

Using Lectio Divina in the Analysis of Poems: Basis for a Student-Centered Learning Pedagogy and Transformative Learning

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Abstract — This study was aimed at introducing Lectio Divina as an alternative tool in the analysis of poems among the 38 Grade 12 Senior High School students at Holy Name University (Tagbilaran City, Bohol). The primary objective was to determine its effectiveness in promoting student-centered learning and transformative outcomes, as well as to identify challenges in its implementation and propose a supportive framework. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-method design, the research began with the introduction of a learning guide to assist participants in applying Lectio Divina in analyzing literary texts. This was followed by a survey to gather feedback on its effectiveness and challenges in poem analysis. The results show that Lectio Divina can be effectively integrated into literary studies, with challenges being manageable. The study concludes that Lectio Divina has potential as a valuable pedagogical tool, and further research is recommended to explore its application, along with other contemplative practices, in analyzing texts in educational settings.

Keywords — *Alternative Tool for Learning, Lectio Divina, Poem Analysis Student-Centered Pedagogy, Transformative Learning*

I. Introduction

For centuries, *Lectio Divina* had been kept mostly as a contemplative practice among monastic communities, most notably, the Benedictine religious order. Listening was a big part of their formation and *Lectio Divina* aided in bringing listening to transformation in his monks through careful, reflective reading of the scriptures in their search for meaning and wisdom (Keator, 2018).

However, in recent years, this monastic exercise emerged as a significant instrument, becoming a tool “to transform teaching and learning and appreciate its powers to connect fragmented forms of curriculum as a route to the contemplative life, one that recognizes and values

all dimensions of being human” (Dalton et al., 2019). *Lectio Divina* promoted a more contemplative and holistic learning experience.

Keator (2018) believed that *Lectio Divina* led the student to an encounter with characters and great thinkers that would “engage in critical inquiry, open up their senses to feel and intuit deeper meaning, and respond meaningfully and thoughtfully to what they are discovering”. *Lectio Divina*, Lichtmann (2005) says, assisted students and teachers to reconnect to and transform their selves.

As a contemplative approach, it invited the students and teachers to be present “to their own lived experiences with greater awareness and provide a deeper connection to the material they study by allowing meaning to emerge through experience” (Gunnlaugson, 2014). This interconnection drew the student into a whole new spectrum of meaning, and that’s what made the experience contemplative and holistic.

While *Lectio Divina* was a very common tool in religious contexts, its usefulness in literary studies was still a more recent innovation that invited further exploration. J.L. Bagshaw (2014) pointed out that only a few studies have been conducted on these contemplative practices, especially in terms of their impact on the educational sector. Marlon Blake (2018) noted, in his study, that this was a significant gap in research because of its importance in highlighting “the impact and use of contemplative pedagogy practices.”

Despite the growing interest in *Lectio Divina* as an educational tool, application within mainstream educational contexts, such as poem analysis, remains relatively unexplored. This study, therefore, sought to address this gap by exploring the application of *Lectio Divina* in poem analysis. By investigating how this contemplative method can be used to analyze poetry, the research aims to demonstrate its potential as an alternative, student-centered approach that fosters deeper engagement and supports transformative learning. The findings will contribute to understanding how *Lectio Divina* can enrich literary studies and enhance pedagogical practices within modern educational contexts.

Research Questions

The study aimed to introduce *Lectio Divina* to Senior High School students at Holy Name University in Tagbilaran City as a tool for poem analysis to determine whether this tool can be used as a basis for a student-centered learning pedagogy and transformative learning.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Can *Lectio Divina* be an alternative tool for poem analysis?
2. Are there challenges attendant to the process of applying *Lectio Divina* to poem analysis?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This particular study was framed through the following theories: (1) David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and (2) The Reader Response Criticism Theory which was particularly advocated by Rosenblatt (1978) and Iser (1978). Grounding the study through these theoretical frameworks provided the lenses through which to explore the use of *Lectio Divina* in the analysis of poems and how it was linked to validating a particular student-centered pedagogy and transformative learning.

