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ABSTRACT

In response to evidence of inadequately trained secondary school English teachers, this report details an experimental education course for the preservice training of English/Secondary Education majors at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. The first section looks at the impetus for such a pre-practice course, and notes that previous education majors had encountered a gap between the theories they had learned in their college classes and the problems they faced as student teachers. This section goes on to describe the belief of the English department and professional and governmental organizations that such teacher inadequacies were contributing to high rates of attrition and illiteracy. The second section describes the course design and applications, emphasizing student experience in specially selected high school classrooms and team-teaching of the education course by high school teachers who have graduated from the Boston Writing Project and by English Department faculty. This section stresses the heavy reading load and the hands-on application of theory to the classroom. A final section suggests implications for the course and notes the importance of cooperation between the high school teachers and the college faculty, the need for a greater role for the Boston Writing Project, and the need for the course to have a more direct connection to experts in specialized areas of literacy. (References and a footnote are included.) (JC)

Active Learning to Active Teaching: A New Direction in Teacher Preparation

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This essay reports on an experimental education course for the pre-service training of English/Secondary Education majors being taught for the first time through the English Department at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. The course attempts to respond to deficiencies in teacher preparation as we have encountered them in our own training programs and as they have been revealed by a wide range of local and national reports and policy statements on education and literacy. Responding to all the problems in teacher training for English majors is obviously not possible in a fifteen week course, and our conclusions are still tentative as we complete a semester's work with this experiment. Yet I want to argue for the direction this course attempts to take in redefining teacher preparation and suggest possibilities for expanding that direction first by describing the generation of the course and then by explaining its design and possible outcomes.

Impetus for the Pre-Practice Course

Three pre-practicum courses in the Institute for Learning and Teaching at UMass, which houses both the Education Department and the Boston Writing Project, prepare students to student teach; all these courses combine educational methodology with on-site observation in high school classrooms. Until now, all secondary education majors have been grouped together in each of these methods courses, with only three hours provided for particular subject matter instruction in the form of presentations given by

departmental faculty. The presentations given by English Department faculty served mainly to frustrate English/Secondary Education students, who suddenly began to realize the tools they lacked and the difficulty of their task as they learned for the first time about issues ranging from incorporating process instruction in writing and reading to expanding the literary canon to meeting the special needs of the high risk learner. Another frustration for these secondary education students came in the area of placement. Students made their own high school placements for student teaching as well as for the observations they completed during pre-practicum courses, but they typically located high schools on the basis of proximity or familiarity, seldom on the basis of the quality of instruction they would observe. Consequently, they were often disappointed in their on-the-job training. Many students entered the profession poorly prepared, with almost no understandings of any theory to inform the teaching of English and only the most superficial realizations of actual classroom practices.

In the English Department we had long been dissatisfied with this preparation. We had observed our English majors student teaching--many of them struggling--and as advisors we had listened to their anxieties and confusion before and during the student teaching experience. Our acknowledgment of problems in teacher training at our institution was seconded by reports like the Carnegie Commission's in May, 1986, which called for sweeping changes in the system to stem the "rising tide of mediocrity" condemned in the Presidential Commission 1983 report, A Nation at Risk. These changes, including longer preparation programs and better recruitment of highly-qualified candidates, have been endorsed and expanded by other influential reports, including NEA Policy Statements, and

in our area, the Outside Task Force Report on Education. The solutions that come from these reports are directed at both program and classroom level, with a call from the NEA for "programs that will bring together K-12 and higher education personnel in joint projects" (8), from the Task Force Report for education faculty to be careful "to model what they teach" (21), from the Carnegie Commission for stricter admissions standards for entering education majors and increased liberal arts instruction (8-9). All the reports insist that activities in the classroom foster both independent action and collaboration among students and teachers, recognizing that these activities lead to critical thinking. The Carnegie Commission encourages "teachers to think for themselves if they are to help others think for themselves" and students to be "busily engaged in the process of bringing new knowledge and new ways of knowing to bear . . . on difficult problems"(25). These suggestions for the improvement of both programs and practices in teacher preparation respond in many ways to our worries about the English/Secondary Education major at UMass--Boston and her ability to be effective and confident in the high school classroom.

