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There are many components of our professional lives competing for a fixed amount of time that must be distributed among several missions. Whatever percent effort is devoted to teaching, however, we all want that time to be interesting and intellectually satisfying. Many KU faculty members report that their teaching is more enjoyable when it becomes another form of inquiry that engages their academic skills. In this issue of Reflections, we share accounts from faculty members who have undertaken some real changes in their teaching, and they report enjoying both the improvements in student performance and the renewed sense of engagement with their own work. Some of the accounts begin with participation in CTE programs that bring faculty members together to analyze and discuss teaching; others report existing enhancements to teaching that were made visible to KU colleagues for discussion. All narratives reveal a level of engagement in teaching that is richly satisfying, regardless of the portion of effort given to it.

Holly Storkel describes a series of changes in her teaching, each of which generated more understanding and skill in her students. She compares the process of improvement in her teaching to the primary skill she is offering to these same graduate students—evidence-based practice. The development of her course over time is an example of improving practice by paying frequent and careful attention to data about effectiveness. She concludes that engaged teaching is as powerful as engaged learning. Susan King also developed a course over several offerings, finding students better able to achieve the goals she set for them. She reports that preparing an electronic course portfolio about that process prepared her to take a real risk in a later graduate course. When she and students joined together in an inquiry into the course topic, there was both learning and engagement all around. Jorge Pérez began his exploration of teaching through a collaborative seminar, and he found the comments from colleagues very challenging and also very generative. His reactions to those constructive observations led Jorge to changes in a course that were very helpful, and he recognizes that his teaching has become a form of scholarly inquiry with many parallels to his research.

Donita Massengill-Shaw also created a course portfolio through collaborative exchanges with colleagues, but she wanted even more feedback on her work. At her request, CTE arranged for a review of her portfolio from a professor in her field at another research university. Donita recounts her reaction to the process of treating her teaching as intellectual work worthy of serious review, and the result is a new focus and energy toward the teaching portion of her work. Ray Hummert recounts a collaborative effort with his colleagues to develop a rich reservoir of student understanding using portfolios. By making this work visible for colleagues through the CTE web site, Ray and his colleagues find great satisfaction in preparing their students for professional life. Kim Warren has a long history of developing community engagement among students, and she reports her rationale for using that form of teaching. Kim reports that student engagement in community translates into engagement in course learning, and student learning keeps her energized about her own role as a teacher.

There are many common themes in these essays, making them a nice set. Faculty members discover their assumptions about students’ entry skills (even in graduate programs) are often incorrect, but there are great rewards for getting students engaged in critical analysis of research or in constructing their own learning. These essays also show the power of making teaching and learning visible to colleagues for discussion and analysis. Perhaps most importantly, it becomes very clear that deeply engaging teaching with your critical academic skills makes it a very valuable part of professional life.

Dan Bernstein
Director, Center for Teaching Excellence
I initially became interested in systematic inquiry of my teaching through attending the CTE Best Practices Institute. While I have always taken stock of a course at the end of a semester, making notes about what I thought went well or needed work, my approach was based on my impressions rather than specific evidence of student learning. The Best Practices Institute helped me see that it was possible to be more systematic and objective when examining the success of a course by focusing specifically on student learning.

This idea resonated with my past experience as a speech-language pathologist. In that work, I took data on a client’s progress during every session so that I had an objective means of determining whether treatment was improving the client’s communication. I used this data to make ongoing adjustments to treatment to maximize improvement, taking data along the way to verify that these adjustments were leading to corresponding improvements. This data collection was enormously satisfying for me and the client (and/or the client’s family), because we could see progress from week to week and know that our hard work was paying off in communication improvements.

In a college course, the interaction with students and course activities provide some clues about the effectiveness of the course, but sometimes these clues are ambiguous. For example, if no one is asking questions, does that mean that everyone understands the material or that they are so lost they have no idea what question to ask? If everyone earns an A on a test, does that mean that I made the test too easy or that my teaching was highly effective? It struck me that a data-based approach to university teaching might be just as useful as a data-based approach to speech-language treatment in answering these types of questions, as well as generating others.

Somewhat ironically, one of the classes that I selected for this type of inquiry was a graduate class that I was revising to incorporate principles of evidence-based practice, a style of clinical practice where a clinician routinely consults clinical research and past experience to formulate a treatment approach for a given client and then collects data on the client’s performance during treatment to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach. The goals for the first offering of this revised course in 2004 focused on reading, understanding, and...
evaluating published clinical research related to specific treatments for children with delayed speech and applying the understanding of the effectiveness of these specific treatments to the development of a well justified treatment plan for a child with a speech delay.

Students completed reading quizzes before each class to demonstrate their understanding of the assigned reading. Readings were then critiqued and discussed in class. Students completed a final project consisting of formulating and justifying a treatment plan for a child with a speech delay. At the end of the course, I examined performance on reading quizzes as well as the final project. I also saved examples of student performance on the reading quizzes and final project. When I examined performance on the reading quizzes, performance was variable, with the majority earning Bs and a minority earning As or Cs. More troubling was that examination of individual student performance showed that fundamental confusions appeared on quizzes throughout the course. For example, students would confuse the independent variable and the dependent variable, suggesting that they did not have a firm understanding of research methodology. Moreover, during class discussion, students rarely offered critiques of the research. When I looked at performance on the final, I noticed that even students earning relatively high grades were able to apply the findings from a small number of research studies to their treatment plan but had difficulty using all of the evidence discussed in class to create a treatment plan. Students earning lower grades had difficulty applying evidence to their treatment plans, selecting an approach that was counter to at least one piece of research evidence.

This data made me realize that I had assumed that students would come to the course with the basic skills needed to read, understand, and critique a research article. This was not the case, because our graduate students come from a variety of undergraduate schools with each following a slightly different curriculum. Likewise, I assumed that students would be able to apply evidence reviewed to generate a well-justified treatment plan. I thought that application would be a naturally occurring behavior that did not require instruction. Essentially, I had assumed that these were skills students would already have, and therefore I had not even attempted to teach these skills.

A new focus
For the next offering of the course, I explicitly taught these skills. I reduced the number of articles that needed to be read for each class so that students could focus on an in-depth understanding of a single article, including a critique. I developed a standard format for identifying the critical elements of a research article and devoted a class session to teaching how to identify these elements and why they were important. Each reading quiz followed this standard format so that students would internalize the structure for identifying and critiquing key elements of research. I created three cases of children with speech delays that we used for in-class demonstrations of applying evidence to the creation of well-justified treatment plans. I added a midterm case application so that students would have more practice independently applying evidence to the creation of treatment plans and have an opportunity to receive feedback on their attempt. I collected the same data for this revised offering, namely reading quiz performance and midterm/final case performance.

When I examined reading quiz performance from the revised course, I was happy with the results. The majority of students earned As and fundamental misconceptions decreased across each reading quiz. Moreover, class discussion focused on critiquing an article rather than facilitating a basic understanding of the methods and results. Students had thought about potential limitations of an article while they were reading it, so they had something to contribute to discussion. I also was gratified by student comments indicating that they were using my standard format for reviewing research articles in other classes and for thesis projects. In terms of the clinical cases, performance at the midterm point in the revised class was similar to performance at the end of the semester in the previous offering. That is, many students were having difficulty applying all of the evidence to a clinical case. However, performance at the end of the semester in the revised class improved such that the majority of students were able to apply all of the evidence to a clinical case. The experience of completing the midterm case and the explicit feedback I pro-
vided seemed to help students improve their ability to use the evidence we reviewed in class to generate treatment plans.

While I was happy with the outcome of the revisions I made, I still identified areas for continued improvement. For the next offering of the course, I focused on improving performance on the midterm case report by demonstrating how all the evidence reviewed could be integrated and applied to each of the in-class demonstration cases prior to the midterm. Thus, students had three examples of how I would integrate and apply all of the evidence reviewed before they made their first attempt to integrate and apply evidence to their midterm case. I also developed a grading rubric for the midterm and final cases to make my expectations clear to students, to provide more specific feedback to students, and to help me evaluate finer aspects of the course (e.g., were there specific components of the treatment plan that students were having difficulty generating?).

What I now see
I think this example from my own teaching illustrates the insights that can be gained from systematic inquiry into teaching. When my reflections on my teaching were based on my impressions of the course, I think my opinions were heavily influenced by whether students seemed satisfied with the course. I normally didn’t take stock of the course until the end of the semester, about the time that I received my student course evaluations. While student opinions are useful in evaluating teaching effectiveness, students may not know what they ultimately need to learn, so it may be difficult for them to pinpoint areas that need to be addressed in future offerings. In addition, I might have been happy with the outcome of the revisions I made, I still identified areas for continued improvement. For the next offering of the course, I focused on improving performance on the midterm case report by demonstrating how all the evidence reviewed could be integrated and applied to each of the in-class demonstration cases prior to the midterm. Thus, students had three examples of how I would integrate and apply all of the evidence reviewed before they made their first attempt to integrate and apply evidence to their midterm case. I also developed a grading rubric for the midterm and final cases to make my expectations clear to students, to provide more specific feedback to students, and to help me evaluate finer aspects of the course (e.g., were there specific components of the treatment plan that students were having difficulty generating?).

While we know that active learning helps keep students engaged in a class, I find that active teaching helps keep me engaged in a course year after year.

Examination of saved student work was helpful in this regard, because I could more easily identify specific skills that students were having difficulty with and then target those skills during the next offering of the course. Creating a well-defined grading rubric was even more helpful in this regard, because it was easier to identify specific skills that students were having difficulty with during the course. Then, activities or instruction could be added immediately to promote learning by current students, not just future students.

Ultimately, students benefit from this approach because the instruction is designed to promote their learning of critical skills that they will need in their careers. For me, inquiry into teaching makes teaching the same course each year interesting. There is always room for improvement, whether it is by changing the instructional approach to a particular topic or adding new topics to a course. While we know that active learning helps keep students engaged in a class, I find that active teaching helps keep me engaged in a course year after year. Moreover, it gives me the same satisfaction with teaching that I felt with speech-language pathology. At the end of the course, I have evidence that my students have improved their understanding of how to provide effective treatment to a child with a speech delay, making the hard work seem like a small price to pay for such an important outcome.
Oh, no! I have to teach that course again?! All summer long, I dreaded it. I've taught graduate curriculum theory eight times since I came to KU, roughly every two years. The course was inherited from another professor. Over the years, I tried to make it my own, but it wasn't working.

By July, there were only two people enrolled in the course, and I was hoping it would be cancelled. But on the first day of class, the sixth person enrolled. What should I teach them? I had avoided planning all summer. The course was very general, very safe, completely theoretical, and completely boring. Intellectually and creatively, I was teaching from inside a small, dark, and narrow box. I looked at my last syllabus and distress started to set in. Even if I adjusted the content a bit, my fear was that I would spend the rest of the semester wishing I had structured the course differently.

I was complaining about my situation to a friend, a non-educator. Half jokingly, he suggested that I try something wild and crazy in my course. At first I laughed it off, because he wasn’t an educator like me. I mean, I have a doctorate in education, and he’s just a lawyer. But then I chose to look at his suggestion as a creative challenge. I asked myself, “Aren’t you the one who encourages her students—future teachers—to experiment and try out new ideas in their classrooms? Aren’t you the one who challenges them to be creative in curriculum design?”

What better way to inspire creativity than to model out-of-the-box thinking in the design of this course! Instead of an intellectual discussion about the need for innovation, I can give these six students an opportunity to experience it. And with that thought, I threw caution to the wind and pushed my way out of the box I’d been teaching in for eight semesters. I went for it, without fear. It was going to be a wild ride—a learning experience for all seven of us.

Teaching as inquiry
Curriculum design usually includes the elements of vision, design, interactions, outcomes, and analysis (Bass 1999). It is similar to the research methodology utilized by my colleagues in the exercise physiology laboratory. But I’ve never thought of my classroom as a laboratory. As a curriculum designer, I approach each course with a vision for the intellectual and dispositional goals that I want my students to achieve. My job is to design educational experiences that are most likely to generate the desired results.
In a typical semester, my students and I interact with course content, and throughout the term I observe the outcomes. Then I conduct an analysis of the outcomes, make decisions about the usefulness of my teaching methods, and plan the modifications I will make when the course is taught again. I suppose that a description of this process is good enough to be considered for publication. But what top-tier journal would publish a manuscript about an experiment I conducted with six of my students? Kansas University is a Research I institution, and it values scientific inquiry, large sample sizes, and large grants. Although Boyer (1990) made a strong case for the scholarship of teaching (that teaching naturally generates its own kind of “scholarship”), I knew the idea would never catch on here.

Nevertheless, this form of inquiry was intellectually satisfying for me, and the results were ever so much more rewarding than seeing my name in a journal. Seeing light bulbs turn on in the minds of my students—that’s why I go to work every day. Fortunately for me, I found a community of scholars who valued teaching at the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE). The intellectual energy I put into my teaching was respected and encouraged. I was given a forum in which to publicize my classroom research. My first attempt at formalizing my teaching as inquiry had its genesis in the CTE Faculty Seminar. I had to identify a “problem” for study in my classroom and publicize it in an online portfolio. My project utilized an experimental design, so I didn’t stray far from those traditional scholarly roots. I conducted the study over three semesters, learning from my mistakes each time.

One important lesson was that classroom inquiry over time was complicated by differences in each new crop of “subjects.” Methods that were successful with students in one semester may not work as well with others. Fortunately during the third semester, when I felt my procedures were sufficiently refined, I had a group of hard-working and dedicated students. I told them that I was conducting a study, and they seemed to want to help. At last the planets aligned, the project went smoothly, and the students generated excellent data. One of the best things that teaching-as-inquiry did for me was to expand my scholarly interests exponentially. Randy Bass (1999) says that “what matters most is for teachers to investigate the problems that matter most to them (p. 10).” I found a form of research that mattered to me. By conducting scholarly inquiry in my classroom, I took my teaching to higher levels and brought meaning and excitement to my scholarship.

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Confronting fear and venturing out
My online portfolio project invigorated me as a scholar, but by summertime the project was over. I thought, “What will energize me now?” To make matters worse, I was about to teach a graduate curriculum theory course that bored me to tears. I was gripped with fear—fear of 16 weeks of boredom, of being an ordinary teacher, of my students feeling that they had wasted both time and money by enrolling in my course. I was boxed in by the content of the course because I felt limited by the course description. Maybe I had no choice but to follow that old syllabus. Just one semester ago, while conducting my portfolio project, I felt thrilled at the thought of teaching. Now, I was feeling small and deflated.

When I was challenged to do something radical, I hesitated out of fear. But wasn’t I already afraid of being ordinary, even boring? I had to decide which fear would compel me more. In truth, I did it more for myself than my students. I needed to get excited about something. Sixteen weeks is a LONG time to dislike what you’re doing. Plus, these students deserved me at my best, not my worst. So I jumped out of the box and committed myself to construct a course unlike any I’d ever taught before. I had a vision to design a challenging experience that would compel students to engage in the content of the course.

When I decided to go for it, fear attacked me once again. Is this a silly idea? What if it doesn’t work? I may be ready for a wild ride this semester, but are
my students ready for something like this? I was so fearful of students’ reaction to the experience that I kept them in suspense for several weeks. On the syllabus, I put question marks next to the dates on which we would be engaged in the new project.

The rewards of fearlessness
My three-semester portfolio project was the springboard for my next challenge, and it gave me the courage to try something new in the graduate course. The design of the new project came easily. My goals were that students would:
1. Make innovative curricular choices to overcome programmatic obstacles
2. Create curricula that are consistent with their goals
3. Demonstrate knowledge of contemporary curriculum theory and models
4. Exhibit an understanding of the contextual issues that affect curriculum design.

To help put my fears to rest, I consulted with three educators I trusted. They gave me the advice and encouragement I needed to move forward with confidence. When I finally introduced the project to my students, they were excited. I can still remember the grins slowly growing over their faces while I read my description of the project. They left the classroom that night smiling, laughing, and eager.

What a payoff! At that moment, all of my doubts were eradicated. I became a fearless teacher.

Throughout that semester, our interactions with the content were focused within a series of four student presentations that exhibited their progress toward the learning outcomes. After 16 weeks, the students wrote reflections of their experience during the project. I was delighted to see that their reflections included an accurate synthesis of the theory learned in the course. My goals to develop innovative and thoughtful curriculum designers were achieved as exhibited by an analysis of students’ comments:

“This experience makes me realize how every day a teacher faces some sort of dilemma and they [sic] have to be creative, knowledgeable and fearless to solve problems in the classroom.”

“I found that realistic and attainable goals must be set in order to provide an effective curriculum. I feel like creativity… must work within the framework of the school objectives and national standards. I think it is essential that a teacher does not become overzealous in their [sic] creative pursuits.”

“(When) we were brought to a new challenge, we were always referred to new research, or we were invited to see what was being done elsewhere. Thus, we were always invited to exercise our judgment in selecting the most appropriate materials and transform them for local needs… for the new challenge.”

“I think about teaching more now than I have in my entire life.”

Life outside of the box
Looking back, I realize that the fear of remaining the same was greater than the fear of change. Now that I’m “out of the box,” I’ve found excitement in teaching again. I’m looking for new challenges and new opportunities to give my students stimulating experiences. My project was designed to make the students responsible for their learning. And guess what? They learned! At first I felt hurt when I saw the high quality of their work. They had actually learned with very little “interference” from me. How were they able to learn so much without being taught? Am I even necessary? Am I a hindrance? Should I have done something like this a long time ago? Have I been keeping my students from learning all these years? Fears still try to attack me even out here. But now, I kick them across the room. My classroom is my laboratory. Everyone learns regardless of the outcome of the experiment. I’ve learned that students can be willing partners in new classroom experiences. If I’m able to allay their fears about assessments and grades, the better students will support my efforts to help them learn, and the mediocre students will learn in spite of themselves.

I don’t know if I’ll try anything this radical again, but I will certainly look for out-of-the-ordinary experiences. Fearless teaching is stimulating. After 23 years, I view my classroom in a new way. I am excited about the possibilities, and I am more eager to share publicly the lessons I’m learning through teaching.

References

Kim Warren
History

I first learned about service learning in graduate school when Al Camarillo visited my first-year seminar on teaching history. Professor Camarillo told us that service learning pedagogy could allow us to combine investigating the past with understanding modern social problems, such as poverty or unequal citizenship rights. Since I had already come to believe that the classroom should be a setting to encourage students to think about their own responsibilities to each other and their local, national, and global communities, connecting courses with volunteer service seemed to be the ideal marriage of intellectual and practical methods. Also, having returned home from a stint in the Slovak Republic with the Peace Corps just a couple years earlier, I was primed to learn about ways to combine my dual passions for community service and academic work. Service learning was a pedagogy that I wanted to embrace.

Before coming to KU in 2004, I had the chance to develop service learning courses and support other faculty members’ courses at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri. As a Jesuit college, Rockhurst encourages its students to live out its mission of developing men and women in service to others. In an academic environment that required volunteer service of its students, service learning courses often became natural enhancements to existing curriculum. That is the reason that when I arrived at KU, a university that does not have as many service requirements for its students as Rockhurst, I was concerned about how to introduce service learning options into my courses. Much to my delight, I was wrong in assuming that KU had a different level of commitment to community service. The Center for Community Outreach, located on the fourth floor of the Kansas Union, provides an infrastructure for community involvement and encourages campus-wide volunteerism. The new Service Learning Center, located in 306 Carruth-O’Leary, provides faculty and students with resources to expand their service learning options. Figure 1.

Effective service learning has three components:

- Identified learning objectives (pre-service),
- Meaningful community service activities (service),
- Ongoing, intentional reflection (post-service)
opportunities. Students can even earn a Certification in Service Learning designation on their transcripts after taking specific courses with a service-learning component and completing a reflection about their experience.

How is service learning different from volunteering?
Service learning is different from volunteer service in that it is a form of experiential learning where students can apply knowledge, skills, and critical thinking to identify and address community needs. Whether part of a course curriculum or a project outside of the classroom, service learning requires three stages: preparation for the project; immersion into service; and reflection on approaches, interactions, challenges, and contributions. Service learning requires student-driven engagement in all three stages and reflection linking academic learning and community issues. The ideal project involves students in determining real community needs. It is reciprocal in nature, benefiting both the community and the service providers. A primary distinction between volunteering and service projects can be patronizing responses to large, systematic problems like poverty, violence and racism, leaving only a short-term impact on both students and community members. However, national surveys suggest that service learning has helped students develop stronger ties between their schools and communities, and in many cases, has led to improved academic achievement and long-term commitment to community service.

The course where I most recently offered a service learning option was History of Women in the United States, 1870-present. Approximately half the students opted for the service learning track, while the other half chose a research project. Both sets of students were responsible for attending class meetings, preparing for discussions by completing assigned reading, and taking exams.

Although the service learning students in this course did not engage in formal research beyond readings assigned for class, I do believe they gained as much understanding of the historical past as research track students. The fact that the service learning students performed at a slightly higher level than the research track students on their written assignments and exams suggests that service learning pedagogy significantly contributed to the course goals. In the end, a slightly greater percentage of service learning students received A-level grades than research track students.

As an added benefit to the time that students provided to nonprofit agencies, I believe service learning helped students to realize that diverse populations exist even in a small city like Lawrence, Kansas. I do not believe that all of my students had this understanding before they did their projects.

Since this history course focused on women’s history, I was particularly interested in how their assumptions about gender were challenged by their service learning experiences. When this

![Figure 2. Benefit to student Benefit to community](image)

- **INTERNSHIP**
- **SERVICE LEARNING**
- **VOLUNTEERING**

![Figure 3. LEARNING PYRAMID](image)

- **Average retention rate**
  - Lecture: 5%
  - Reading: 10%
  - Audio-visual: 20%
  - Demonstration: 30%
  - Discussion group: 50%
  - Practice by doing: 75%
  - Teach others/immediate use of learning: 90%

National Training Laboratories—Bethel, Maine
Maryland Student Service Alliance
current student population was growing up, males and females had relatively equal access to educational and athletic opportunities, and in the future they expect to earn equal wages as adult workers. One way that service learning expanded their worldview is in regard to gendered wage and childcare gaps. The reality is that inequality continues to exist. In earlier versions of this course, when we would talk about wage gaps in class, students did not understand how pay inequity could exist—disparity did not seem real to them. Service learning experiences helped them engage with people who are living with inequality in more pronounced ways than they are. For example, students who volunteered at agencies that offered childcare developed a deeper understanding of the intersections among race, class, and gender. They saw parents drop off their children, and they began to note such particulars as the gender of the parents and the length of day for children. These observations helped them understand that inequality is not about money alone. Rather, compounding issues create barriers to equality, such as control of one’s money and time, access to modes of transportation, and kinds of flexibility one has with a job. In their reflections, they could link these real-life observations to their reading about the history of women’s work, childcare, and labor organizing.