Experiential Learning Theory describes the process of learning which involves the extraction of concepts from the texts, and evaluating their effectiveness based on the student's experiential reaction to them, enabling the concepts to be applied to varied situations in the student's life. According to its proponent, Kolb (2015), learning new knowledge was created through a reflective and holistic experience in the learning process.

This theory was based on the following propositions: (1) "Learning is best facilitated by a process that draws out the students' beliefs and ideas about a topic so that they can be examined, tested, and integrated with new, more reformed ideas," and (2) that it was "a holistic process of adaptation to the world. Not just the result of cognition, learning involves the integrated functioning of the total person – thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving" (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). With this theory, the success of the learning process was determined by the transformation that happened in the learner's life. It brought experience to the forefront of the learning process, and this was what differentiated "experiential learning theory from rationalist and other cognitive theories of learning that tend to give primary emphasis to acquisition, manipulation, and recall of abstract symbols" (Kolb, 2015).

Kolb's proposed theory was usually illustrated by a learning cycle that was composed of four steps that, he believed, covered all areas of a learner's learning experience. These four steps were concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015; Healey & Jenkins, 2000). The concrete experience happened when the student encountered a new situation or even revisited an existing experience. It led him to the next stage which was reflective observation where he reflected on this experience in an attempt to deepen his understanding of it. Based on this reflection, the student entered into a stage of abstract conceptualization where the student consciously or subconsciously theorized, classified, or generalized his experience to generate new information. Finally, he reached the stage of active experimentation where the student now applied the new insights or conclusions of his experience in the real world. Once he reached this stage, the student once again entered into a new cycle of encounters with a new experience.

Through this four-stage cycle, Kolb (2015) was able to propose that experience can be translated, through reflection, into concepts, which can then be used as a guide for future reflections on new experiences (Healey & Jenkins, 2000).

Supplementing the concept of Experiential Learning Theory was another theory known as the Reader Response Theory, which was also another framework for this study. While the Experiential Learning Theory pointed to the necessity for experience as a vital factor in the reflective and holistic learning process of a student or learner, this theory zeroed in more specifically on the locus, which was Literature and the learning process involved in reading literary texts.

Probst (1994) acknowledged that in this proposition, the experience called for a “respect for the uniqueness of the individual student and the integrity of the individual meaning”. In this theory, the literary text must always be read in conjunction with its connection to the student. Meaning is created when the student places the text on his own experience and vice versa. Scholes (1989) confirmed this concept when he compared the reading of text and the reflection of one’s life to belong to the same intellectual process. For Scholes (1989) “Learning to read books is not just a matter of acquiring information from texts, it was a matter of learning to read and write the texts of our lives.” To read was not just to exercise an academic process but to “accept the... satisfaction we may achieve in life.”

While several experts have made their proposals based on their understanding of the concept of student response, this study looked only at the two key pioneering contributors of this theory, Rosenblatt (1978) and Iser (1978), who both believed that a literary work only comes into existence through a transaction between the student and the text. For Iser (1978), “a text... can only come by way of ideation, and so the structure of the text sets off a sequence of mental images which lead to the text translating itself into the student’s consciousness.” Rosenblatt (1978) agreed with Iser (1978) in believing that the text is both a stimulus and blueprint: “The text is a stimulus activating elements of the reader’s experience – his experience both with literature and with life... the finding of meanings involves both the author’s text and what the reader brings to it.” In other words, the meanings derived from the reading of the text are reflections of the student as well as the text through its interaction with him (Kim, 2004).

Based on this theory, Thomson (1987) proposed the developmental model of reader-response, which outlines the various stages a student experiences when engaging with a literary text. At the initial stage, the reader achieves a literal understanding, focusing on the information presented without engaging in analysis. As the process deepens, empathy emerges, where the reader begins to relate the text to their own life, considering not only actions but also their consequences. This leads to the analogy stage, where the reader gains insights into their own life by making connections between their personal experiences and the events or characters in the text.

