

## LEARNING ABOUT STUDENTS FROM THE TEACHING PRACTICE OF ONE'S VETERAN COLLEAGUES

As you know, one good source of information about teaching and learning is the work of veteran colleagues. People who have been teaching for a while and who have learned how to tailor their practice to meet the various and changing needs of their students, are a rich source of information for novice teachers. For this assignment you and your colleagues will work together to study the teaching practice of one veteran teacher to see what you can learn from her practice about her learners and how she addresses their needs. The assignment will take place over several weeks' time and will unfold in a sequence of four steps. For all four steps you will be working with at least one partner. For one of the steps you will have a high school student who will help you complete the task. Below you will find a description of each step in the process as well as the products you are expected to produce as you move along in your investigation. The dates that these products are due are also listed below; please make note of them.

### STEP I:

#### **Learning about adolescents by watching school events (due September 9 and 16)**

The first step in this process is to get to know to your teaching colleague by studying her web site and exploring the various images that are there of her teaching and her students' work. Before trying to answer the questions below, spend some time looking through the various representations of teaching and learning practice on the site to see what you notice about the students in the class and how the teacher thinks and talks about them. By exploring the site on your own you can get some baseline "data" about what you see and notice as you begin this phase of your teacher learning journey.

The focus of your investigation for STEP 1 is the **learners** in your teacher's class. As you answer the questions below, keep in mind this process of learning about learners by watching teachers and students in school. For each question, write a reflection that is one or two paragraphs long. If you have more to say, please do so. The process works best if you read all four questions before you begin to answer each one. This way you can see where your responses best fit in.

- A. What does your teacher say about the students in her class? Does she speak about them directly? What does she say about them as people, as learners, as adolescents, as racialized beings, as members of a particular culture, socio-economic class, etc.? How much attention does the teacher seem to pay to who her students are? What can you learn about students in general by listening to this teacher talk or write about her students? What can you learn about her students in particular as you listen to what she has to say?
- B. Next, take a look at the kids themselves. They are an important source of information about adolescence. What do you notice about these learners as you watch them doing their work or listen to them talk about their experiences in school? If the students in this class were prototypes of adolescents more generally, what might you say about this period of life?
- C. Another way to learn about kids is to watch experienced, successful veteran teachers teach them and infer from their practice what they know about their students. As you watch these teachers teach, do you think they have designed their instruction to meet the particular learning needs/ levels/ abilities of their students? Why or why not? Provide examples.
- D. Teachers develop various ways of getting to know their students. What strategies do you see in the practice of your teacher that suggests she is learning about them as they are learning the material of the course? What kind of information about learners does the strategy yield (about what they know, about what they care about, about how they reason through problems, about what their experience in school, etc.)?

You will have time to work on this STEP I analysis with your partner in class next week (September 9). The class time is meant to give you a chance to share your impressions of what you've learned thus far, and to prepare for how you will answer the questions to turn in on the 16th. The class time is also a chance for you to prepare how you will share the answers to these questions with people who are studying the practice of different teachers the following week (September 16).

**STEP II:**  
**How knowledge of the learner informs teaching**  
**(due September 23)**

STEP II takes you back to your teacher's site. This time you'll be looking at the teacher's teaching to see how their "knowledge of their learners" informs their practice. As you study the site, consider the three domains over which teachers have some control: a) the classroom climate; b) the pedagogy; and c) the curriculum. How does the teacher's knowledge about her students influence the decisions she makes and the actions she takes in all three domains?

- A. Classroom climate: How does the classroom climate respond to or reflect who the learners are? Does it? Give examples of any climate-setting strategies you notice and how they reflect the students of the class.
  
- B. Curriculum: From what you can see of the teacher's curriculum, how does it reflect who the learners are? Does it? What are some examples of how the teacher has transformed the subject matter for this particular group of students?
  
- C. Pedagogy: In what ways does the teacher's pedagogy reflect what she knows about her learners? Provide examples of pedagogical strategies that seem especially appropriate for the learners in this class. Are there strategies that the teachers use that you believe are not particularly reflective of the learners?

Come to class on September 23 with your reflections typed out (1-2 pages) and ready to be discussed with both your research partner, and after that, other class colleagues. We will spend class time reviewing these three domains of classroom practice and how knowledge of the learner impacts each. The data that will inform our discussion will be those you provide from your analyses of these sites.

**STEP III:**  
**Corroborating your findings with a high school "expert"**  
**(September 23 in class)**

If we are able to coordinate it, on September 23 we will meet with a group of high school students to think together with them about what life is like

for them in schools. The "text" around which we will organize this conversation will be the web sites that you've been studying. I will provide details of how this will occur and what you need to do to prepare in class closer to the date.

**STEP IV: Trying it out...**  
(due September 30 and October 14)

Now it's time to try using some of what you've learned from studying the teaching practice of our three veteran colleagues. From the various strategies you and your colleagues have studied---strategies to get to know your students (who they are, what they know and don't know, what they find difficult, what they care about, etc.), and pedagogical strategies that reflect that knowledge in successful classroom practice--- choose **ONE** that you will try in your own classroom in the coming weeks.

Once you've chosen the strategy, prepare a lesson plan to incorporate it into a class you will actually teach. Your plan should include answers to the following questions:

- A. What strategy will you use and why? (What pedagogical dilemma are you addressing with your choice?)
- B. What will you do, how, and when in the larger plan for your class?
- C. How will you evaluate whether or not you have accomplished the goal you identified above?

On September 30 you will have a chance to discuss your choice and your plan with your colleagues. You need to come to class that day with your plan written up including 1) the choice of strategies and rationale for that choice; and 2) the steps you plan to take to use this strategy in your class.

On October 14 we will spend class time sharing the outcomes of this work. Bring with you to class the plan description that you prepared for 9/30 as well as a reflection about how things went and what you learned about yourself, your students, your subject matter, your school, teaching itself--- or anything else--- from trying this strategy in your own developing practice.