

REFLECTIVE TEACHING INQUIRY

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Like the courses I teach, this reflective teaching inquiry is built around what my students learn and say: the knowledge they hammer out through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking critically and creatively together in my classrooms.

With the goal of providing readers of this teaching portfolio with a lively and well-grounded account of the highlights of my teaching, I have drawn on some of the qualitative research methods I employ in my scholarship. Gathering together a large quantity of comments students have made about their learning experiences in my classes, I analyzed those comments in search of themes. The themes I discovered in my students' writings provide the structure and content of this reflective document.

To illustrate and illuminate these teaching themes, I have placed key excerpts from students' remarks in the text boxes sprinkled through this essay. I therefore ask my readers to pay special attention to the contents of the text boxes, as they present a chorus of student voices to accompany, enhance, and affirm what I will say about my teaching.

A brief methodological note: Students' comments were drawn from three different kinds of sources, each of which carries with it distinctive kinds of authority and, perhaps, limits on authority. Each quoted excerpt is labeled to show from which kind of source it came.

- *Anonymous course evaluations* ("a.c.e."). Comments hand-written by students on the backs of their op-scan evaluations of my teaching at the end of each semester. Due to the anonymous nature of these evaluations, I am unable to secure permission from authors to be quoted. I have indicated the course and semester in which the quoted comments were written.
- *Student portfolio prefaces* ("s.p.p."). When my students submit their course portfolios (collections of research projects, response journals, and other written work) near the conclusion of each semester, each student must provide a "preface" or "introduction" to her portfolio. Among other things, I encourage students in their prefaces to discuss what they learned, obstacles they encountered, and surprises they experienced. Most prefaces do not provide material that illuminates my teaching, but some do. Excerpts from portfolio prefaces quoted here are from students who signed forms giving me permission to quote them. I have indicated the course and semester in which the quoted comments were written.

- *Letters of recommendation* (“l.o.r.”). These are letters, some of which are presented in their entirety in the preceding section of this teaching portfolio, that I solicited from students who I thought would be insightful and articulate in describing their learning experiences with me. I have identified the author of each letter excerpted here in my reflective teaching inquiry.

LEARNING AS TRANSFORMATION

As a result of the readings, coursework, and instruction, I feel that I am a better teacher, a better writer, a better thinker, and a better citizen. What I have done in this course will continue to impact my teaching throughout my career.
(a.c.e. for Eng. 409.03, “Writing Assessment in Middle School and

I want my students to learn, but I also want them to change. I want them to emerge from my course with the vivid and satisfying experience of working as a learning team rather than as an isolated individual student. I want them to experience real research—research conducted for an urgent human purpose, read and used by a real audience—rather than research as an academic exercise without lasting or far-reaching

meaning or value. If they are constitutionally quick to speak and enjoy speaking at length, I want them to learn to listen more and to be more succinct. If they are inclined to hide out in silence during class discussions, I urge them to use their response journals as a tool for rehearsing and trying out their questions and insights so they arrive in class ready to contribute verbally.

I want them to see themselves and their subjects of study in new ways, to see surprising new possibilities and connections within English Studies and the teaching of English and between English Studies and the rest of the world.

By discussing the “map” of English studies, I saw concrete evidence as to how English related to so many other topics than literature, grammar, and rhetoric. My mind opened again as I considered parts of English that I have not considered before. Through the research presentations, I have heard and seen parts of English that I may not have been exposed to at this time. . . .

I feel that I have strived towards a goal of trying a different way of thinking, and feel that in this class, I have succeeded. I have found many things surprising and interesting at the same time; things that I had never really considered before in the English language.

(s.p.p., *English 100*, “Introduction to English Studies,” Spring 2004)

I envision my students as entrepreneurs of learning, people who will not only fulfill a course assignment but who will go out into the world able to identify problems to be solved and questions to be answered. I want them to have hands-on experience with the messy,

communal, exciting, risky business of attempting to change the world for the better through rigorous research and convincing rhetorical craft. I want them to become someone who does not wait to be told what needs to be done, but who actively seeks out opportunities to do improve the world and who quickly and comfortably lays her or his hands on such work. My teaching methods are specifically and consistently designed to move students from a problem-solving frame of mind to a problem-identifying framework.

