

Integrated Academic and Ethics Courses: Encouraging Critical Thinking and Promoting Transformative Learning

Alex Jeikner

Deree – The American College of Greece, Greece

Abstract.

At a time when universities are accused of failing to equip students with necessary skills for the future and employers complain that that students lack critical thinking skills, students are said to resist learning and want to transform educational institutions from places of critical thinking into safe spaces for inclusive learning. Based on studies that indicate that discomfort encourages critical thinking, this manuscript argues that integrated writing and ethics courses in higher education encourage critical thinking and thereby foster transformative learning. The ethical component invites engagement with challenging, sometimes uncomfortable social issues, while writing pedagogy helps students feel less overwhelmed without conveying the message they are not expected to handle sophisticated content. By employing Gibb's Reflective Cycle (1998), the author reflects on integrated writing and ethics courses taught for over eight years, together with a philosophy instructor, at a private tertiary education institution. After describing the courses and personal responses to the teaching experience, I evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the course by considering student evaluations through quantitative and qualitative analysis, to understand their attitudes toward the course and their learning; I then analyze potential factors that influenced students' experience. Key insights are that students do not necessarily resist learning but ideas which make them feel uncomfortable as well as that instructor negativity discourages critical engagement; second, that aligned teaching strategies reduce resistance and enhance learning.

Keywords: Gibb's Reflective Cycle, discomfort, writing pedagogy