

2006-7 WTS Project Abstract: "Unpacking a Signature Pedagogy in Literary Studies"  
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I began my Wisconsin Teaching Scholars project by looking at a single assignment in my Introduction to Literature course. Over the WTS Program year, it evolved into an exploration of a signature pedagogy in literary studies, which led to numerous presentations, which then led to co-editing a book on signature pedagogies (to be published by Stylus) with two colleagues from our 2001 Wisconsin Teaching Fellows cohort, as well as writing the chapter on my discipline.

I wrote the following paragraph explaining signature pedagogies in our book proposal: Huber and Hutchings (2005) point out that "Biologists, historians, and psychologists may all agree that they want to foster deep understanding in their college classrooms, but what they mean by deep understanding is different" (4). If what we mean by "deep understanding" varies by discipline, then so too should the pedagogies that most effectively lead to a discipline's deep understanding. Similarly, Wiggins and McTighe (2000) and Fink (2003) demonstrate that the most effective teaching results from identifying the deep understanding we want students to gain in our courses and our disciplines. Thus, generic attempts at helping students learn fall short if they're not connected to the habits of mind of the discipline. Such is the role of signature pedagogies in which "novices are instructed in critical aspects of the three fundamental dimensions...—to think, to perform, and to act with integrity [to the discipline]," thus "disclos[ing] important information about the personality of a disciplinary field—its values, knowledge, and manner of thinking—almost, perhaps, its total world view" (Shulman 2005; Calder 2006).

In my project, I articulate a handful of generic pedagogies in literature courses: the ubiquitous practice of coverage, professorial packing, interpretive relativism, adisciplinarity, and pedagogical narcissism or what Shulman (2004) calls "nostalgia." These generic literary pedagogies at best ignore students' novice practices and at worst reinforce or create misconceptions. Plenty of SoTL work has established the "intellectual land mine" that such misconceptions represent, especially when it comes to thinking disciplinarily (Shulman 2004). My work with colleagues Holly Hassel and Chuck Rybak documents some specific literary misconceptions in a taxonomy that builds on the previous SoTL work in the discipline, particularly Ardizzone, Breithaupt, and Gutjar's attention (2004) to the two most common misconceptions in literary studies. These novice practices and misconceptions mark the beginning of a signature pedagogy, for we cannot teach students to think like literary scholars until we have first confronted what *they think it means to think like a literary scholar*—or their understanding of the discipline and its practices. Musgrove (2006) effectively claims that, in response to students' problematic metaphors for reading, we need to give students "the means to replace those conceptual roadblocks with more effective and empowering metaphors." This point about students' metaphors for reading—the essential activity in literary studies—begins my focus on what teaching and learning through the discipline of literary studies looks like.

If a signature pedagogy is both an "element of instruction and of socialization" for "what it means to learn to 'think like'" a literary scholar, ultimately revealing "the personality of a disciplinary field—its values, knowledge, and manner of thinking—almost, perhaps, its total world view," then a signature pedagogy for literary studies must be represented metaphorically, in the figurative language of the discipline (Shulman 2005; Calder 2006). My project thus focuses on the competing metaphors for how novices and scholars approach literature—solving a text vs. unpacking a text—and looks critically at some of the ways we can help students develop an understanding of the discipline, its values, and its habits of mind through specific performances and course routines that help students recognize, value, and internalize the skills of unpacking.