As the reader progresses, they enter the reflection stage, which involves a deeper understanding of other people’s motives, allowing them to evaluate the characters and themes within the story. Following this, the evaluation stage enables the reader to compare the author’s social and cultural values with their own, broadening their perspective. The final stage, recognition, marks an awareness of the reading process itself, where the reader begins to reflect

on the relationship between the author and the text, ultimately exploring their own identity as a reader. Through these dynamic stages, the reader moves toward a deeper understanding of the text's social and ideological elements, while also developing their interpretive skills.

These two theories supported the process of *Lectio Divina* because it mirrored what these theories advocated and this meant that *Lectio Divina* drew heavily into the reader's experiences when analyzing texts and embodied the full meaning of the texts through the reader's personal response to it.

The practice of *Lectio Divina* is enriched by four distinct senses that guide readers in deriving meaning from texts. According to Casey (1995), these senses provide a multifaceted approach to interpretation. The literal sense pertains to the historical context and the author's intended message. The Christological sense introduces an allegorical dimension, placing the text within a broader narrative or situation. The behavioral sense reflects the moral implications of the text, shaping the reader's beliefs and guiding their actions. Finally, the mystical sense elevates the reader's experience, fostering a deeper desire for spiritual growth and a closer relationship with the divine.

Consequently, these four senses align with the stages of *Lectio Divina*: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). Together, they encourage students to engage with their lived experiences, promoting greater awareness and deeper connections to the material they study. As Dalton (2019) emphasizes, this approach allows meaning to emerge organically through embodied experience, transforming the reading process into a holistic and reflective practice.

Moreover, *Lectio Divina* facilitated Reader-Response Criticism by looking at how both advocated for the active participation of the reader, not only in reading the texts but in providing meaning to the text and the process. In other words, a literary text is only brought into existence when "a reciprocal bond between the text and the reader is created" (Iser, 1972). Both emphasized that only through an interaction with the text can meaning be extracted or developed.

Thus, *Lectio Divina* manifested these theories in supporting student-centered and transformative learning. The four steps or movements of *Lectio Divina* emphasized drawing from the reader's active engagement and experiences to create the meaning sought in the process. *Lectio Divina* assisted in the reading of literary texts and produced reflective and holistic learning experiences. *Lectio Divina's* approach to reading texts according to the four senses appealed to an experiential approach to learning which finds meaning to the texts according to the reader's response to it.

II. Methodology

The researcher employed a sequential explanatory mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. This dual approach enhances the validity of the findings, as the quantitative data supports the qualitative insights, creating a robust interpretation of results.

Participants

The participants in this study were the Grade 12 Senior High School students enrolled in the Contemporary Philippine Arts course during the second semester at Holy Name University in Tagbilaran, Bohol. Out of the ten class sections, one section with 38 students was selected for participation, as it provided a sufficient number of participants to evaluate the effectiveness of *Lectio Divina* and the proposed learning guide.

The selection criteria ensured that participants had foundational knowledge in literary analysis, particularly poetry since Contemporary Philippine Arts was the only subject offered during the semester with a literature component. The Grade 12 students were chosen for their capacity for self-reflection and engagement in guided activities.

Instruments of the Study

For this study, the researcher used a survey questionnaire to gather data from the participants. The questionnaire asked from the participants their impressions of using *Lectio Divina* in poem analysis through close-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions asked the participants to respond with a yes or no to the given questions, while the open-ended questions asked the participants to give, in their own words, their impressions or assessments relative to the challenges of the process.

Procedure

The researcher first sought the opinions of the Principal and Vice Principal for the Integrated Basic Education department at Holy Name University who were very much aware of the demographics of the high school environment and who were the key contacts in providing the researcher with onsite information about the number of class sections taking the course Contemporary Philippine Arts. A letter asking for their permission was also sent to their offices containing details about the criteria used by the researcher in choosing the class section to be involved.

Once permission was obtained, the researcher established contact with the teacher who was handling the Contemporary Philippine Arts subject of the selected section. The instructor was asked to assist the researcher in presenting the study to the class and to serve as the on-site facilitator. The on-site facilitator, then, distributed the Informed Consent Form. These forms sought the participants' consent for adults and parental consent for minors.

The activity was implemented by providing the respondents with the poems to be analyzed. The poems were accompanied by a learning guide, containing a series of questions or instructions, to assist the respondents in the various steps or movements of *Lectio Divina* and to help them to focus entirely on this approach and not be tempted to use other means of literary analysis. The guide was structured in a way that the respondents were able to take notes if it helped them perform the process better. The guide as well as their notes remained with the respondents after the entire process was done.

After all accomplished instruments were retrieved, all responses were tallied and tabulated to present a picture of the result for both the potential and challenges.

Data Analysis

The researcher tabulated the responses against the total number of participants. The initial set of data involved their responses in the form of yes or no for the questions relative to the potential of the *Lectio Divina* in the classroom setting. A weighted mean was applied to quantify these responses, providing a nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives.

On the other hand, the comments were compiled and subjected to thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of common categories and themes that emerged from the participants' experiences, particularly the challenges, in implementing the process.

Ethical Considerations

In observance of the ethical procedures in conducting research, this study faithfully adhered to the highest ethical standards in the conduct of the study. The manuscript was reviewed by Holy Name University's Ethics Review Board to ensure strict compliance. Before the conduct of the study, the researcher complied with the requirements for conducting the study, such as permission letters, and obtaining assent (if the participant is under 18) together with their parents' or legal guardians' consent. The researcher ensured that communication and transparency were strictly observed in disseminating the information to be able to make well-informed consent with their participation.

For purposes of transparency, the researcher does not pose nor is he in a position that will create a conflict of interest regarding this study. The study is purely an academic function and does not involve any monetary or other forms of compensation which would create bias on the part of the researcher. However, the researcher may provide some form of compensation, token, or gift to the on-site facilitator for his assistance with implementing the study but none to the participants.

III. Results and Discussion

Tables 1-2 present the participant's experience with *Lectio Divina* as a tool for poem analysis and the corresponding challenges attendant to the process.

Table 1 Lectio Divina as a tool for poem analysis

Question	YES		NO	
	n	%	n	%
Were you aware of <i>Lectio Divina</i> before it was introduced to you as a tool for poem analysis?	15	39.47	23	60.53
Did you find it easy to use?	36	94.74	2	5.26
In your poem analysis, has <i>Lectio Divina</i> led you to discover deeper insights into your own life or experiences	37	97.37	1	2.63
Would you recommend using <i>Lectio Divina</i> to analyze literary texts in the classroom?	37	97.37	1	2.63

Table 2 Perceived challenges attendant to using Lectio Divina

Codes	Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Struggling with the process due to a lack of experience Struggling to be open to experience 	The challenge with a lack of experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of familiarity with language or context Lack of familiarity with the process or concepts and skills required Challenge in being able to connect to the poem and its message Lack of availability of experts and resources 	The challenge of familiarity with the process of <i>Lectio Divina</i> and the lack of useful resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding the capacity for patience Finding the capacity for mental discipline Finding the capacity for focus and concentration 	The challenge with emotional and mental discipline requirement to successfully focus on the study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding the time or schedule to do it Being challenged with finding the right pace suited to the particular user 	The challenge of developing an appropriate schedule and finding a comfortable pace
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding the right level of comfortability Finding a safe space to do it Struggling with the capacity to deal with the emotional reactions 	The challenge of comfortability with the process

Discussion

Table 1 indicates that many students had some knowledge of the process beforehand, but this was not a majority based on either personal experiences or other exposures from the media or religiously based areas. The remaining 60.53% were unfamiliar with *Lectio Divina* from before the study; thus, this was their first proper exposure to the process. The study, therefore, presented the participants for the first time with an opportunity for experience and acculturation.

Moreover, most of the participants did not struggle to apply the *Lectio Divina* while making the analysis of the poems, even though it was the first time that they had come across the process and hence could understand and apply it. This may be because of the friendly and positive process itself, besides, of course, the supportive learning guide. In post-pandemic learning environments, Buque (2024) noted that students have higher capabilities for self-directed learning, which allows for "collaboration, creativity, cooperation, and communication." Their adaptability could have been one of the reasons why they easily adapted to the concept of *Lectio Divina*, which was unfamiliar to them. Yet, 5.26% reported that it was a process not easy to become comfortable with, probably because this was their first exposure to it. Although this percentage is small, it nevertheless suggests that certain aspects of *Lectio Divina* were found challenging or counter-intuitive by some.

These data also show that *Lectio Divina* significantly helped the participants to reflect upon themselves and be better understood personally, as 97.37% of them affirmed it. This supports the contention of Dalton et al. (2019) that *Lectio Divina* "invites students into their own lived experience with greater awareness, thus allowing for deeper levels of connection to course material." This implies that the contemplative nature of the process allowed the participants to derive insights from the poems beyond their intellectual understanding, hence facilitating personal discoveries and emotional resonance. It therefore points to the fact that *Lectio Divina* helped the students access the intellectual meaning of the texts and their emotional, and experiential dimensions.

Finally, 97.44% of respondents agreed that *Lectio Divina* has a place in classroom literary analysis. This is also in line with international studies underlining the importance of embodied learning. Dalton et al. (2019) write, "Though standardized educational models often separate mind from body, *Lectio Divina* integrates them, offering new possibilities for a more humanized educational experience." In essence, then, these findings present a strong recommendation to incorporate *Lectio Divina* into conducting a literary analysis. It reached almost unanimous approval by participants, thus improving both understanding and interpretation in the reading of literary texts and, hence, constitutes a valuable addition to educational practice.

Table 2 outlines the common themes and repeated ideas derived from participants' responses. One of the biggest difficulties in *Lectio Divina* for participants was a general lack of experience. Many stated that being at the tail-end of an unfamiliar process inhibited them from fully engaging at first. This novelty bred fear of whether they were doing it "right," if their way was good enough, or even if they were wrong at all. Many even remarked on being caught up in mental blocks, which prevented them from looking objectively.

Another challenge was how to work one's way through the process itself. *Lectio Divina* carries its own language and context and several participants found this confusing. They felt lost when trying to interpret what was being asked of them, which made it harder to connect deeper

into the poems themselves. Many suggested that extra resources, guides, or references might help explain the process better.

Moreover, some respondents even made comments about mental and emotional discipline in *Lectio Divina*: indeed, maintaining the steady, slow pace of the steps is bitty; there is no shortcut. Others felt they couldn't focus for so long a time because they usually get distracted by things that surround them. This postulates that the reflective nature of the process can be very stressful to people not customarily used to such deep concentration.

Other challenges included time management. Many participants had difficulties finding time to fit the activity into their schedules, due to school work, extracurricular activities, and responsibilities at home, even when they felt the activity was quite valuable. The fact that they needed to do this by themselves, rather than within a group they were part of, added even more pressure to find the time to do it. As it would be, balancing the steps of *Lectio Divina* with the business of everyday life was quite a challenge.

The final significant challenge was comfort on the physical, mental, and emotional levels. Some described very extreme emotional responses in the process itself, while for others, it was difficult to find a quiet, personal space in which to work. Most wanted to be left alone but could not find a suitable setting, which again made them self-conscious with a desire to deepen into the poems.

While thought to be challenges, these experiences highlighted what could be done more effectively for others in the future. And while *Lectio Divina* was valued, it requires thoughtful introductory and supporting steps so that people might more fully benefit from it.

IV. Conclusion

This study highlights the potential of *Lectio Divina*, traditionally a contemplative tool for biblical studies in monastic communities, as an effective alternative for learning in secular contexts. The results suggest that *Lectio Divina* is an effective tool in guiding or assisting the reader in extracting meaning from the text and allowing the meaning to bring the reader into deeper insights into his own life or experiences, resulting in a change or progression in his beliefs or mindset. This study also revealed that *Lectio Divina* is not a difficult process even for those who do not have prior experience or familiarity with it.

This suggests that *Lectio Divina* could be integrated into educational curricula across all levels, from early childhood to graduate studies. Its inherent flexibility allows for adaptation to age-appropriate activities, making it a valuable addition to diverse learning environments. Furthermore, this study identifies a gap in current educational practices, advocating for a re-evaluation of pedagogical approaches to incorporate contemplative practices like *Lectio Divina*.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of integrating such practices into various educational frameworks and investigate additional strategies for implementation.

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