Not coincidentally, proposals for the improvement of public secondary education center on enhancing the same skills in high school students that reports on higher education encourage among college students: the capacity to think critically, to communicate effectively, to manipulate ideas in language. Two of these secondary education reports lay particular emphasis on the activity of the student and the challenge for teachers in encouraging it. Both the Paideia Proposal, based on a program of liberal arts instruction at the secondary level developed by Mortimer Adler, and Action for Excellence, a governmental task force report on education and the economy, similarly assert that high school classroom teaching must develop students' cognitive

skills, by focusing on concepts rather than on topics. Students who learn to think in concepts can develop personal ways of knowing and apply these strategies to a wide range of intellectual tasks. The reports suggest that students who are encouraged to think in concepts become, in fact, active participants in their own education.

Whatever their shortcomings or the disagreements among them, the wealth of reports like the ones described above makes one thing clear: education at both secondary and post-secondary levels must change to accommodate more active learning and more facilitative teaching. The reports also suggest that problems in teacher preparation mirror as well as become public school system problems. The Carnegie Commission report notes that inadequate teacher preparation derives from the gap students perceive between their training in education and the real focus of the subject area, a gap they encounter for the first time as student teachers. But the problem is larger and more serious: college courses generally fail to help students see themselves as writers or as researchers who blend experiences of their own and of others into a self-constructed theory or methodology. Our students in English/Secondary Education come from high school and college classrooms where learning has been a relatively passive activity. Because they have been taught to think in topics, not concepts, they are not able or willing to pose problems for themselves, but instead look to give answers to their teachers. They recite what's expected, but rarely link the theory they read to its possible implications or practices and almost never to their own experience. Not unexpectedly, students who become teachers are ill-prepared to promote concept-building skills, the very skills that shape literacy. That's a particularly grave failing in the training of English teachers whose classrooms will become the focal point for teaching literacy, and yet

whose preparation seldom includes composing or reading theory or methods for confronting literacy issues. The system of passive learning gets passed on in the classrooms these students eventually direct.

The effects of such inadequate training are visible in schools at both secondary and post-secondary levels, as the need for improved preparation is exposed in the increasing and alarming rate of attrition and illiteracy. In Boston City Schools, where many of UMass--Boston teachers are sent, The Boston Globe reported recently a 44% dropout rate, and estimates on illiteracy in the population in the area run as high as 30% (May 3, 1987, 114). Boston is a large, urban center with significant numbers of minorities and immigrants, those traditionally excluded from educational opportunity. But it is not unique; urban and rural schools alike face many of the same problems and the same frightening statistics. Many of the national reports sound a note of panic as they cite the inadequacies of retention and literacy programs in the face of more stiffly competitive world market that will place greater demands on a population trained by fewer teachers.

Course Design and Course Applications

The pre-practice course at UMass--Boston was propelled by a realization that we needed to better meet our responsibility to students who would in their own turn become responsible for the literacy of their students. The course we have designed is the third in the set of education courses leading to student teaching, and it represents a cooperative effort among the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT), the public schools, the Boston Writing Project and the English Department. As we work with all these groups, we hope to create the interactive and interdependent model of learning we promote in the teaching of this course.

The Institute provides resources for replacing English faculty and assures the course meets standard state requirements, including admission to student teaching. As well, it furnishes the incentive for high school cooperating teachers to become a part of the program, in the form of tuition paid for one graduate course and funds to purchase classroom materials. This aid from ILT has meant that a group of highly-motivated high school teachers can become directly involved in teacher preparation at the university. Support from the education program has also allowed the English Department to team-teach the course, so that a number of faculty will train themselves in teacher preparation and thus give the course and the liaison continuity[1]. But even more important is the symbolic effect: team teaching this course shows the pre-practice classroom as a model of interaction. In a real sense, students will be team teaching with the educator who supervises their apprenticeships in the high school, and our team teaching in the college classroom reflects a belief in the cooperation and the collaboration that can occur in such classroom dialogue.

Students participate in this dialogue not only in the pre-practice course, but also as they observe for two hours a week in specially-selected high school classrooms whose teachers are graduates of the Boston Writing Project. Boston Writing Project staff help the English Department identify these master teachers, successful practioners who have learned through the Project how their own writing, and their thinking about writing, contribute to their teaching of literacy. The classrooms of these teachers have varying demographics, large and small, city and suburban, public and parochial. Two of the cooperating teachers this past semester taught English as a Second Language classes, two taught courses for high-risk learners, several worked cooperatively with instructors in other departments. Like ours, their

classrooms became laboratories for pre-practice students' increasingly active investigation into how concepts become methodologies, as students analyzed the variety of strategies and situations that occurred in the high schools they visited.

