but they didn't understand. Some of my friends thought I was being snobby when I would mention something I did in Europe or how much I missed being in Europe,…… etc."

Student Voices

- Learning about learning
  - "I can handle the workload. I need to make more connections on my own as opposed to a teacher helping too much."
  - "I have a lot of fears, but I am able to tell myself that I have made crossings before and while this one might be a little bigger, eventually I will be able to do it."

Our Voices

- Questions?
- Comments?
- Observations?

Contact Information

- Zaide Pixley, Ph.D., Dean of the First Year and Advising
  - pixley@kzoo.edu, 269-337-5755
- Lesley Clinard, Assistant Director of Academic Advising & Institutional Support
  - lclinard@kzoo.edu, 269-337-5767

Kalamazoo College
Structured Reflection Triangle

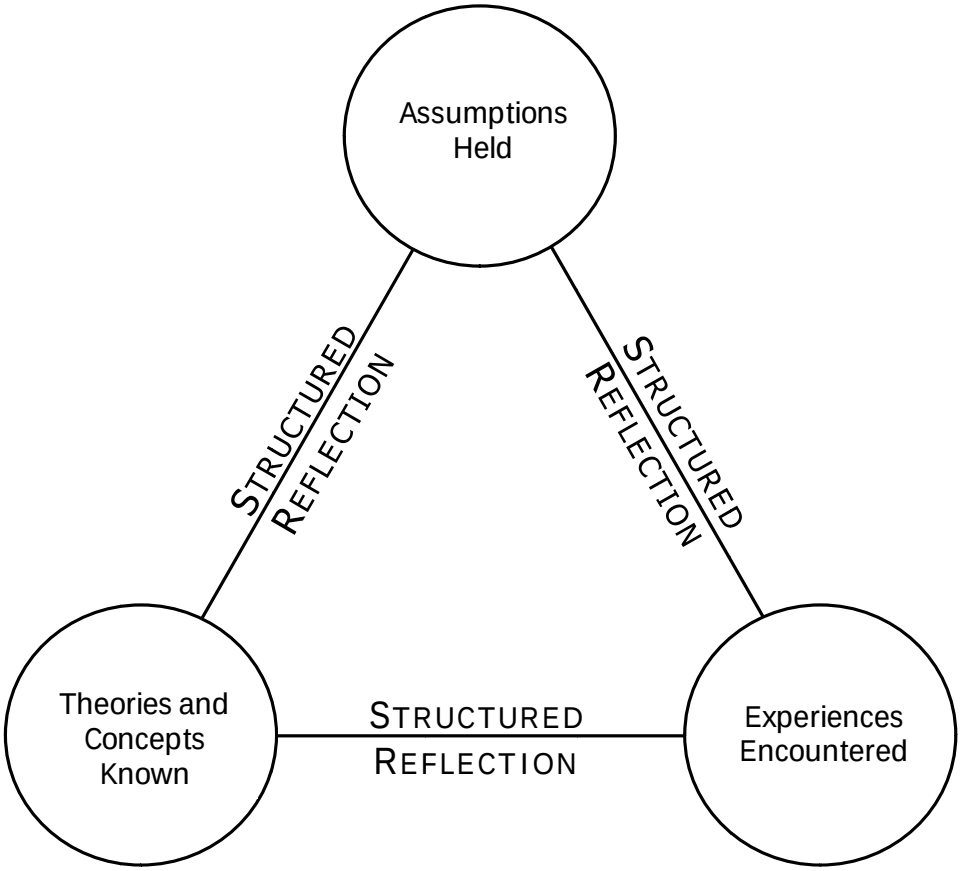
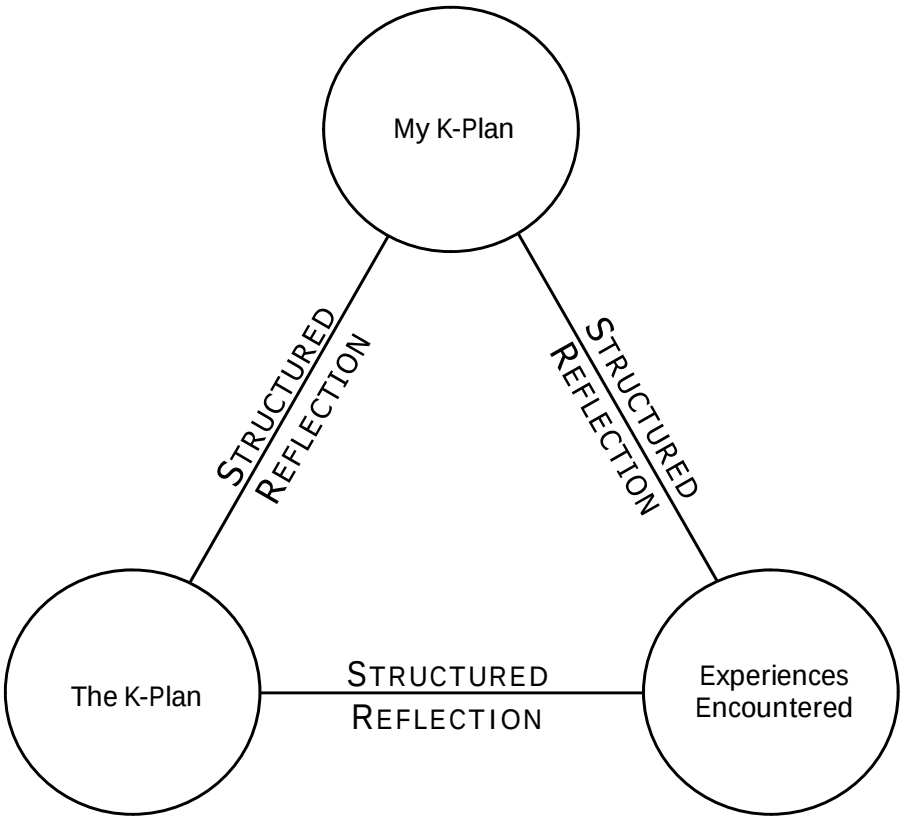


Figure adapted, through many recursive conversations at Kalamazoo College, from: "Culture, Religion, and Nationality: Developing Ethnographic Skills and Reflective Practices Connected to Study Abroad," by Carol S. Anderson and Kiran Cunningham. In *Integrating Study Abroad Into the Curriculum: Theory and Practice Across the Disciplines*, Elizabeth Brewer & Kiran Cunningham, eds. Stylus Publishing, 2009.

Kalamazoo College
Structured Reflection Triangle
For Use in Academic Advising