I design my courses, activities, and assignments to promote the construction of knowledge, but I also design them to engage students as deeply as possible in the course content so that they will emerge from the course as a changed person, more ready to take on the professional and civic responsibilities awaiting them, more ready to transform their worlds.

... I think my greatest accomplishment in the class was how my mindset changed as I evolved from a graduate student to a graduate student preparing to enter a professional community. I came into this class still very much a naïve first-year Ph.D. student, but I feel like I am leaving a more critical, more thoughtful scholar and researcher of composition studies.
(s.p.p. for English 497, "Research Methods in Composition Studies," Spring 2004)

PUBLICATION OF STUDENTS' RESEARCH

One way in which I stretch for transformation is by requiring my students to conduct research for a real and urgent purpose and to place that research before a real audience. In most of my undergraduate courses, each student is required to submit her most successful and best developed research project for inclusion in a sourcebook we publish (in hard copy and on the worldwide web) at the end of the semester. Students respond energetically to the knowledge that their research will be assigned reading in future sections of the course, and that it may well find an even broader readership via the worldwide web.

When my graduate students undertake what we call our "communal change project," they join a team of researchers striving not just to gather and analyze knowledge on the topic of the course, but also to change the world in ways relevant to the topic of the course. In seminars on writing assessment that I taught during the 1990's, we conducted communal change projects on comprehensive exams for English Ph.D. candidates and the University Writing Exam. We submitted our research to the relevant decision-makers (the Department of English Graduate Committee and the Writing Committee), and we believe we contributed constructively to changes recently made or planned for each of those assessments here at Illinois State University.

But no communal change project matches the ambitious scope or the potential impact of the Illinois State Portfolio Assessment of Writing (ISPAW) Project. This was the communal change project I proposed to students enrolled in my course in "Writing Assessment in Middle and High Schools" (Eng. 409.03) in spring 2003. This group of practicing middle-school and high-school teachers pooled their experiences and their research efforts to argue

convincingly to change our state's formulaic timed writing test scored by an out-of-state testing agency to a portfolio assessment evaluated by Illinois teachers.

The ISPAW Team presented at two professional conferences during 2003 to make its case, and subsequently published two articles in the statewide journal for secondary English, *Illinois English Bulletin*. It appears to me that ISPAW's impact is not yet finished. In 2004, the Illinois state legislature cut all funding for statewide writing assessment in Illinois. In the ensuing assessment vacuum, the ISPAW Team attempted to position portfolio assessment as an appealing and practicable alternative to the old (then defunct) writing test.

For details of a participants' perspective on ISPAW, please see Michael Boyd's letter of recommendation and the photocopy of the ISPAW article "Making Statewide Writing Assessment Rigorous, Valid, and Fair: The Illinois State Portfolio Assessment of Writing (ISPAW)," both found in the "Artifacts" section of this teaching portfolio.

Meanwhile, it may prove helpful for readers of this teaching portfolio if I point out that, as the ISPAW Project moved beyond the semester in which I taught English 409.03 and out of the classroom and into professional conferences and a regional teaching journal, my work with the ISPAW team changed from "instruction" to "mentoring."

BUILDING A LEARNING TEAM

In every course syllabus I compose, I present my students with this paragraph explaining the significance and logistics of one of the most important ideas shaping my teaching: the learning team.

"I feel very strongly that we learn best when we work as a learning team. This means that every member of this class should not only know the names and contact information

As I reflect on this course . . . the first thoughts that come to my mind is the strong "Learning Team" that has been formed. Professor Broad has done an excellent job of setting the stage for fellow classmates to come together as a community of learners. This course is probably the first [I have taken] in which the classmates truly care about each other, know each other's names, discuss literary topics openly—including out of class, e-mail each other with questions or suggestions, and want to see everyone in the class succeed.

(s.p.p. for Eng. 295, "Teaching Literature and Writing in the Middle School," fall 2003)

(phone, e-mail, etc.) of every other member of the group, but also know everyone's: topics for the various course projects; special resources and talents they bring to the group; and special needs and areas of interest. The concept and practice of the learning team also places heavy value on class participation, including attendance, preparation, and a high level of professional engagement while in class."

The impact of the learning networks we create in my classes is one of the things about which my students comment the most in their course evaluations and portfolio prefaces. It is also one of the things about my teaching that is the most important to me and of which I am most proud. For me, the benefits of substantial and in-depth collaboration go far beyond classroom learning. I firmly believe that many of the difficulties of our society and world result from people failing to see the ways in which they are, in fact, connected to one another and failing to see the ways in which they might be connected to each other, but are so far isolated and disconnected.

. . . my classmates were instrumental in my approach to this [research] project, and the fact that they had to go through the same process was the extra motivation I needed to finish strong. This can all be traced back to my professor, however, because he could have just as easily said that everyone should work alone on their projects and report what they find at the end of class. But he understood the importance of fellowship, and the idea of teamwork, and that is a very valuable lesson I've learned from this class.

(s.p.p. for English 100, "Introduction to English Studies." Sprina 2004)

This English 295 class has been completely different from other English classes that I have taken The students made up the majority of the conversations and the discussions. Mr. Broad, you help guide the conversations and discussions and let us learn from one another. We are not just getting the teachers' thoughts and answers; we are getting answers from one another. We are seeing a wide variety of perspectives and opinions. For that, I as a student learned from my fellow classmates in a way that I have never done before. This is what makes this class a great class Not only did I learn from my classmates, I learned from my professor. I learned how to make a class feel like a little community in a huge school community. I learned how to get students to learn in a new way, by having them learn from each other. . . . I learned what it takes to make a successful workshop environment. I learned that giving students freedom to choose makes a huge difference in how they learn. The teacher is there to instruct but more importantly, the teacher is there to guide.

(s.p.p. for Eng. 295, "Teaching Literature and Writing in the Middle School," fall 2003)

I believe the benefits of sustained collaboration play out in commercial settings with work teams, in community groups, and globally in relations among societies.

CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE INDEPENDENTLY

Never have I been challenged in such a positive way, like I have in this class. For the first time taking a class, I learned information for the sake of learning information, and not just to get the grade.
(a.c.e. for Eng. 100, spring 2004)

When my students work together to support and critique each other's work as a learning team, they also gain a healthy independence from the professor. I am still very present and active in and out of the classroom. I participate in discussions and offer extensive, high-level response to their draft projects (please see samples of such responses in the appendixes of this portfolio). But

the students see my critiques, praise, ideas, insights, and opinions in the rich context of the whole learning team, with the result that they gain a spirit of independence and self-sufficiency in their pursuit of knowledge.

One of the statements I prize most from among all the things my students have written is something one of my students, Kristina, said during one of our final exam portfolio publishing parties, in which every student reads aloud an excerpt from her course portfolio. Kristina described how her focus and motivation for her research shifted away from me, the professor, and toward her peers and her profession (teaching secondary English). She talked about how she literally forgot about me, the professor, and forgot that her research fulfilled a course requirement. After hearing what Kristina said, I asked her to put it in

[Professor Broad] does something more than inspire us, he let us create, and sometimes inevitably fail, and he was willing to be patient enough so that eventually we might succeed, but on our own terms. This is a lesson I will most definitely take with me into my job when I become a teacher.

(s.p.p. for English 100, "Introduction to English Studies," Spring 2004)

writing, so she e-mailed me this statement. As you can tell, this is an ideal scenario for me, in which my students conduct research for real purposes and audiences, and their learning and work takes off, leaving behind the constraints and rewards of the university classroom and running purely

on the fuel of the inherent rewards of learning and writing.

REVISION

Keeping with my focus on teaching as transformation, I push my students relentlessly, and support them enthusiastically, in revising their research to a depth most of them have not previously experienced. Several of the materials presented in the

As I began to write my research paper I thought about the comments you gave me and how I could use them in my writing. And although I found some of them helpful, I really started writing the paper with myself and other pre-service or novice teachers like me. I wrote a paper that made sense for beginning teachers to read and think about when planning their writing curriculum. Unlike many of my classes, where I write a paper with my teacher in mind, I really wrote this essay with a larger audience in mind. You allowed me to forget about you, and for that I thank you.

(s.p.p. for Eng. 297, "The Teaching of Writing," fall 2003)

“Instruction” appendix of this portfolio (Response Journal, Writer’s Memo, my responses to students’ writing) are devoted in various ways to encouraging, supporting, and requiring deep intellectual and rhetorical revision from my students.