The cooperative effort between the English department teachers and high school teachers included meetings, some with Boston Writing project staff, to share concerns, discuss course materials and readings, and later to assess effectiveness of the methods and materials. English department teachers visited each high school classroom, and high school teachers visited the college classroom for an open forum where all three groups--high school and college teachers, and students--asked practical and theoretical questions of one another. Near the end of the pre-practice course, high school and college teacher met to evaluate each student's performance as observer and participant in the program, and the high school teacher's evaluation became an important tool for our general assessment of how each student was learning to integrate the varying theoretical and practical components of the course.

Reading, writing and research are three primary and intertwining elements that direct this model of interaction and interdependence between high school and college, teaching and learning, theory and practice. We assume that students can neither teach nor nurture literacy unless they penetrate their own literate behavior by "knowing their knowledge," as Ann Berthoff phrases it (35). In the pre-practice course, we promote this knowing by showing as well as telling, by making all our activities conform to or play off against the theories and themes we invite students to examine during the semester. A discussion of how to respond to student writing in terms of what the writing is doing is obviously more meaningful if our

responses to student papers in the course show an attention to the concerns that researchers like Nancy Sommers have addressed. A belief in process instruction translates into action when assignments build on one another during the course. A definition of active learning that includes reading, writing, talking and listening carries weight when students write in, as well as out of, class every week, interact in small and large groups, listen and respond to one another as well as to their teachers. Students learn to test theory against their own experience as readers, as writers, and as students in this course, and they learn to feel confident about testing those theories and experiences in observing and describing their high school classrooms.

In other words, students continually juxtapose or blend classroom practice, theory and their own roles as thinkers. As they read Frank Smith and other reading theorists, they describe their own reading behavior and respond to the use of reading in the high school classroom. While they read Mina Shaughnessy, Ann Berthoff, James Moffett and Peter Elbow, they examine the writing process in assignments that ask them to describe their own writing behavior and in group activities that invite them to make connections to the writing behavior of others. Later, students read Sondra Perl and Janet Emig, learning about qualitiative research while they focus on one high school student for a case study. They learn about concepts of community in the classroom and beyond by experience as well as reflection, by commenting on their own small group discussions as well as learning about Stanley Fish's informed reader. The reading load is heavy and varied--from Labov to E. D. Hirsch, from Piaget and Vygotsky to Wolfang Iser. Yet, despite what sounds like cognitive overload or at least over-emphasis on theory, students learn to keep the connections they make primary, rather than their isolated reading or writing tasks, through a careful manipulation

of practical experience and personal reflection within the context of theoretical reading. Students keep journals of their reading and of their observations, and these journals themselves show students how writing helps them both articulate and apply what they are learning. Students are, in fact, doing research, which is the umbrella over all these activities, and it is a type of research that many students accomplish for the first time. Students discover what and how they know as they make connections in reading and writing; they find themselves applying ideas rather than repeating them, posing questions more than answers. Accomplishing this kind of research, students are challenged to think in concepts, not topics.

This example might more clearly explain how the facets of the course, reading, writing, and research, come together in activities within the course. A classroom discussion near the beginning of the semester culminated in students listing on the board what they perceived as similar and disparate elements in reading and writing. The list included such items as writing is active/reading is passive; you invent in writing/you receive in reading; writing is hard/reading is easy. As they wrote these categories on the board, the group began to find challenges to many of their initial assumptions and were surprised to note that the differences between the two activities began to seem less deep divergences than surface distinctions as they began to analyze their own reading activity. During that week, students read Frank Smith on the reading process at the same time they wrote about the ways in which reading and writing activities were linked in their high school classrooms. Here is an excerpt from Margaret's paper commenting on reading and writing in an English as a Second Language class:

> Students write stories, read their stories and thereby discover what their stories lack. This sounds negative

> and it isn't because the students also find out what the strong points in their stories are. After a student has read his/her story, Anne goes around in a circle and asks students what they remember. It's at this time that any gaps or misunderstandings are cleared up or filled in. It's important for me to say that the writer herself has noticed and made some inflectional attempt to clarify by stumbling and raising or lowering her voice (and I suspect by adding words as she reads). I think this technique is more effective than Anne writing little corrections in the margins. In this way, the self-corrections and also the group questions which can often lead to corrections, are in reality amplifications, not corrections at all. The student didn't do anything wrong, she just didn't tell me enough.

