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"I Can See Clearly Now": But Oh the Pain It Took To Get Here! Why Did I Do This To Myself?

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“I Can See Clearly Now”: But Oh the Pain It Took To Get Here! Why Did I Do This To Myself?

I had Lasik surgery almost 21 days ago. Actually, it was PRK surgery, but I say Lasik because people understand what that is.

Warning: skip down if you are squeamish about your eyes!

Lasik involves cutting a small flap in the cornea, folding it back, and using a laser to reshape the cornea according to computer specifications in order to correct vision. PRK, or photorefractive keratectomy, begins with the outer layers of the cornea being scrubbed off, then the laser makes its corrections directly to the cornea.

The Lasik procedure sounds infinitely more painful, but it is actually less so. Those of you who have had Lasik probably had instant correction and no after effects. Not so with PRK: I was fine for the first two days, but the pain and discomfort began on the third and fourth days. I was plunged into a blurry world for several days. That layer of my corneas had to grow back,

and it took time. I had to miss a class for medical reasons for the first time in about 25 years, and the first time ever at Winthrop.

I have worn glasses since I was ten years old, when I was in the fourth grade. That was 51 years ago. I had about a decade when I wore contacts, and I loved that freedom, until I developed problems and had to stop wearing them.

But now, after a few weeks, I can see! I went to the eye doctor this morning, and she told me my vision is 20/25—and that it is likely to get even better. It still astonishes me, and I am not quite used to it. When I wake up in the morning, I reach beside my bed for my glasses. But there are no glasses there!

Now, here is my analogy to teaching and learning: for our students, taking a challenging class is like have PRK surgery on the eyes. The challenging class provides a new way of seeing, a wondrous way of seeing. But it takes

time. And it can be uncomfortable, even painful. Change comes, but it is gradual. And as my eye doctors keep telling me, you have to be patient.

I think about students in our critical thinking course, CRTW 201. Or my graduate students in critical theory, ENGL 602, the most challenging course I teach. Both classes give students a new way of seeing, a new way of seeing that is actually a new way of thinking. The class seems painless at first, but as challenging concepts pile up, as writing and thinking gets more complex, discomfort and even pain sets in. I have had students drop the class at that point—although most remain and endure the pain.

The class where I introduce the elements of reasoning to my CRTW students is about to happen, and that is where the discomfort will come for most of them. What are all these concepts? (One of which is concept.)

“Teaching and learning is not a strictly linear process. We have to remember, and our students have to understand, that the path seems impossible at times, but after we make it through, especially through the hard parts, we will understand at journey’s end.”



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Why do I keep confusing “assumptions” and “implications”? That whole circle seems like a big, blurry jumble.

In ENGL 602, Derrida and deconstruction bring the pain. How can I find meaning in a concept that says there is no fixed meaning? And why even bother if all meaning is indeterminable?

At Saturday’s Conference on Teaching and Learning (which was awesome, by the way), Dwight Dimaculangan was making a presentation about the way he is incorporating metacognition in some sections of introductory biology. My ears perked up when he said that studies have shown that it takes 21 days to master a new habit or skill.

So, it has been almost 21 days since I had the eye surgery. I am almost there! Ah, but another study says nine weeks. That matches up well with the two months they tell me it will take until my vision is really settled.

But think about either time span in terms of our classes: sometime between 21 and 63 days for our students to develop a new habit or acquire a new skill, from three weeks to a bit over

two months. For the really hard skills, then, the semester is two-thirds over before our students catch on.

That means they have to be patient—but it means that we have to be patient and caring and understanding, too. I think about my eyes from my perspective, but Dr. Metwalli, my optometrist, has her perspective too. She has seen me four times since the procedure, and she will see me at least once more.

The first time, four days after the surgery, I was a basket case. My wife had to drive me to the appointment and nearly lead me by hand into the office. That whole week, I began to have doubts. Why had I done this to myself? Was this the biggest mistake of my life? To say I was miserable was an understatement.

But I was better just two days later, when she took the bandage contacts off. (I left that painful detail out of my description.) Each day as I woke up and reached for my phantom glasses, I could see more clearly. Day by day, my eyes grew stronger and my vision sharper and clearer. Now, almost 21 days later, I feel like a new person with new eyes.

Our students are in that period between 21 and 63 days right now. Some of them have got it: their eyes are clear, their vision is clear. Others are still struggling—but they are improving too, each day, even if they do not realize it.

Hang in there with them. Help them along. Guide them, as we have guided many students before them.

Teaching and learning is not a strictly linear process. We have to remember, and our students have to understand, that the path seems impossible at times, but after we make it through, especially through the hard parts, we will understand at journey’s end.

My surgeon had a classic rock station playing while he was shooting a laser into my eyes. As he finished, the song that began to play was “You Ain’t Seen Nothing Yet.” I took that as a positive sign.

Our students ain’t seen nothing yet. But with our help and patience, they will. And the sight is going to be glorious!



Thanks For Helping Make the Teaching and Learning Center Work!

Winthrop's Teaching and Learning Center offers a wide variety of sessions each year for faculty and staff, on teaching, technology, professional development, and personal development. From leading class discussion to mastering the Smart podium to tenure and promotion to cooking soufflés, the TLC tries to make sure that all faculty and staff receive

the kinds of professional and personal development that will make them better teachers, administrators, and employees.

To offer this programming, the TLC depends on the talent, expertise, and generosity of our faculty and staff. We do not have a big budget to bring in outside speakers and experts. Even so, we are able to offer engaging,

timely, and valuable sessions every year on a variety of topics. We thank those who have offered their time and talent in past years.

We also thank those of you who have attended TLC sessions. Your time is valuable, and we appreciate you taking some of it to enrich yourself through professional and personal development.

A Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The TLC for several years has been offering a service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology,

and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't

at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: <http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop> See you there!

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At
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The 2nd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning

Many thanks to the presenters and attendees at our 2nd Annual Conference on Teaching and Learning, Saturday, January 31, 2015. It was a great day! Make plans to join us next year. Special thanks to TLC program coordinator Dana Bruneau for making the conference run so smoothly!

Thought For the Week

"The common eye sees only the outside of things, and judges by that, but the seeing eye pierces through and reads the heart and the soul, finding there capacities which the outside didn't indicate or promise, and which the other kind couldn't detect."
--Mark Twain