Students’ feedback
Overall, students have responded quite favorably to service learning experiences. In their reflection papers, they often made comments about how they had experienced significant changes in their own lives since engaging in service learning. Many reported to me that they had not spent time in the community before taking my class. Others had

... [Students] could link real-life observations to their reading about the history of women’s work, childcare, and labor organizing.
MPA Portfolios at the University of Kansas: Bridging Academic and Practical Experiences

Ray Hummert
Public Administration

“The conclusion is evident. Learning is most effective when the academic approach, involving abstract concepts, examples, comparisons, and generalization is combined with a first-hand acquaintance with practical situations.”
—Ed Stene, 1964

Since 1948, the Edwin O. Stene Master’s Degree Program in Public Administration at the University of Kansas has been educating students for careers in public management, employing a format that combines a tradition of academic excellence with a concern for the practical aspects of public management. Dr. Stene founded the program on the premise that a strong academic experience is important, but students learn even more when formal coursework and practical experience are joined. Over the past several years, the MPA program has developed the Portfolio Project to assist students in linking the classroom with their work experience. The goal of the portfolio is to enhance learning beyond the academic setting by providing a framework for continual personal and professional development and thinking. It provides the stepping-stones for a student to become a reflective manager and to begin on a path of lifelong learning. This article describes the MPA program, the Portfolio Project, the elements of the portfolio, the success to date, and the future in preparing the next generation of public administration professionals.

The MPA program consists of two options. The internship option is designed for those who have little or no public administration experience. The typical internship student begins course work during the summer session with two courses, and then takes four courses during the fall semester and four courses and one workshop credit in the spring semester. This schedule allows students to complete all but six units of graduate credit during one calendar year. The second year of the student’s education is grounded in a full time, paid internship that students secure with assistance from the public administration department. These include positions in organizations around the country as budget and management analysts, assistants to city managers, and interns in state government or non-profits, as well as formal internships that include traditional rotations between departments. During their internship year, students participate in three professional development seminars for six hours of academic credit. In these seminars MPA faculty, program staff, a Practitioner in Residence, and invited distinguished local government professionals provide substantial guidance and support for students to facilitate the connection between their academic year and their internship experiences. The goal of the professional development seminars is to provide students with additional knowledge that can help them transition from the academic
environment to the professional work environment. Students, faculty, and practitioners discuss employee socialization, leadership, administrative change, what it means to be a professional public manager, and professional development/portfolios.

The career option is for those already working in the field of their choice who desire an MPA degree for career development and advancement. Career option applicants typically have at least three years of professional level experience. Career option students may enter the program in the fall or spring semester. Most students enroll part-time, but it is possible to be a full-time career option student.

Career option and intern option students complete the same course work except for the last six hours. Internship option students enroll in six units of professional development seminars associated with their full-time internship. Career option students take two additional elective courses, or in some cases they may write a field project report, a thesis equivalent.

Portfolio Project
In 2001, the public administration department developed the Portfolio Project to assist intern option students in their education experience as they transitioned from the academic part of the program to their intern positions. After investigating diverse models, the faculty decided that the Portfolio Project would be an object—a completed document—and a process—a tool by which learning would be demonstrated over time. Students would have the freedom to adapt it to their learning needs. There were to be four important elements of the portfolio:
- Goal setting
- Writing
- Reflection
- Learning

The process is simple and widely used in portfolio programs. Figure 1 outlines the process.

In the portfolio, students are asked to review their aptitudes and strengths, as well as areas for improvement. The portfolio offers an opportunity for students to measure themselves against competencies like those provided by the International City/County Management Association, the professional association of local government managers. Other measuring tools are evaluations, competencies of

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**Figure 1. THE PORTFOLIO PROCESS**

What I know and what I need to know
- Competency models
- ICMA self assessment
- Canadian civil service competencies for deputy ministers
- PRIMA, IPMA and other association competency models
- Employee evaluations
- Course syllabi

Transformation
- Review feedback
- Where do I want to be
- Future goals

Data/artifact collection

Presentation
- Supervisors
- Mentors
- Peers
- Faculty

Review, selection, recording

Reflection
other professional groups, syllabi from individual classes, and skills tests. In addition, the department is involved in developing its own list of managerial competencies to assist with student self-assessment. In development of the portfolio, students are pushed to participate in their own education.

Audrey Seymour, assistant city manager of Menlo Park, California, encourages young professionals to use of this type of goal setting process (Benest 2003a). She stresses the importance of self assessment and the development of a learning plan with specific goals, actions, and timelines that can be reviewed by supervisors, peers, and subordinates for feedback. The portfolio is designed to allow students to look at what they do well, to consider their mistakes, and to think about choices they made, why they made those choices, and plan for the future. The portfolio becomes a tool for lifelong learning.

Communication is what public administration is about, and writing is a fundamental part of communication. The portfolios utilize many unique formats, based on students’ needs. Some follow a journal format, some are a compilation of activities and projects, and some are categorized by a competency model. Writing is important in all of these formats because it:

- Records a student’s development over time
- Provides a vehicle for dialogue between student and faculty and/or mentors
- Demonstrates improved writing skills over time
- Reinforces a student’s learning by critically evaluating their performance against established goals
- Becomes a living document for the student
- Provides ownership for students by allowing them to tell their story.

In the May 2003 article, “Meeting Today’s Challenges: Competencies for the Contemporary Local Government Professional,” John and Carol Nalbandian identify the ability to integrate theory and practice as a key attribute of a successful public administrator (Nalbandian 2003). For the Nalbandians “knowledge about oneself,” or self-reflection, is a critical knowledge area for local government professionals. According to the Nalbandians, self-reflection leads to the integration of personal self with professional self.

In the October 2006 public management article, “Keeping the Passion Alive,” Frank Benest talks about the importance of story telling, writing, and reflection as a way to learn about one’s personal self. He describes reflection as being a courageous act because we may find things about ourselves that we would rather not know, and the act of writing is one tool in reflecting (Benest 2006).

**Project results**

In a survey of graduates who participated in the Portfolio Project, David Dillner, city administrator of Edgerton, Kansas remarked that the portfolio “should be developed with the purpose of documenting your thoughts and ideas for future reference... You get so wrapped up in what you’re doing that you forget to take time out and think about your management style, organizational development, managerial experiences and others that if you don’t document, you end up forgetting. I am always better when I write something down and look back on it later. You’d be amazed at how this shapes and develops your thinking” (Dillner 2006).

Eighty percent of the graduates responding to the survey were using a portfolio in some manner. The majority of them were using portfolios to:

- Prepare and communicate clearly during job interviews: Kelly Greunke, associate financial management analyst of City/County of Denver, Colorado said, “When I started to interview for jobs, I really was glad I had a compilation of artifacts to review as I prepared for the interview” (Greunke 2006). It was important for her to reflect on the artifacts in their totality, not as individual projects, and what they meant to her in her learning.
- Assess progress in career development: Megan Laha, senior management analyst of Johnson County, Kansas said, “I am working on a five year plan of the things I want to accomplish” (Laha 2006).
- Identify patterns of learning: Dillner uses a portfolio “to document management practices that I’ve been developing. This will help me better refine my thoughts and encourage me to continually learn new things” (Dillner 2006).
- Compile a personal data base.

Grads responding to the survey recommended two things to help the portfolio become a better learning experience:

- Provide students a better outline of what needs to be
learned or define competencies more clearly.
• Provide guidelines and a mechanism for both the student and the person evaluating the student, whether it is a faculty member or supervisor.

Recently, John Nalbandian led two KU MPA human resources management classes addressing these concerns. Since 2001, the Portfolio Project focused on the intern option or pre-career student. Since the primary mission of the intern option program was preparing students for careers in local community building positions, competencies developed by the International City/County Management Association were initially used. The department realized that if it was to include mid-career students in the Portfolio Project, a wider range of competencies needed to be developed. In “Developing Learning Outcomes for the University of Kansas MPA Program,” the authors identified competencies that focused on a broad public management perspective (Gaggero et. al.). The next step is to introduce students to the competencies, as well as the rubric and portfolio as a method of documenting their learning. This is scheduled to take place with all new students in fall 2007.

Reflections on the process
The portfolio is designed to bridge gaps among theory, practice, and knowledge of one’s personal and professional self. It requires the student to adopt the role of both teacher and student. It requires taking classroom experiences and work experiences and reflecting upon them in ways that will define who the student is and who he or she will become professionally. Because reflection/assessment is analytical in nature, the portfolio process moves students to consider concrete elements of their work and studies. While analytical, it is not easy for most students to accept the ambiguity involved in preparing a portfolio. Even graduate students are used to asking, “What do you expect?” from their faculty instructors. But the portfolio is not about what faculty expect; it is more concerned with what the student can craft by personalizing both the tool and the task.

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References


The Quest for Excellence: Could It Include Peer Review?

Donita Massengill-Shaw
Curriculum and Teaching

I have a poster in my office that reads, “The quest for excellence is a lifelong process.” I often reflect on the poster’s cliché. Several things about that statement strike me. What is excellence? How does one become exceptional? What does the process of becoming an excellent teacher entail? Does making my teaching public help me become an outstanding educator?

Many educators believe that reflection is an essential part of becoming an excellent teacher. Reflection allows a person to look within and consider all the factors involved in teaching (such as the audience, the content, time demands, teaching style) and how to improve. Reflection occurs in numerous ways—contemplative thought, dialoguing with colleagues, reviewing student work, obtaining feedback from students, and experiencing a formal peer review. One method of reflection that was new to me in the past year was the external review process. I have chosen to make my teaching public because I want to grow and learn and change and improve. I wondered what an external review would be like and how it would help me excel.

Now that I have experienced it, my goals are to share with you my reaction to the process, what I learned, and the impact external review has had. First, though, I need to paint a picture for you.

The background picture
Let me tell you about my teaching. In the School of Education I work with undergraduate college students who plan to be teachers. My main undergraduate classes typically focus on pre-service elementary education majors by instructing them how to teach elementary children to read, write, and spell. These four-credit classes are involved and demanding, and the students respond positively to how much they learn. Now imagine the opposite, a one-credit class that is an overview of literacy for pre-service music and health/physical education teachers who will be licensed to teach K-12. They are required by the state of Kansas to take a literacy course to be certified to teach K-12. They come to Joseph R. Pearson Hall once a week for 50 minutes. So much happens in their academic lives the other six days between each class period that the semester-long thread attempting to keep
the learning continuous for them often gets trampled and forgotten. Further, no textbook has been published for this audience. Most literacy methods textbooks and articles are geared either for elementary or secondary content majors. So I have adapted the material and made it relevant to music/health physical education content areas. Making literacy important to these future teachers when they feel passionate about teaching their specialty, including keeping students active during PE, has challenged me. A while back I attended some seminars at CTE and focused on improving this class. This then led to developing an electronic teaching portfolio and last, but not least, experiencing external review from a professor of education at a comparable university.

My reaction
Receiving a peer review of my teaching was a powerful experience. The process reminded me how easy it is to be intimately involved in planning, reflecting, and working on a class to the point where it is hard to see what an outsider can visualize. My reviewer provided me with three pages of comments and questions particularly focusing on the intellectual quality, quality of teaching practices, quality of student understanding, and summary of reflective consideration. Based on what I was able to portray through written communication and samples of student work, my reviewer posed much food for thought. This is priceless, because I’ve never received this much feedback before for what has been a private academic pursuit. Being reviewed was a risk, but every part of change involves taking a precarious step and learning from it. Sometimes this can be hard and scary and uncomfortable. Yet I am someone who loves to learn and grow, so embracing change has become important to me. No class or teaching will ever be perfect. Nonetheless, my teaching can improve as a result of an external review as long as I learn from it.

What I learned
Now that I have experienced external review, I can re-learn three important points: clarity, coherence, and feedback. The reason I said “re-learn” is because I thought I previously understood these. Now I realize there is more knowledge to gain about each point. First, I need to be clear, clear, clear. I may perceive that my explanations for goals, assignments, and directions are clear, but do my students or an outsider see them clearly? What is murky to someone else needs to be cleaned-up. For example, I need to clarify the course goals throughout my public portfolio and to effectively communicate these goals to my students. Also, I need to make clear the difference between what makes a good assignment strong and what makes a “less good” assignment not so strong.

Second, I’ve learned to provide greater coherence throughout the course. I believe I’ve attempted to be coherent in matching goals with assignments, but I need to more effectively articulate how each assignment and daily plan fits with the goals and objectives. I need to evaluate each aspect in light of the bigger picture and better explain that coherence to eager students.

Third, I need to work on gaining more information and feedback from students, such as noting student behaviors during class in both lecture and small-group work. During lecture I can observe body language, level of participation in answering questions, or involvement with note-taking on key concepts in class. What I perceive of their behaviors may be different than what they actually say and do in their small-group work, so as I walk around (or immediately after class) I can jot down observations. I can also ask students for written and oral feedback about the course and document that evidence. Gathering this data and triangulating it (lecture, small group, and verbal/written feedback) will provide me with clues to possible answers regarding the challenges of teaching this class. This will then allow me to offer effective instruction based on student needs.

Even though I’ve attempted to gather more information from students and provide a coherent and clear class during the past few years, I now see I can work on these three areas. The reviewer provided me with a new lens through which I can better see my course and know how to move forward. Excellence is seeing things differently and knowing what needs to be done.
Impact

As I have read through the reviewer’s comments and noted areas to work on, I can also specifically target some immediate tasks to undertake. First, the next time I teach the class I plan to expand the syllabus. Rather than relying on oral methods to communicate why we’re doing certain activities and assignments and why the content is important, I can communicate that information in writing and clarify it on the syllabus. Second, I plan to change my instructor-made class feedback form to include 12 specific points to which students will be asked to respond. These include course goals, course structure, teaching practices, and assignments. I also will restructure the small-group feedback form for their final project—I will make it more open-ended. Plus, I will note observations during class time. Third, I’d like to take the created and adapted materials I use in this class and prepare reading material and homework for students. This will allow me to spend less time lecturing and more time emphasizing student involvement. Also, I plan to document how each assignment and daily plan connects to the final exam and overall course goals. These actions will provide greater coherence to the class. Excellence is taking action.

What has external review done for me? Simply put, it has broadened me, challenged me, and pushed me. Without going public in this manner I would be static in my teaching, trying to move forward but limited by my own blindness. Through this experience I am taking a step in the right direction, knowing the path I want to walk and getting the “push” (specific feedback from the reviewer) to get going. The true impact of external review will be documented in the future, because I received my evaluation at the commencement of spring break, right before writing this reflection and halfway through teaching the current course. Additionally, in the future I will be able to determine the impact on my students.

I can speak, though, to the impact inquiry-teaching has had on me and my students thus far. I now engage in teaching in an intellectual manner parallel to scholarship. I have posed questions, gathered evidence, and determined results. Never before have I done this, and the process and reflection is empowering. For students, their voices were heard in relation to class load, value of assignments, pacing of material, and presentation of material. I model for them how I change and alter plans and instructions based on response from students. This results in a winning situation: I win because I’m growing and improving, and students win because their learning is strengthened, they feel valued, and as future educators they witness and experience reflective inquiry.

Now that I have experienced an outsider’s response to my teaching, I am different, changed. I have been humbled. Going public has helped me rise above a self-centered view of teaching. This process has taken the ownership away from “me” and focused more on “we.” My class is no longer about how good of a teacher I am or how much my students learn as a result of my instruction. It takes the emphasis away from the numbers I receive on the end-of-semester surveys and stresses the educational process of learning together during the semester. The focus of my teaching has changed. Making my teaching public has broken down the lonely walls of self-questioning and wondering what I can do to improve, and it has opened opportunities for dialogue. I feel a greater need to become more transparent about my learning process. This experience forms a safe, respectful community of reviewer, instructor, and students. Excellence is learning from others.

Final thoughts

I have been able to share with you insight into my experience of having an external peer review. I am cognizant that professors can become exemplary educators without going through external peer review, and I do not suggest that it become a requirement for all faculty members. However, I personally believe this has been a healthy, worthwhile practice, and it is an important process in the quest for excellence. If excellence includes seeing things differently, taking action, and learning from others, then how else are we to improve if we aren’t seeking outside feedback? Our personal limitations and blind spots can only take our reflective teaching so far. For me, the process itself has been invigorating and transforming, because it provides energy and direction for the future. As I reflect on the poster’s cliché, “The quest for excellence is a lifelong process,” I believe I am a step closer in answering my questions and a bit further on my journey.
Two years ago, I was asked by my chair if I was interested in developing a new class, a course on Hispanic culture that would address the contexts of both Spain and Latin America. We had been talking about this new course for a while. In a department retreat, we had discussed ways of better preparing our students to take advanced literature courses. We came up with the idea of a course that would offer an overview of key concepts and ideas about the Spanish-speaking world, while simultaneously adapting our major to current trends in the field, which is moving toward establishing transatlantic connections between Spain and Latin America. Since my own research agenda was already in that direction, the department thought I would be a good person to pilot the class in spring 2006. Should the course be successful and the results satisfactory, we would then think about including it in our curriculum. I accepted the challenge cheerfully but with concerns. I could not approach it as just another class. An important curricular development for the department rested on my shoulders, and I knew I had to put some thought and time into it. As a pilot class, I did not have any materials such as syllabi or paper prompts to draw upon. I had to design and develop it from scratch. Therefore, I decided to apply for the Best Practices Institute sponsored by CTE. I had heard colleagues in other units mention it was a good way to encourage reflection on teaching practices. “That’s exactly what I need,” I thought.

In preparation for BPI, we were asked to identify areas that needed improvement in a target class. I immediately thought it was being assumed that I had “problems” in my teaching. Me? I get high scores in students’ evaluations; they’ve got to be kidding! When we first met, all the seminar participants started to talk about their problems. Most of them were tenured professors with plenty of teaching experience, but they still had teaching dilemmas. To my surprise, even Dan Bernstein, the director of the seminar, mentioned his own pedagogical challenges and doubts. At that time, it was clear to me that it was fine to have problems. After the initial discussion, Dan announced our homework for the seminar: to create a poster about a target course in which we had to lay out the background of the course, a specific area on which we wanted to focus (an intellec-
tual goal, a learning objective, a type of assignment, etc.), and ways of improving that area. He was basically asking us to put our problems in writing and think about remedies. Given the authority that I, as a literature person, give to the written word, this meant that my problems were becoming really serious.

