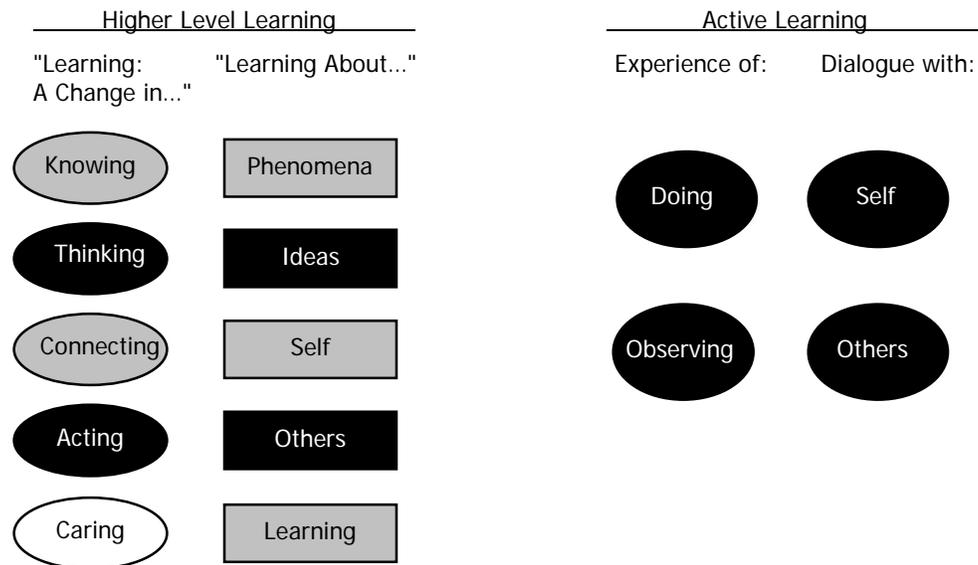


## *English: Stronger fiction writing built around an imaginary town*



A fiction writing course by Dr. Patrick Parks, Elgin Community College, Illinois (1997)

### **Course Design:**

Parks suggests that helping students to become better citizens and to understand their place in the world should be an essential part of the mission of higher education. In the hopes of promoting this mission, Parks organized his fiction writing class around students creating an imaginary town. The class chose the geographical location of the town and its physical features, history, and legends. Students populated the town's businesses and homes with characters of their own creation that interacted with one another in different scenes. The class as a whole layered story upon story, checking to make sure that one version of an event did not conflict with another, until the end of the semester when each student received a compilation of everyone's work.

The fictional town framework prompted students to rely less on other authors for inspiration, and to focus less on perfecting a particular genre of fiction, such as romance, drama or horror. Students looked to their own communities, families, and lives for inspiration rather than emulating the plots and characters of well-read authors. The class also drew upon the importance of communities, the complexity of their problems, and the cooperation necessary to resolve those problems. Students created a network of interacting fictional individuals and learned to rely on each other, as a classroom community, to create a fully-functioning, fictional town.

### **Higher Level Learning:**

In creating their fictional town, students worked together to strengthen their personal creative thinking skills (**Thinking**). The act of meshing their own ideas with those of others furthered a better understanding of the process of thinking about and writing fiction (**Thinking, Acting**), as well as of the process of community-building in general (**Thinking** about **Ideas** and **Others**).

### **Active Learning:**

Students gained inspiration and skill in fiction-writing through both their own writing experiences (**Doing, Dialogue with Self**) and through observing and coordinating with the writing processes of others (**Observing, Dialogue with Others**). The inner focus and the outer focus were both equally essential to the learning experiences in this course.

Parks, P. (1997). The Community in the Classroom/The Classroom in the Community. In J.K. Roth (Ed.), Inspiring Teaching (pp. 148-157). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc.