Reflections From the Classroom

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Foreword

Since the publication of Ernest Boyer's (1990) book *Scholarship Reconsidered*, there has been much discussion of the construct "scholarship of teaching." Many readers, including me, felt this was nothing but a nominal attempt to redefine teaching into a category of activity that the academy would value. Personally, I feel that universities should give great value to teaching because it is a critically important function of any society, and I do not need to label it as scholarship to give it great weight. Many of us wondered how Boyer would say that this scholarship of teaching was different from teaching per se. One version of such a difference focuses on research on teaching, especially as it is practiced in schools of education. We need more understanding of what practices and strategies will result in deeper learning for students, and professionally sound educational research is the way to get that knowledge into play. There continues to be a large, generative literature of findings on factors that make some classes more effective than others. A second (and very complementary) version of the scholarship of teaching has focused on something known as "reflective practice." In this area of scholarship, teachers give sustained attention to the ways that they have changed their teaching practices and how students' understanding has varied as a result of those practices. The focus of that reflection has been on many different features of teaching, ranging from intellectual framing and content to the many uses of contact time to the challenges of designing excellent opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding. What they all have in common, however, is the act of reflection by an instructor, putting the results of his or her work into a meaningful context, and planning for future teaching.

Our present set of essays all focus on the author's successes and failures as a teacher. Each person is ultimately concerned with how course experiences influenced the depth and quality of students' understanding and skill. What we see in each person's narrative is the power of being thoughtful and intentional about teaching, often resulting in more learning for students and less frustration for the teacher. Sharon Bass writes about her gradual understanding that less teaching from her could result in more learning by students. She discovered by being reflective about her work that her efforts were keeping her students from doing the discovering of their own skill in writing. Ruth Ann Atchley also reflects on the writing her students have been doing, but she increased the amount of writing students did and found that it was generative of the kind of higher-level learning she was most interested in promoting. Somewhere in the middle ground there are good levels of writing by students and feedback from teachers and other readers.

Jeff Olafsen observes how important it was for him to be part of a teaching community. When he put himself in contact with other reflective teachers, his vision about his own teaching increased. Andi Witczak also reflects on the benefits of community, and she expands on the value of analyzing complex skills into their component parts as an aid to student learning. Both Anton Rosenthal and Reva Friedman-Nimz reflect more broadly on the place of teaching in a longer career. Their experiences are different, but each writes a compelling account of dealing with challenges and moving forward. While some reflections are on the level of issues resident within a single offering of a course, other reflections place teaching in the context of bigger degrees of evolving practice.

All in all, we feel that teaching and learning will continue to evolve and grow at KU through the opportunity to generate reflective practice and to read about the insights others have drawn from their reflections.

Dan Bernstein
Director, Center for Teaching Excellence

On Design and Liberation

Sharon Bass

It was more than 20 years ago, but I remember clearly those first classes when I crossed over the line from student to teacher.

As a teacher, I brought that student along with me. It was both a good and a bad thing. My earliest decisions about teaching were informed by the experiences I had as a student. Sadly, I was more attentive to reacting to problematic teaching. I should have been guided from the get-go by those models who had inspired me, who paid me an undeserved respect because they saw more potential in me than I saw in myself. Models who knew their stuff and after many years were still excited by the subject, so much so that they HAD to share it with me, their student, and with colleagues. I entered those first classrooms determined never to appear before any class with boilerplate notes and lectures. I would be fresh. I would be current. For the most part, I have carried through on that.

I also entered those first classes determined to give students a full response to every assignment: No paper returned with a grade at the top but not a single note on the interior. Following through on this promise almost led to my undoing. If I were to start all over again, this is where I would begin the reconstruction.

Serving students as a teacher in a good university requires one to be less reactionary and more strategic. This lesson took a while. Over the years, I found great satisfaction in designing courses. The best part of the year almost always seemed to be those days spent organizing the syllabus: what will happen when, how, and to what consequence or with what weight. I say the best part because that was when everything was possible, clear, the plan set.

Classes began, projects rolled in, grading overtook me, and I thanked my stars for that plan, hanging on for the ride until the end of the semester. Some semesters I was not sure I would make it. Living that way caused more living that way. Too little time to think, reflect. It was a matter of ending the semester, recovering and launching the next one.

I hit bottom just before the midpoint of my KU career. A student turned in a 2,000-word article. It wasn't the worst thing I had seen. It was not the best thing I had seen. It fell somewhere in the middle. I wrote 4,000 words to the student about the paper.

What the student really wanted to know was the grade and why that grade. She may have wanted to know major steps needed for improvement. But poor soul, she did not want to know 4,000 words of criticism—constructive or otherwise. Most students don't have time for that much help.

Lesson one: Most students don't need, merit or expect to be edited by their professors. But, I brought my professional persona to my classrooms for many years. I am an editor. I worked as an editor. And for years I taught as an editor.

What's wrong with that? There are several things wrong with it. One, being an editor is not being a teacher. Being an editor is fixing someone else's work. Being a teacher is showing students how to fix their own work.

Being an editor does not take a strategic approach to teaching and the classroom. It's a role. It's an identity and, perhaps for me and others, a crutch. It's a model I understood well. It was the tool I carried and knew how to use.

Beyond all these faults, being an editor means concentrating on the work and not the learning process.

Over the years I changed, but most has come in recent years. And the change, I am embarrassed to say, came about for reasons that had everything to do with me at first and little to do with students.

This business of being a master teacher, a great teacher, even a passably good teacher requires a focused strategic approach because we have to be effective in our classrooms and within our disciplines. And we also have to do many other things.

We have to keep up with what's going on in our own field. I need to know what's going on in journalism, the major issues and problems, and also the challenges of operating magazines as journalistic enterprises and as businesses that demand return on investment. I need to study the practice of freelancing (how to be successful and how to incorporate freelancing into a staff talent pool), and I have to study, deconstruct and analyze magazine design (how presentation effects

understanding and utility for readers). Then, I need to come to some sense of understanding and test it by publishing and presenting the ideas.

In addition, I have to help people in the unit—advise students, serve on committees, assist with faculty development. It's the same with the university and our local community. In my unit, we often work with professional counterparts. They ask for help creating professional development programs, conducting surveys, reviewing and analyzing products and projects.

I also have to take care of myself—rest, recreate, exercise. I have a family who deserves more than a shadow of a slice of me.

These competing interests drove me to redesign one course as a test: Could I work smarter and still deliver the experience students needed and deserved?

I began with a couple of questions: Do my students really need to complete 15 assignments? How fair was it to have them work on the next assignment before I had evaluated the previous one? The subtext, as many of you will recognize, was how could I get out from under the weight of so much grading?

The redesign began with a CTE faculty seminar. I didn't have time for it, but I didn't have time not to do it. And I knew after being exposed to smart people—such as Barbara Walvoord from Notre Dame and Claude Cookman from Indiana University and Meggin McIntosh from the University of Nevada, Reno, as well as some of my own colleagues—that there were other ways. The first semester I dropped all the way down to 13 assignments. I almost declared victory and went home.