I have never been helped so much through a revision process. Usually, I hate revising because I think once is enough and I can do it right then. That is so far from the truth. . . . If I wrote my paper in two weeks like I wanted to, it would have been a shallow, boring manuscript with no clear purpose. Now I have a paper that has many different components that tie into one very important issue. This class was nothing like I expected, and one of the more intricate courses I have ever took.
(s.p.p. for English 100, “Introduction to English Studies,” Spring 2004)

In this class I have been through an amazingly difficult revision process that has taken me all the way up to the last few weeks of class. I feel like I have been tested beyond the usual parameters of a test, but into a whole other universe of trials and tribulations. I will never forget this class, since it has changed my opinions on writing a research paper.

Because I believe in the power of “writing to learn” (as distinct from “writing to show what you’ve learned”), I approach the writing process as one that yields thoughts and insights with which the

writer did not begin the research and writing process. My students’ comments on research, writing, and revision show that while they don’t exactly “enjoy” the process of drafting, gathering responses from peers and their professor, and then revising according to those responses and according to their own best insights into their topic, they learn and grow in that process in a manner and to a depth to which they are not accustomed.

I’ve noticed that most of the time I write, I disregard any comments I get because I oftentimes feel that changing my paper would completely take away from the original meaning I had set out to achieve, but in this class, I definitely saw a change in that. I actually got comments and suggestions that were evident would change my paper for the better, and I have never actually listened to and acted on the suggestions that were made to me. For the time, I think I realized that no paper is ever perfect, and everyone does not always see things how I see them, and it’s ok to change things and end up with something different, because in the end, that difference ultimately means a better outcome.
(s.p.p. for English 100, “Introduction to English Studies,” Spring 2004)

OTHER NOTES ON MY TEACHING

Below are a few additional quotations from students that shed light on what seem to me important elements of their experiences learning in my classes.

The level of respect you have shown to students and their ideas is unmatched by any professor I have ever had. Your teaching style and performance can be best described as completely dignified."

(a.c.e. for Eng. 300, "Senior Seminar," spring 2003)

I was able to look beyond aspects of Atwell's writing which stifled me and search deeper into what I could learn from and take to the students whose burdens I take upon my own shoulders. This is what reflective journaling can do for a person. "Writing to learn" and "writing to think," as modeled by Professor Broad, has surely become an instructional strategy that not only promotes learning, writing, and thinking, but also assists in an understanding of your deepest thoughts and feelings. From response journaling, I have come to know myself better.

(s.p.p. for Eng. 295, "Teaching Literature and Writing in the Middle School," fall 2003)

In the past, I have not had much success with peer response. However, with the introduction of the Writer's Memo, I now have found a way for a writer to have answered the questions they feel are needed and an audience response in one . . . All of the responses challenged me to revise, edit, and delve deeper into what it was that I really wanted to say. They were professional and honest. This is the type of peer response I wish to introduce to my writers and responders.

(s.p.p. for Eng. 295, "Teaching Literature and Writing in the Middle School," fall 2003)

Professor Broad was one of the three best professors I have ever had in college. His experience, class environment, motivation, and demeanor were exceptional.

(a.c.e. for Eng. 300, "Senior Seminar," spring 2003)

Aah—I am so glad I'm done with this course. That being said, I can honestly say this is the most quality class I have ever taken. You are honest and fair. That is something I haven't said to many teachers . . . You were born to teach this class.

(a.c.e. for Eng. 300, "Senior Seminar," spring 2003)

. . . [Y]our ethically-informed, contemporary pedagogy really appeals to my modes of being a student. I think you do good work in the world, and I think you encourage me to do good work in the world both by your example and by the challenges you set for me in this course. I would recommend that the department find more opportunities for you to teach this course; I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

(a.c.e. for Eng. 300, "Senior Seminar," spring 2003)

CONCLUSION TO THIS REFLECTIVE TEACHING INQUIRY

Thank you to readers of this reflective teaching inquiry for exploring with me the themes I pulled from various students' comments on their learning experiences in my classes. I hope "hearing" this chorus of student voices and tracking my analysis and theory-building based on their statements gives you a stronger sense of my teaching philosophy and practice, the qualitative methods I use in my research, and the synergistic relationship between my research and teaching.