My lesson for the day was that in the roundtable, teaching problems were not treated as tumors to be immediately extirpated, but as topics for investigation. The discussions were quite fruitful. It was interesting to hear colleagues talk about issues they were grappling with in their classes, which oftentimes overlapped with my own. In essence, the discussions did not differ much from conversations one has with colleagues at professional conferences. It certainly felt like I was in one of the monthly Hall Center for the Humanities seminars. People shared ideas and presented thrilling projects. We gave feedback to each other to further improve or redefine projects. In short, we were all engaged in intellectual discussions about our teaching practices. Teaching could be the topic of intellectual inquiry and, moreover, bring together a group of scholars. These scholars were using their expertise to make informed judgements about others’ practices, helping each other find strategies that could enhance their teaching.

In small group discussions, I quickly identified my “problem.” I had taught cultura courses before, and I always had an oral presentation component to make a lecture-driven course into a more participative and interactive environment. However, I was not happy with students’ performances in these presentations. Students consistently chose well-known topics of Hispanic culture (say Pablo Picasso) and relied on a couple of Internet sources such as Wikipedia to report commonplace information that did not add anything new. Presentations tended to be boring and disorganized. I definitely wanted to find a way of making this learning experience more meaningful. My colleagues in the group discussion, Jeanne Klein from Theater and Film and Max Utsler from the School of Journalism, posed questions that made me grasp quickly that I was in part responsible for those unsatisfactory presentations. They asked, “Are you giving the oral presentation enough importance in the breakdown of the class grade so that students see it as a relevant component of the course? Are you giving them enough guidance to succeed in this project?” No, I was not. I was actually taking for granted that students knew how to pick a relevant and original research topic, where to go to find valuable sources of information, and how to organize and present orally a research project in front of their classmates.

Rather than reacting defensively to their questions, this time I took it as positive feedback. Basically, it was similar to feedback I usually get when I present a paper at a conference and someone shares with me a reference I was not aware of to make the theoretical background of my research more solid, or when a colleague gives me a good tip about how to reformulate my argument in a more convincing way. Likewise, it also reminded me of letters from editors of scholarly journals where I submit my work, when they forward peer-reviewed reports that indicate: “Good potential but needs to rethink some aspects. Revise and resubmit.” Just as I do with my research, I sat and thought about ways to integrate that constructive feedback into my teaching project. Simply put, I had to make some revisions to that component of my class before I could successfully use it.

I grouped my revisions within three categories:

1. Identifying the desired and realistic output for the assignment. I made an outline of desired results and then thought about specific student performances that would demonstrate those results. This helped me shape the details and format of the oral presentation assignment (time frame, level of research, etc.), having in mind what kind of understanding I was expecting from students and which skills I wanted them to master.

2. Explaining clearly my expectations for the assignment. This involved developing criteria to evaluate it. I decided to try to do this step collectively. I had students discuss in pairs the components of a...
good oral presentation, and then as a class we brainstormed an outline for a rubric. I took their ideas and combined them into a draft. In the next class session they gave me further feedback about other aspects that we should include in the rubric and about the distribution of points assigned to each section. The students were having a great deal of input in creating the document.

3. **Providing a scaffolded approach** that would help students move from choosing an original research topic, to doing thorough research on it, to being able to synthesize it and present it in an engaging way to their classmates. This entailed specific in-class tasks so that students could build the different skills necessary for the oral presentations. That is to say, I needed to prepare them little by little for the big project.

The presentations were more successful than usual with higher average grades than in previous semesters, which had a positive impact on the final course grade for several students. I attributed this success to having good models and to providing enough guidance. As it was the first time I used that method of teaching, I did not have past semesters’ work to compare it to and draw more conclusions about it. I realized that it would be useful to keep records of students’ work over time so that I could see patterns of how students were learning better (or not) with my implementations. I kept copies of their work, including presentation outlines and bibliographies, and the rubrics with my comments and grades, as well as my notes on each presentation. I looked at all these materials when the semester was over and found some areas where students consistently needed improvement. For example, I noticed that they tended not to be clear about technical terms or words. They were not writing new words on the blackboard nor explaining complicated concepts to their classmates. Consequently, I needed to emphasize that aspect and include it in my rubric for the next semester.

In fall 2006, I taught Spanish 424: Advanced Spanish Composition and Grammar and included an important oral presentation component. I added the nuances that I found by looking at my evidence from the spring. This time the presentations were even more successful than the previous semester. The students helped their listeners navigate their presentations by using the chalkboard to clarify new terms and concepts. Apart from performing more successfully and earning better grades, I also noted that students were more relaxed in general when presenting their work. Practically all of them looked very comfortable and at ease while speaking to their peers.

Keeping evidence over time could, thus, provide a lot of interesting information to study and analyze students’ performances and to figure out ways of helping students understand and learn more efficaciously. One option I will look into in future semesters is to videotape the oral presentations. This would involve finding and becoming familiar with the video equipment and preparing students for the taping. I believe it will be a superb way of capturing the product, and I would be able to create a thorough archive of evidence that would allow me to look into other aspects. For instance, it would allow me to study patterns of grammatical and lexical mistakes in oral presentations as opposed to written papers.

The completion of this project that started with my participation in the Best Practices Institute has made me more reflective about my teaching practices. My teaching is now intentional rather than instinctive. Instead of exclusively relying on “this feels right,” I try to look for a rationale behind my teaching decisions and methods. I think much more about outcomes and goals, about ways of helping students achieve those goals, and no less importantly, about ways to measure those achievements. It has also impacted my general motivation and interest, for it is much more fun and rewarding, and not merely a task to complete “well enough” to get decent evaluations.

Interestingly, teaching is no longer a “problem” to correct but a query worth exploring.