But, I test-drove the new product. Better, but what was I thinking? Almost immediately in the roll-out semester, I spotted places where the work could be better grouped in ways that made more sense, to me and to the students. I began right then with the redesign of the redesign. By mid-term I began the next syllabus. That meant I bought all sorts of time the following semester when I would have been mired in the syllabus preparation and trying to remember just what changes needed to be made.

My major effort went into identifying priorities. In three months none of us can teach everything the student might need to know. I had spent 15 years trying to do so—to remedy the deficit, to introduce new

material and move into the future. Of course it was impossible, so they left my classes with a deficit as well.

Working as an editor had put me in the habit of dealing with all mistakes or shortcomings equally. Setting priorities for learning helped me make assignments that were tailored to that learning. Having tailored assignments meant I knew priorities for grading. I could share these with students. It might seem like triage, but in a lengthy business plan, having good ideas on how to reach an audience is more important than format. Not to say that presentation didn't count, but now it had a proper place and weight.

The next year I rolled out the course with four assignments. These four assignments covered the knowledge previously required of students, but the students and I could manage these four assignments. I had done what journalists are supposed to do: I had cut. Fewer assignments. Fewer thou shalts and shalt nots. More active classes solving problems. More instruction with discussion and improved feedback.

The feedback improvement was the gift of technology. I began using the editing tools of Acrobat. No more handwritten notes. Talk about liberating. Pain-free hands, at last.

And best of all was the spontaneously expressed appreciation on the part of students. They felt the Acrobat feedback was richer and easier for them to follow. Acrobat also forced a discipline: Stick to the priorities with concise notation. I am now thinking of ways to use even simple software such as Word to do the same thing I have done with Acrobat.

This experience led me back to basics and thinking about teaching with specific goals in mind. Some experts call this backward design. Most of us engage in backward design instinctively or in part. The idea is to begin with the desired learning outcome and then build the course backward to achieve that outcome.

For me this meant that all assignments had to help students learn and help students know how each assignment contributes to the final goal. While previously I had nice elements in the course description and a day-by-day account in the syllabus, what the students needed was a clear map and much greater transparency about why they do what they do.

Graded work had to be returned within a week of the submission (sometimes I slipped to 10 days). If I could not deliver on this, then the assignment had to

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be reworked. The result was that my teaching improved. And somewhere along the way, I found out how to restore the course to students. The work inside the class became more active, the exchanges more productive. There was more buzz in the room. The experts call this "engagement." I call it fun.

Focus led to better organization and better organization led to greater clarity in presentation. Student evaluations on organizational ability, fairness and access all improved. The truth be told, I spent less time in office consultations, less time in grading, less time on email and had more time for the other parts of my professional and personal life.

Some days I regret that I didn't arrive at this point sooner. Other days, I recognize that it's all part of a process and that perhaps I could not have arrived at this place without those earlier experiences. When I studied photography I constantly wished that one time, just once, I would learn from doing it right rather than doing it wrong.

It never happened in photography, and it has seldom happened that way in teaching.

A friend recently asked what the turning point was? I surprised myself and my friend when I blurted out that the turning point most likely was entering the phased retirement program because in every way and in every role, I was detached in a most wonderfully productive way. I still cared about students and colleagues, but saw that it was their enterprise, not mine.

My friend's comment: Now how can we make that liberation available to everyone in the university? I wish I knew, because that connected, reflective detachment is liberating and empowering.

Sharon Bass is an associate professor of journalism. She has taught at KU since 1983.

Something New

Ruth Ann Atchley

This story began about two and a half years ago when I agreed to teach a new course in clinical psychology titled History and Systems in Psychology. I had been teaching at KU for five years at that point, and I normally teach neuropsychology courses. This means that I focus on topics like neuroanatomy, neuroscience methodology, clinical patient populations, and issues of this sort. In short, I teach lots of new vocabulary, lots of relatively straight-forward findings from the research literature, and other kinds of knowledge that, quite honestly, are reasonably amenable to the handy tools of lecture classes and multiple choice tests. A class like History and Systems was really something new for me. As I began to prepare for this course in the summer of 2003, I looked through the many textbooks available, I talked with my colleagues who had previously taught this course, and I started to feel a bit sheepish. Yes, I am exceedingly interested in the philosophical and historical underpinnings of my field, I regularly attend a conference on the history of neuroscience, and I had taken a course like this in my undergrad days. But I felt ill-prepared to approach this course, and I knew that my usual teaching methods felt incompatible with the abstract and conceptual information that is the backbone of this course.

My first thought was to teach this course as I had taught other graduate seminars in the past: assign readings and then lead a discussion. But as many can testify, this strategy can bomb horribly if the students are not highly motivated to show sustained involvement in the discussions (a possibility that seemed very remote to me at the time) and/or the students are not very invested in the topics being discussed. This latter outcome seemed possible, but I was not confident that the required interest level would be sustained throughout the semester. Additionally, the History and Systems course was going to be cross-listed as both a graduate and undergraduate course, and so I felt that I would need a bit more structure in my daily schedule than is often needed in a class for graduate students only. I did not feel good about relying on a successful conversation each week in the classroom as the primary way to convey course content. Not to mention the pitfalls of

having a small subset of the students "carrying" the course discussion, and the possibility that the discussion would too often go off track and not address the important issues that needed to at least be touched on. So this solution felt insufficient.

Then I asked myself a critical question: "What do I want to see happen in this course?" I concluded that my goal was for every student in the class to do the following things:
• Read all assigned material before coming to class.
• Carefully ponder the philosophical ideas being reviewed, not just memorize names and labels.
• Think critically about the influential theories that have shaped our field.
Also, I wanted the material we were covering to influence how these students defined themselves as psychologists. Yes, I was being an idealist, but I perceived this class as having the potential to be either the most boring course ever or one that could significantly change new psychologists' assumptions about their own field of study.

Exploring the potential

It struck me that one great way to get each and every student to digest each of the ideas that were the critical content of the course was to require them to write about these ideas. Writing is a process that requires a reasonable a-priori level of understanding of material, and writing, like a good discussion, has the potential to stimulate critical analysis of a topic. I had used writing in many other classes as a kind summative exercise to get students to tie together important issues of a class (i.e. in a research proposal or literature review). But I'd never used writing as a day-to-day tool in the classroom. Nonetheless, writing seemed like the perfect method for instruction in this new class. Additionally, there was the added benefit of providing students a chance to improve their writing skills, an area our department believes needs more attention.

So the next questions were, "How often should they write?" and "When should this writing happen?" My first thought was to assign some take-home writing assignment once a week or maybe once every other

week; again, a more traditional approach. But then I thought, why not write every day and why not write in the classroom? In other words, if writing was going to be the primary method of instruction, why not spend class time doing it? This felt like an odd idea at first; wasn't writing during a class period somehow a waste of precious class time? But when I tried to imagine what a lecture on this material would look like, it struck me as either being a painfully redundant replication of the text material or delivering a very subjective view. I didn't think either of these two options—being extremely dry or potentially biased—was acceptable, and this approach would not help me effectively reach my teaching goals for the class. Therefore, I decided to consult with the KU Writing Center and the Center for Teaching Excellence to get their feedback about how best to implement a daily writing regimen. The Writing Center staff helped me decide what type of written work the students should do. At CTE we discussed the potential learning benefits of this methodology. I also decided that the students should be involved with structuring this course. Thus, once the semester began, I talked to students about my plan for intense writing and sought their input on how writing sessions should be incorporated into each day's activities, as well as how the writing should be evaluated. My impression is that including student input was one of the things that helped make the class a success.

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Implementing the approach

As a team we came up with the following general structure. Each class period was broken up into three segments: first, a short lecture by me; second, a period of in-class writing in response to a writing prompt; and third, a discussion of students' written ideas. This structure was, of course, a bit fluid, and at first I had some trouble keeping my lecture to only 15 or 20 minutes. The students actually helped me with this, because they really appreciated having a lengthy discussion at the end, so they helped me keep track of my lecture time. When I taught the course a second time in Fall 2004, I modified my lectures so that instead of giving a chapter overview, I included a content piece that expanded on ideas in the text. Regarding the writ-

ing component, I quickly discovered that the greatest determining factor for success was the quality of my writing prompt. The challenge was to generate a question that required critical thinking and could only be answered if the student had read the material carefully. I found that devising this single writing prompt took me almost as long as writing a 30-minute lecture, but the results were worth the effort. To help illustrate my point, I have provided a few of the prompts that seemed to work well and some that didn't.

Better prompts:

Pythagoras proposed a very early form of dualism, which combines the more rationalist ideas of Parmenides with the more empiricist ideas of Heraclitus. Please describe Pythagoras's version of dualism. Also explain how this cosmology influenced his contemporary culture and how it might be influencing our culture today. (The combination of a more factual question at the beginning with a more abstract question seemed effective.)

Please discuss Condillac's analogy of the sentient statue. Use this analogy to describe and explain the important tenets of British Empiricism and French Sensationalism. (One nice thing about this question might be that it used a very concrete and evocative example from the material as the backbone for the more abstract part of the question.)

Weaker prompts:

How has Gestalt psychology influenced contemporary psychology? Provide specific examples from your field of study. (Probably too broad and vague; this kind of overly general question did not help students write concise and well-directed essays.)

Given the fact that rudimentary theories of evolution go back as far as the early Greeks, why did it take until the 19th century for adequate theories of evolution to develop? What general philosophical ideas impeded the development of a theory of evolution? (Possibly too speculative; students definitely felt like they did not have enough information to effectively answer this question.)

Thanks to efforts by CTE, it is also possible to look at actual examples of student writing in this course. Links to these are available on the CTE web site at www.ku.edu/~cte/gallery/atchleyObsInClass.html

The final issue we addressed was the question of grading. If the course utilized writing as the primary mechanism for learning, then course grades should be based on writing, as well. Again I asked students for suggestions about what aspects of their writing needed the most work and what should be emphasized. Our solution was for students to write a one-page out-of-class paper that synthesized our classroom writing and discussions. These out-of-class assignments, which were due every two weeks, built on the topics of the daily writing assignments. Students were in fact encouraged to use their daily writing and the notes they had taken in the discussion periods to develop the graded writing assignments. The paper length was specifically limited, because the students and I decided that one aspect of writing that needed the most work was succinctness. For a final exam, the students wrote three different papers that built upon daily writing assignments from throughout the semester and addressed larger themes in the course. This final writing assignment provided students with an additional layer of synthesis.

Evaluating the impact

I have now taught this course twice, and I anticipate teaching it every other year. My impression of the general effectiveness of this teaching method is that it has been a reasonable success. I am most pleased about the impact that this course has had on my students' writing skills. This was not one of my original goals, but it became a significant one as the course developed. Based both on the quality of work produced and on student feedback, I believe that students were able to become more precise, concrete and effective writers. This success required a lot of work from all involved. In particular, I think it is critical for an instructor to provide extensive critical feedback on the first few papers. Peer evaluation can also help in the learning process (though how it should be used is an issue I am still struggling with). For the students' part, they need to accept feedback provided in the way that it is intended, as an attempt to be helpful. Some students were markedly resistant to receiving critical feedback, but they all needed it. One way to make this a bit easier may be to make sure that all the papers look equally "red." In other words, provide lots of written comments on all papers and then simply show students that they all have room for improvement. Of course, it also helps to provide positive feedback freely, as well; seeing what works is as helpful as seeing what doesn't.

Regarding the acquisition of content, I can say that I have been pleased with the substantive content in the later writing assignments, and I have been impressed with many of the final writing assignments that I have read. I do not, as yet, have a great way to determine if content learning has been significantly improved through this approach to teaching. However, on most days when we left the classroom, I felt that each student had made a real effort to understand the material, and there were days when I felt that the discussions we had were the most insightful, generative and creative that I had ever had in a classroom. There is more work to do, but I think that I can recommend this "writing in the classroom" method.

Ruth Ann Atchley is an associate professor of psychology. She has taught at KU since 1998.

An Ongoing Reflection

Jeffrey Olafsen

For most faculty members, there is no external stimulus that makes us take a good long reflective look at our teaching in a broad context. There is pressure to teach and to teach well, but that expectation always seems to be in the here and now. Hence, we usually look at our teaching in terms of the next class, the next test, the next demo for a lecture. In the absence of any significant external stimulus for reflecting on teaching, what can compete with funding deadlines, committee meetings, the student at our door, the next paper sitting nearly complete on our office desk, or even the more immediate need to finish our next lecture prep?

I won't try to suggest that I have the singularly right or best answer to this question. Much like scaling a mountain, there are many paths through the foothills and approaches to the summit—which in analogy I admit I myself have still not reached. However, to extend the analogy, there are commonalities no matter how we approach the climb: at some point we'll break out of the cover from under the tree line (we'll be seen as faculty who think about our teaching), smaller mountains are easier to train on than larger ones (we'll build confidence as we solve small problems before tackling big ones), and the experience we gain can be as much a benefit to others as to ourselves (sharing what we've learned about teaching benefits others and reinforces our own understanding). There are three simple points that I want to share, based on my own experiences with trying to improve my teaching.

Make time

If there is no external stimulus that requires you to broadly examine your teaching, then making the time to do this must come from within yourself and your own desire to be a better teacher. We all know the tactics we use to push everything out of the way when we are working on a proposal deadline or a journal manuscript. We close our office doors, we work at home, and we burn the midnight oil until we eat, sleep and dream of our project descriptions and data analysis. This is the hallmark of a successful manuscript or proposal: the consummate work that results from an intense focus. A similar tactic must be used to critically examine our teaching. If your office is like mine—filled with manuscripts for journal articles, a computer with an open email browser, and notes for the beginnings of the next grant proposal—then a different venue must be found for reflecting on teaching. In this regard, the existence alone of the Center for Teaching Excellence is significant. Even if your schedule is such that you can't seem to free the time for CTE-sponsored events, just drop in to visit as a quiet place to get away from the lab and office. Their substantial library is an open resource for KU instructors. Bring notes with you from the last time you taught a particular course, or even just blank pages, and quietly reflect on your teaching. If you're not sure what questions to be asking yourself to begin, the library resources can be good fodder, especially for those of us who have never thought about how to think about teaching.

When I started teaching at KU, I had never thought much past how one lecture connected to the next. It is a common "divide and conquer" technique that I think is a healthy defense mechanism to keep us from becoming overwhelmed, especially when preparing for a course offering the first time. I also fell victim to one of the more common pitfalls in teaching: the belief that somehow I was doing an excellent job with my lectures, and somehow it was the students who weren't getting it. In the sciences, we're not surprised when we repeat an experiment identically and get exactly the same result. But somehow when we teach, we get tripped up thinking that next semester, if we change nothing, somehow the class of students will be different and next time the result will be better. Equally disastrous is the belief that we must change everything about our teaching all at once. If we're reflective enough to want to take a serious look at our teaching and desire to be better instructors, then statistically speaking we can't be doing everything wrong.

Break it up

Just as you know you can't teach a whole semester's content in a day, realize that it is equally daunting to try to improve everything you can in your teaching on a similar schedule. This is why I

didn't say there was anything wrong with the "divide and conquer" approach to teaching class one lecture at a time. The pitfall is becoming myopic and looking at teaching as only a set of connected lectures that follow one another sequentially. Similarly, if we find a long laundry list of things to try to improve our instruction, attempting all of them at once can do more harm than good, supplanting effective practices for the sake of trying something new. Again, as researchers, we know that if we fix a problem by changing two things at once, we're in the dark as to whether it was one or the other (or both) changes that resulted in a positive outcome. In terms of advancing knowledge, we haven't done ourselves any favors, because eventually we have to go back and do the experiment to figure out which of the two factors (or the combination) resulted in improvement. There is something else we know from our research programs: some experiments fail to produce the outcome for which we hope. That doesn't mean we haven't cultivated valuable wisdom from them.

Learning these truths was the biggest surprise I discovered when I participated in the CTE Best Practices program in Spring 2003. Previously, I had been a passive attendant of the Teaching Summit and a few other CTE programs. I applied for the Best Practices Institute to make time to reflect on my teaching and to actively improve my instructional techniques. I picked through the readings that had been assigned before the scheduled meetings, and I had to admit to being intimidated by the feeling that it seemed everyone knew more about teaching than I did. I also worried that in order to improve, I'd have to become an expert in the field and start publishing papers in journals for education. Neither of these fears materialized. One of the most reassuring revelations of the Best Practices Institute was that I didn't have to create an entirely new research program in physics education to improve my teaching. My colleagues attending Best Practices were all very much like me, each of us having come to the realization that we were not content with the status quo and wanting to improve our teaching practices. As we shared our problems and discussed our frustrations, it also became clear that the challenges we were having were not specific to our particular subject matter. Physicists were facing the same difficulties as professors

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in psychology, speech-language-hearing, engineering and East Asian studies.

The two-day program was beneficial in many ways. First, referring back to my initial point, it was two full days of discussion and reflection on teaching among colleagues with the same concerns and the same desire to make improvements. While CTE staff provided the structure and initiated the first discussions, by the end of the second day the group dynamic had changed significantly. In particular, the belief that those outside of one's specific discipline couldn't relate to someone else's instructional problems had completely dissipated. Second, while the content of the program approached teaching like any other academic endeavor, and thinking critically about it like any other research problem, the ultimate product of the reflection was not a journal article. The point was not to make us all the next best experts in education or require us to establish a research infrastructure to publish scholarly communication in education journals. The workshop leader focused on giving us time to reflect on what we thought was not working in our teaching, then challenged us to interact with each other and come up with approaches we might try to improve its effectiveness. Third, we were all a group of colleagues in the same situation, comforted by the understanding that there was no "silver bullet" to solve all our instructional problems. If there was such a thing, it would have been packaged and sold to us on CD-ROM a long time ago. This awareness was very liberating; in an encouraging and non-judgmental environment, we had freedom to explore ideas both one-on-one and in groups, as well as time to reflect about possible benefits and pitfalls.

In the process, we rediscovered many of the work habits we try to impress upon our own students about learning: make time for homework and reflection, working in groups is often more effective than working alone, and don't be afraid to get the wrong answer. Finally, we were introduced to a web-based tool to help us organize our thoughts and innovations that involved neither formulating a thoroughly detailed teaching portfolio nor developing a new research program. The web-based posters allowed us to simply and concisely organize assessments of our instruction and to serve as an ongoing journal of innovations we were going to attempt and how effective we found them to be.

A constant cycle

The best teaching practice is a constant cycle of reflection, innovation and assessment that brings us back to reflecting on our teaching on a regular basis. I would have considered my time well spent with CTE even if my experience had culminated with the Best Practices Institute in 2003. However, many participants continued a dialogue throughout the following academic year. We met to show each other the open questions we had each settled on exploring in a subsequent offering of one of our courses. We differed on how to present our reflections in our web posters, but these differences varied largely according to taste. Again, we found that the issues we dealt with transcended our disciplines, because many of our innovations centered on how material was being delivered, not in the details of subject matter. We compared and contrasted what we had learned through our initial reflection and innovations we implemented and assessed, which resulted in understanding each other's outcomes, both successes and failures. This was even more evident when some of us responded to an invitation to return as part of Best Practices Institute 2004.

Our participation in this second CTE program was different from the prior year: we were brought in as facilitators to the conversation, not as experts with answers, but as colleagues with examples of reflection to help guide the dialogue. We found that rather than dominating the discussion, we were able to simply be examples of reflection that resulted in an exchange developing more quickly and easily among our new colleagues than our own group had managed the year before. We were able to provide a point of view that had not been as evident the first time: our web posters were only the beginning of a longer process of an evolving cycle of reflection, innovation and assessment, then a return to reflecting on a course again. The realization that this circular process is somewhat more important as a teaching practice regardless of the outcome of any particular innovation was more profound the second time around, for both the facilitators and the first-time participants. Had I made only one pass through the CTE program, I don't know that I would have as deeply appreciated teaching as an open-ended scholarly endeavor. By providing an example to my colleagues, I believe the first-time participants saw clearly that one need not try to implement all possible innovations at once to have a successful experience reflecting upon teaching.

Finally, having worked through the process more than once, I find that I'm now much better equipped to reflect on my teaching on a regular basis. I still interact with my Best Practices colleagues from time to time, either by perusing their ongoing web posters, or by meeting them face-to-face at CTE programs. Interestingly, I find that I'm using my time more efficiently to reflect upon teaching in much the same way I do my research, resulting in a better balance between the two scholarly activities. I'm now able to do this quite effectively in my office, where my open email browser, my idea for the next grant proposal, and the journal manuscript I'm finishing all exist along side the courses that I continue to work to improve.

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A Thinking Transformation: Why Does Clarity Bring More Questions Than Answers?

Andi Witczak

Last spring, I had the opportunity to participate in the CTE Best Practices Institute. Through discussion and discovery, the experience completely changed the way that I think about teaching. I discovered the idea of "backward design" from *Understanding by Design* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe. This approach starts with the end goal in mind instead of beginning with textbooks or assignments. Although not a new idea by any means, it furthered the approach by advocating creation of the assessment tool at the beginning of the planning stage and asking readers to consider what would we accept as evidence of student learning before planning the teaching and learning experiences (8). However, it was during a discussion when Dan Bernstein mentioned "component composite analysis" that my thinking transformation began. It allowed me to name and define a framework for what I was, in a sense, already doing. I was able to move from the abstract to the concrete.

As I am a designer and not a psychologist, I have a limited but "design-contextualized" understanding of component composite analysis. A complex performance requires that students be able to put together parts of information and understanding (components). The instructor must be able to identify the components and provide opportunities, through practice and feedback, to allow students to acquire the component knowledge so that they can put together the total performance (composite). Proponents of this idea argue that students who appear to lack talent may be missing the opportunity to learn the component skills, thereby making the composite too hard to achieve. It places the responsibility on the instructor to identify three things: a successful composite performance, the component knowledge needed, and where the student would have acquired the skills. When the formal analysis is completed, the instructor teaches to the component skills. After discovering component composite analysis and backward design, I started to fully examine my teaching methods. The theory seemed to make perfect sense, and having this conceptual framework was enlightening. It expanded my thinking by defining

a methodology whereby I could take my experiences and organize them into a new, yet familiar, context.

My observation is that for many, teaching is about using our collections—collections of lectures, collections of projects, and/or collections of tests and paper assignments. Usually missing from this discussion is what these collections represent. What do they mean to students? What do we want students to do with them? In design studio courses, we often use projects to define and identify course content. We speak confidently of what an individual project will teach, yet rarely talk about a course in terms of overall teaching/learning goals, but rather in terms of our collection of assignments. If we start with the learning goals and requisite component skills defined, then we can evaluate our collections and choose lecture content and assignments that will help students perform successfully and confidently. Even the simple mind shift into thinking that if each project is a specific component, then what is the composite of the course as a whole has opened up new possibilities for me.

I have often wondered why beginning teachers, most of whom are excellent graphic design professionals, get so lost and frustrated in the classroom, losing patience with students who "just don't get it." Although I understood intuitively what the problem could be, especially in the introductory courses, I did not have a framework to answer the question until component composite analysis. If a teacher assumes that students have acquired the component knowledge needed but, through no fault of their own, they have not, then frustration will occur not only for the instructor but for the students, as well. I constantly remind myself that instead of asking "Why can't students (fill in the blank)?" my first thought should be "How can I help facilitate this skill?"

Now that I have bought into the idea of backward design and component composite analysis, the question becomes "Does this teaching approach create students who can successfully complete the task?" As I mentioned earlier, my process of teaching was similar to component composite analysis. I have always taught

design projects by expanding parameters, initially keeping the parameters limited so students could discover basic design principles and then expanding the visual opportunity to increase learning and retention as the project went along. Over the years, I have been happy with the results. Last fall, using component composite analysis, I refined the idea in VISC 524/Graphic Design IV, a senior-level studio course for graphic design majors. The first step was to clearly define the composite or products of the performance and make sure they were clearly listed on the assignment sheet. After conducting a formal analysis of the component skills needed to successfully complete the task, I refined the process that I have the students move through during the course of the project. The assignment sheet defined the process in terms of component skills and provided time and feedback to discover or synthesize information. For skills that would not have been taught in previous coursework, I conducted mini-performances within the overall assignment. These detours allowed a student to practice or discover a component skill that could then be brought back into the assignment proper. Finally, I used the component skills to construct a comprehensive rubric that would allow for an objective evaluation of the composite performance. This fall, when I teach the course again, I will hand out the rubric at the beginning of the project in order to make the evaluation criteria transparent to the students. Overall, I was extremely pleased with the result as the projects demonstrated strong conceptual thinking and solid formal skills. The only change I plan on making at this point is with the schedule. I will allow more time at the end for the Brand Identity Study (a publication that captures the student's process throughout the project).

Along with studio courses, I am also responsible for teaching a lecture course entitled The History and Philosophy of Design. The course uses the traditional art history delivery method of dual slide projectors and a collection of lectures organized by design movement and philosophy, presented in chronological order. I share many of the complaints voiced by my colleagues, such as why do students have a hard time writing clearly and thoughtfully? Why are they seemingly unable to synthesize and apply information? Reminding myself of my earlier question, "How can I help facilitate these

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skills?," my thoughts have shifted: What do they remember after the course is over? What do I want them to remember? What is truly important? Why do I write tests the way that I do? Is it because that is the way it has always been done? Interestingly, I have never thought to apply lessons I have learned in teaching studio to teaching a lecture course. What is the complex performance (the composite) I expect from them? Can it be something more than a test or a paper? What skills would they need to complete this task? Since the course itself is available to any major within the design department, as well as anyone who has completed Art History I/II, where would students have acquired (through practice and feedback) the skills that might be required? How could I address something new within what already seems like a packed schedule? One might think that from the sheer number of questions I have raised, the prospect of change would seem too daunting. Just the opposite. Armed with my "design-contextualized" understanding of component composite analysis, I am energized by the idea of applying the theory to many different situations and under different conditions as a way to test its appropriateness and discover its strengths and weaknesses as a methodology.

In order for reflection to truly impact teaching, one must be open to the possibilities that present themselves as a result and ultimately act on them. I am surprised that a moment of clarity, the simple discovery of a framework around which to organize my thoughts, would yield so many compelling questions. My task now is to prioritize the questions as they relate to each of the courses that I teach. If I try to tackle everything at once, nothing will get done. This is the challenge that I have given myself: How will I direct my energy into manageable yet significant changes?

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Innovation, Fear and Risk Aversion in Teaching

Anton Rosenthal

Nearly every December it happens. I find myself frantically running down a hallway in Blake. I'm clutching the final exams, the extra pens and some spare bluebooks, and I'm late because I've lost track of the time. My heart is pounding, I'm sweating even though it is in the midst of winter, and then I'm gripped by the realization that I have no idea where my class is. I peer through the door windows into room after room, but my students are nowhere to be found. And then I wake up.

I used to wonder when this repeating anxiety dream would let go of me. But I think I know the answer. Not as long as I'm still teaching. And I'm starting to see that that is not necessarily a bad thing. I've come to see fear as an integral component of teaching. It permeates our classrooms, and it is not just coming from the student in the back row who freezes when you call on her or the one who comes to you after blowing a midterm and tells you that he really has to have a "B" in your course in order to graduate. It comes out of our own desires as teachers, our years of training as students, and the infuriating experience we have that as we age, our minds and memories are deteriorating. While delivering a lecture, in the midst of hunting vainly for a word in mid-sentence, perhaps a thought has crept into your mind, "What am I doing here in this classroom?" It's the same question that my dream asks. My feeling is that when I can no longer answer that, it will be time to move on to another occupation. For now, my answer is "I'm trying to learn something new." So each semester, on the first day of classes when my stomach moves to another time zone, I push past my shyness and look around the room for reactions to the syllabus. I discard my worry that students will move for the door as I explain that this is a new class that has never been taught before and they are the designated guinea pigs. I brace myself for the disappointment that will come from enrollment drops as they perform the calculations about how all this assigned work might fit into their schedules. And through it all I wait to see if there are just a few pairs of eyes that light up, that hold out the possibility of intellectual engagement over the coming months.

Jane Tompkins, an English professor, has written eloquently on fear and the necessity of taking risks in teaching. In an article published in 1990, she detailed the fear she felt after decades of teaching according to what she had imbibed in college and in graduate school. Her constant anxiety over being well-prepared and showing how smart and knowledgeable she was in class led her to critique what she called the "performance model" of teaching, which she found to be "destructive of creativity and self-motivated learning."

> Each person comes into a professional situation dragging along behind her a long bag full of desires, fears, expectations, needs, resentments—the list goes on. But the main component is fear. Fear is the driving force of the performance model. Fear of being shown up for what you are: a fraud, stupid, ignorant, a clod, a dolt, a sap, a weakling, someone who can't cut the mustard. In graduate school, especially, fear is prevalent. Thinking about these things, I became aware recently that my own fear of being shown up for what I really am must transmit itself to my students, and insofar as I was afraid to be exposed, they too would be afraid.[1]

Tompkins' solution was to radically alter the rules of the game, to give up the mode of the lecture and to allow students to take control of the discussion by reducing her own input in the class to a minimum. Her fear motivated her to innovate, and in the end she felt that both she and her students gained far more from the experience than from the more traditional approach. Also, her fear dissipated.

Teaching is a risk-taking activity. It probably does not seem that way on a weekly basis and certainly not to outsiders. After all, most of us are not saving lives or pushing around millions of dollars of investment capital or anything that looks terribly dramatic when we construct a course or enter a classroom or a studio. But engaged teaching, the stuff that inspires students and might change the direction of their lives, involves using your whole being, not just what you learned in grad school, or read in journals or discovered in the lab or in the archive. What you select to teach and how you present it is a reflection of your life, your personal-

ity, and your politics as much as it is where you got your Ph.D. and what your specialty is. In that sense, teaching involves more emotional risk than many other professions and occupations. Parker Palmer, a popular teaching guru, makes this point when he writes:

> Here is a secret hidden in plain sight: *good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.* In every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood— and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning.[2]

My own teaching is marked by a disdain for hierarchal authority that comes out of going to college on the West Coast during the era of police riots on campus. It also features an egalitarian streak that was fed by working on a newspaper collective in Santa Barbara in the 1970s; a healthy respect for the power of the cinema which comes from my brief experience as a film student; an appreciation of the creativity of workers that comes from both studying labor history and working for years as an offset pressman; and the obsession of a collector of old postcards, which I think is simply a way to order the chaos of the past. I bring all of these aspects of my life into the classroom every week, into the design of my courses and even into the subjects that I elect to teach. Some people would call this "baggage," but I see it as my work box.

Templates are there to be broken

Breakthroughs like Tompkins' appear to be accidental and rare rather than a planned part of the university environment. This is strange, since universities often tout themselves as sites of innovation, especially in laboratories and research. Teaching, by contrast, is regularly looked upon as a more conservative endeavor where faculty members are often expected to emulate their professors and hold on to the "tried and true" methods of the last century (or two)—the entertaining lecture, the long term paper, the final exam.

Carl Strikwerda, another historian, wrote in these pages a few years ago that "teaching is a conservative act, in the classic sense of the term" and that it has as its goal "to preserve what is good from the past."[3] While I understand his point, my perspective on where we are and how we got here is somewhat darker. I come from the assumption that a world in which it is possible for a handful of people to destroy the foundations of human society in a matter of minutes is fundamentally untenable. For me, it follows that the role of the historian and the social scientist is to question the wrong turns that have led us to this place of chaos, to tear down this history, to destroy the myths that help perpetuate it and to question its premises. In short, to teach is to profess, to bay at the surrounding darkness (if for no other reason than to remember that it was not always night) and to search for a way out of the tunnel. In order to do that, I find that it is often necessary to diverge from the methods of the past, as well. In an upper-level undergraduate course on the cultural history of Latin America, I started with recent dark events and worked backward in time, in contrast to almost all other courses in our department which work from the past toward the present, a template that is central to our discipline. My idea was to unravel culture as if it were an onion, looking at interrelated layers and eventually at its core foundations in the 19th century. But I also wanted to shock students with a problem at the very beginning: How could a country with one of the most democratic traditions in the hemisphere give rise to a brutal and prolonged military government that routinely tortured its citizens and produced the highest political incarceration rate in the world during the 1970s? To answer this question I had to disorient them, put them into the maelstrom, and then we had to climb backward through the barbaric sludge and the cultural achievements of the 20th century. Interestingly, no student has ever complained about this reverse chronology, though a few have had moments of creative confusion in the middle, and my sense is that they have been able to make the conceptual loop back to the present at the end of the course with an even better understanding of culture than if I had employed a traditional model.

The notion of a template for history courses was first made visible to me a couple of years ago by a graduate teaching assistant who wanted my advice on teaching a world history course, a freshman intro. He had gone to our syllabi file, fashioned his course after the previous one taught, selected a text, and now, several weeks into the semester, was bored out of his mind. Apparently, so were the students. He complained about the strategy of covering three civilizations per week, rendering them so simple as to be incomprehensible. I asked him why he followed this tack, and he replied that he had not wanted to rock the boat and assumed

that this was how the faculty wanted the course taught. I freed him of this illusion that he had to reproduce his ancestors' course, and the next time he taught a survey class, he created it according to larger themes and comparative case studies that let him and the students get into the subject in more depth. There are two points to this story: first, that under the duress of our varied and increasing workloads and a desire to please our superiors, we often have a tendency to follow the path of least resistance in teaching, but this is ultimately not good for the individual or for the institution. This conformity is learned in graduate school, repeated by assistant professors under pressure to produce sufficient amounts of research to attain tenure, and then so well ingrained that absent countervailing forces, it can go on unabated until retirement. All that is necessary is to please students enough that they award good marks for "well prepared and communicated effectively" and "the instructor was generally effective." As an institution, I think that we have to reexamine the messages that we are communicating to the new professoriate; i.e. that they should not put too much energy or creativity into their teaching because they need to turn out ever increasing amounts of research. This lesson, learned collectively, will render us irrelevant as an agent of change in a very short time.[4]

> I had to let go of my fears of how much I did not know, and to trust my students to do the work, offer their insights and make interesting connections between theories, problems and some of their own experiences. In short, my own inexperience led to a collaborative effort.

Boredom as the mother of invention

My second point is that boredom experienced by a teacher is not the product of some personal failing but a symptom of something in the teaching itself and probably a good impetus to experimentation. Joan Flaherty, in admitting that grading and the repetition of subject matter lead her to a state of "debilitating, mind-numbing" boredom, suggests some defenses that involve reading and writing about teaching, tinkering with the delivery and substance of a course and "lightening up." Some of these can be useful while others are simply short-term mind games.[5] For me, the thing that keeps both boredom and fear of irrelevancy at bay is inventing new courses. I average about one new course each year, discarding old ones after I've taught them four or five times. Not everything gets thrown out. It is more like reshuffling the deck, taking seg-

ments of older classes and realigning them, with new topics and assignments and different goals. But each time I do it, I engage in some investigation by reading new material, then I perform some creative collage.

The biggest risk I have taken in teaching began a few years ago when I convinced a series of colleagues and administrators to let me teach an occasional course in another discipline. I was hesitant to approach my friends in sociology for permission to play in their sandbox, but something drove me to propose teaching a course that I entitled Deciphering the City, which fell under the existing rubric of urban sociology. The truth is that I had been getting a little bored after achieving tenure, and I wanted to get out of my box as a Latin American historian and investigate something new, with a broader geographical scope and a greater sense of immediacy than what I'd been used to. I was warmly welcomed by the sociology department and allowed to teach the course using an interdisciplinary approach. I spent a few months reading about the topic in unfamiliar journals and books, observing one of my friends teach an introductory sociology class. Then I dove in.

For a while, I clung to what I knew, the historical dimensions of cities. But my students, who were very different from history majors, expected something more than this, and they let me know it. So I pushed into contemporary issues and sociological methods, and the class took off. I had to let go of my fears of how much I did not know, and to trust my students to do the work, offer their insights and make interesting connections between theories, problems and some of their own experiences. In short, my own inexperience led to a collaborative effort. I also had to allow my own ideas, observations and constructions to guide the discussions, even if I considered myself a novice in this new discipline. When I did that, my own learning—the very purpose of this experiment—increased markedly, and I also began to relax in the classroom. In time, the course really did become interdisciplinary, employing ideas and materials from geography, literature, history and sociology. I've probably never learned more in my life than I did from teaching this one class, and it has helped me bust through borders in the rest of my teaching repertoire, especially at the graduate level where I now teach a course on The Global City.[6]

It is customary to open essays like this one with a provocative quotation. In my unorthodox way, I've been holding back, waiting to close with something that captures my feelings about teaching more eloquently than I can articulate them. It is from a short story by an Uruguayan author who has spent the last three decades in Spain, having fled the violence and insanity of a military dictatorship in her homeland. The story concerns the Museum of Futile Endeavors, a melancholy repository of unrealized desires located on the edge of an unnamed city.

The clerk assures me that only a tiny proportion of useless efforts makes it to the museum. For one thing, the government lacks money, so acquisitions, exchanges, or exhibits in the provinces or abroad are practically impossible. For another, the inordinate number of useless efforts carried out all the time means that a lot of people would have to be willing to work without pay or understanding on the part of the public…

Leafing through one of the volumes, I found a man who spent 10 years trying to make his dog talk. Another spent more than 20 years trying to win a woman's affections…

There are men who have taken long journeys in pursuit of inexistent places, unrecoverable memories, deceased women, disappeared friends. There are children who undertook impossible tasks with great resolve. Like the ones who would dig a hole periodically washed over by the waves…

Entire sections of the museum are dedicated to voyages. We reconstruct them from the pages of the books. After a time of drifting across various seas, traversing dense forests, discovering cities and marketplaces, crossing bridges, sleeping on trains and station benches, the travelers forget the purpose of the trip yet nevertheless continue traveling. And then one day—lost in a flood, trapped in the subway, asleep forever in a doorway—they disappear without a trace. And no one comes to claim them.[7]

Those who innovate tend to work on the fringes of hierarchical institutions, hidden away where someone won't come by and tell them that they cannot continue to do what they are doing. Faculty need to exploit the few spaces they have for experimentation: CTE, the Honors Program, team-teaching and the course development funds made available by the Office of International Programs.[8] They also need to take some risks to open new spaces. There is unlikely to be any new initiative coming from above, no grand experiment on the level of the University of Pennsylvania's alternative core curricula.[9] In any case, ambitious students will find these limited and idiosyncratic fringe experiments through their own intelligence networks. But these accidents need to be encouraged, sustained, documented and fully incorporated into the curriculum if the university as a whole does not wish to be rendered irrelevant in its teaching mission.

Endnotes

[1]Tompkins, J. (1990). Pedagogy of the distressed. *College English, 52* (6), 654. For a more detailed analysis of fear in the educational system, see her autobiography, *A life in school: What the teacher learned* (Cambridge: Perseus, 1996).

[2]Palmer, P. J. (1997, November/December). The heart of a teacher: Identity and integrity in teaching. *Change,* 16.

[3]Strikwerda, C. (2001). Reflections on teaching. *Reflections from the Classroom (4),* 16.

[4]For an interesting discussion of conformity and scholarship in academe, see the interview with the historian and activist Howard Zinn. Barsamian, D. (1997, July). Howard Zinn: *The Progressive* interview. *The Progressive,* 37-40.

[5]Flaherty, J. (2000). Teachers get bored, too. *The Teaching Professor, 14* (10), 1.

[6]For an explanation of how this course was designed with the help of a CTE Faculty Seminar, see the CTE web site at www.ku.edu/~cte/gallery.

[7]Rossi, C. P. (2001). *The museum of useless efforts.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2-5.

[8]The case for the creative potential of interdisciplinary team teaching was made by Anton Rosenthal and Fred Rodriguez, (2001), in Interdisciplinary courses and team teaching: Crossing academic borders, *Reflections from the Classroom, (4),* 1-4. None of the institutional barriers to this type of teaching has been removed. Good arguments for exploring the intersection of history with other disciplines are put forward by Thomas Bender in Expanding the domain of history, an essay commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and available at www.carnegiefoundation.org/cid.

[9]*The Chronicle of Higher Education,* May 10, 2002, A12.

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My Teaching Voice

Reva Friedman-Nimz

My parents, both educators, decided that I shouldn't become a teacher. "You don't like kids," they told me. I have managed to avoid reminding them of this prediction, as well as the one they made about my decision to abandon playing the violin ("You'll regret it," they proclaimed. I still don't.).

Much to my amazement, I have been a teacher for nearly 30 years. I have worked as a teacher educator at KU since 1978. During this time, I have taught children from preschool through high school and a broad span of adults in undergraduate and graduate courses. I teach and coordinate graduate courses leading to a certificate in gifted education, and I also teach courses in instructional theory and creative thinking. Next year I will have the opportunity to teach a new course, The Reflective Practitioner, in our undergraduate program. The opportunity to pause and reflect on who I have become as a teacher came at just the right time, as I develop the course designed to prepare our students for student teaching.

Fits and starts

My early exposure to teaching from the teacher's side of the desk was less than encouraging. After working in student affairs for a few years, I entered a doctoral program in educational psychology. If I was going to prepare future teachers, clearly I needed an experiential base from which to draw. My advisor arranged for me to teach American history and world literature in two nearby high schools. I had very little by way of resources or collegial support. I was so anxious that I prepared elaborate lectures and read my notes to my classes. I nearly put myself to sleep along with the students. Fortunately, the simulations I enacted were more successful. The students became deeply involved in the activities and performed well on unit achievement tests. I became a fan of inductive learning—putting students into puzzling situations in which they are presented with evidence they must dissect in order to discover underlying operating principles.

The next year, as a graduate teaching assistant in an introductory educational psychology course, I was in charge of a weekly 90-minute discussion section with college juniors. I was a dreadful instructor. The first time I was observed I had an image of myself falling off a cliff while I stood by helplessly. Steve, the professor who taught the lectures and oversaw the GTAs, was a terrific supervisor and a model of reflection on the mechanics of teaching. His feedback consisted of a running narrative, minute by minute, including very concrete suggestions (like "When a student asks you a question, don't back away. Move in closer so that you demonstrate you value the question and the student for asking it" and "Smile at the students occasionally. Act like you like them"). He urged me to partner with another assistant and do exactly as she did. I followed Steve's instructions, and I started to experience some success. I still have some of those notes, complete with margin instructions about when to pause, ask a class questions or insert a humorous anecdote.

The biggest assist was the weekly meeting of all four or five teaching assistants. Steve talked with us about the goals for that week's topic. We constructed discussion points and class activities to fit the goals and concepts. He provided additional readings to inform our presentation of key concepts. We were expected to attend his lectures, and he included us in class demonstrations. Some of them seemed pretty goofy to me, but they made principles of learning come alive for the students—and I relaxed more about performing in front of a large group (about 150 students). In our meetings, we also talked about the previous week's class. Steve invited us to unpack his teaching style and the lecture content. He reciprocated with comments about his observations of our discussion sections. He was highly effective at noticing what we were doing better and commenting on those improvements. I began to think of teaching as interesting, and the enterprise of enticing students to learn as intriguing rather than threatening. I also started to value the contributions of a teaching community of peers to my emerging practice.

Before I graduated, Steve and I had a heart-to-heart in which he talked about his experiences in learning how to teach. I was shocked to find that he, too, had been shy. His most powerful model, coincidentally,

was the person I was replacing at the University of Kansas (they were both at Purdue at the time). He described in detail the aspects of Don's teaching style that made him a compelling lecturer, and he encouraged me to keep looking for models and to adapt aspects of their styles that I thought were effective.

Armed with this minimal success and other happy experiences leading workshops for teachers, I arrived at KU. I was so lacking in self confidence that in a graduate course on learning in school situations, I ordered three textbooks for the students so that they could choose the one that fit their needs best. What a management nightmare. My first three years at KU were challenging. I was young and my students were older than I. Establishing credibility was difficult. I had no guidance that could help me continue to improve my teaching. I used the student feedback on the campus-wide Curriculum and Instruction survey to target for improvement various aspects of my teaching, but teaching was more anxiety-producing than pleasurable.

> My dread of student judgments faded as I reframed my view of the experience as an opportunity to *be a teaching*. … A key effect is that I have broadened my reflections about teaching from a focus on *technical* reflection … to include *critical* reflection.

Hitting my stride

The turning point for me was to take on teaching a large lecture class, Introduction to Learning, a course taken by juniors who were newly admitted to the School of Education. At last—an opportunity to create a reflective teaching community similar to the one that was so valuable for me in graduate school. For inspiration I drew on my memories of Steve's confident, almost brash persona. I expanded my repertoire of models for my teaching self by imagining myself as Phil Donohue, a talk show host popular at that time. I left the safety of the podium in the old auditorium in 303 Bailey Hall and sashayed into the audience with my microphone, soliciting opinions, stimulating conversations. We adapted popular game shows to illustrate key concepts about learning. The students came to class, and even more wonderful, they stayed awake! My graduate assistants were my intrepid fellow voyagers joining me on a quest to keep learners engaged. Our checks on student learning consisted of short quizzes, multiple-choice tests and a brief teaching episode. I used the item analyses to re-grade tests in situations where it was clear that either a majority of students hadn't learned the material or the test item was seri-

ously flawed. The number of students challenging their scores became miniscule. However, we also reviewed and reworked the ways in which the concepts were taught. Even more powerful, we shared the information with the class. They were prospective teachers, after all.

I had an epiphany—I could model the practices I would like my students to use as teachers. My dread of student judgments of my teaching faded as I reframed my view of the teaching experience as an opportunity to (as Dennis Dailey, professor emeritus in social welfare, urged me) "be a teaching." This has become a powerful theme in ongoing reviews of my teaching practice. A key effect is that I have broadened my reflections about teaching from a focus on *technical* reflection ("How was my wait time?" or "I should have switched to that group activity") to include *critical* reflection. Thus, I also ask myself questions such as, "What am I modeling for my students?" "Are they truly understanding the material?" "How are my values, prejudices and biases influencing the ways in which we study x concept?" and "How can I communicate my views and make other perspectives welcome?" I continue to learn the value of sharing this inner dialogue with my students as a way to encourage them to initiate this practice.

I translate my desire to personalize learning by involving my students with shaping the community in which we learn. Students brainstorm questions they want to address in the course. I commit to making sure their interests are addressed. We talk about the values and principles we want as the frame and foundation for the course. Mutual respect, collegiality, choice and voice are popular examples. We then connect these abstract ideas to specific course features: I share illustrative experiences, provide options for projects and assignments that use a variety of presentation styles, and offer students the chance to have input into grading rubrics. Because I teach regularly at the Edwards Campus where connecting with an advisor can be difficult, I schedule individual appointments with students to visit about their career and program advising needs. To give voice to students' interests and expertise, course members share something related to class content. Over the years, this has taken the form of books, articles, quotes, web sites and professional resources. I

ask students regularly for feedback on their learning, what is going well in the course, questions that have emerged, confusions, aspects of the course that aren't working, and their ideas for improvement. I share the information with the class and make sure to use their recommendations in some form.

One of the benefits of teaching in a professional school is the utility of the learning. Unfortunately, this can also be a limitation. Prospective (or practicing) teachers ask, "How will I use this information?" as the key criterion for judging the quality of instruction. Making that question part of the classroom conversation seems to reduce the focus on meeting immediate needs. I rely heavily on problem-based activities in my courses. This creates some risk in that not all students will create meaning at the same depth. But I'm willing to try it as long as I remember to provide a well-timed assist to make important connections.

I now believe that I can reveal myself—my values, experiences and views —while validating my students' differences. I am far less self-conscious about mistakes; I can use them to illustrate the processes of teaching and learning. I am particularly sensitive to marginalizing, and I am passionate about social justice. I use personal stories to illustrate issues in education. I allow myself to be funny. I used to think that my offbeat sense of humor had no place in my classroom. In fact, my classes have run the full gamut of emotions—I have had classes in which we cried together, too. For me, teaching is an exploration, rather than a methodical investigation. I continue to relearn that some students are ready to accept the invitation I offer and to avoid taking it personally if they are not. Like the parable of the sun and the wind who made a bet as to which one would be successful getting a man to take off his shirt, my goal is to shine gently but insistently.

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