Margaret's response shows that she is learning something important about responding to students' writing, and about the role of the classroom community, and connecting her discoveries to an integration of reading and writing in a program of learning. She is clearly seeing herself in the role of investigator or researcher, as she interprets her observations. She is, in other words, coming to "know her knowledge" by researching her own experience as reader and writer, student and teacher as well as researching the experience of others in the community of the classroom she observes and the journals she reads. This research is organic rather than imposed, and it fosters active learning because of the activities it mandates--exploring, negotiating, analogizing. Margaret's response typifies the active learning we want students to pursue themselves and foster in their own students as they become teachers.

Implications

It should be clear that this course requires a lot of manipulation. Students move between the high school and the college setting, observe

themselves as they observe others, push theory to the test of methodology as they watch teachers and produce lessons of their own. But its rather chaotic set up puts students into an active dialogue with what they learn. I believe that participation in this dialogue can help students evolve both strategies and rationales for their emerging teachers' roles.

What further directions do we need to take with this course in teacher preparation? One direction centers on the next step for this group of students--student teaching. Will the new classroom model for teacher preparation affect the approaches of students as they begin to assume control over classrooms themselves? We hope to be able to assess possible effects and adjust the work of the course itself based on what we learn, as, for the first time, a group of six student teachers who have completed this course are supervised by a member of the English department. These students will meet periodically with one of the pre-practice teachers in seminar/discussion groups throughout the student-teaching semester. Providing continuity between pre-practice course and student teaching experience allows for real evaluation of the course and the program; the connection between course and practice also encourages students to monitor and explore their own development as professionals

The other direction this course must approach more firmly is in the strengthening of the collaborative, cooperative effort by expanding the roles of those who are partners with the English department in this effort.

1. The high school cooperating teacher is crucial to the success of the course, and the course should more clearly reflect the importance of the connection. High school teachers might collaborate with the English department faculty members teaching the course by helping to define issues the course should pursue, by proposing course objectives and suggesting

strategies for reaching them. The pairing of high school and college teacher to team-teach particular units or classes within the course would also promote interaction and collaboration. In addition, the high school teacher's professional involvement in preparation could be encouraged by a graduate course that would include theory introduced to undergraduate pre-practice students linked to a discussion of the supervision and training of new teachers. The high school teachers who worked with the course this year indicate the renewed enthusiasm they feel for the profession as a result of establishing themselves as guides to new members. This feeling of renewal among the most talented and dedicated of members of the profession can only benefit the teacher preparation program.

2. A greater role for the Writing Project in the teacher preparation course is both a positive and obvious additional step. The Boston Writing Project's success with those already in the profession is demonstrated at close range by the group of cooperating master teachers working with the pre-practice course this year. The implementing of a writing project program for student teachers would be as valuable, encouraging these apprentice teachers to see themselves as writers and giving them a much-needed sense of the professional community that they're becoming a part of. Like the high school cooperating teachers, Boston Writing Project staff could effectively team-teach parts of the pre-practice course with the English department member. The combination of writing practice, reading and writing theory coming out of such a team-teaching effort would be a provocative illustration to students of the symbiosis of reading and writing, of the mutual interdependence of theory and practice.

3. The course needs more direct connection to experts in specialized areas of literacy, particularly those who work with English as a Second

Language and Bilingual students and teachers of basic writers and other high risk learners, as well as experts in multi-cultural education programs. One of the aims of this course is to help new professionals meet the challenges presented by the diversity of the high school population. And, although some of the readings and discussions in the course take up up significant lines of inquiry, we need theory enhanced by pertinent, practical help from teachers actively involved in these programs.

These prospects suggest that there is much work to be done to make teacher preparation more viable. Yet, in spite of the limitations of one course taught so far only once, a useful outcome has already been recognized by the participating groups, a change in self-perception among students who are finding a way to locate themselves in a community that embraces both teacher and learner. Just as we want students to find themselves a part of the large group of educators devoted to helping learners develop and discover their own literacy, we want them to retain a sense of their status in a community of learners themselves. Sondra Perl describes the community in Through Teachers' Eyes this way: "The community of writers includes Shakespeare, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Flannery O'Connor, and Ed, the student in fifth period who flunked last term." (24). A pre-practice student expanded that community further by defining the teacher's role: "To be a guide in anything requires having been there before, having been there in a meaningful way, and remembering having been there." As this student has learned, the community of the classroom includes not only professional texts from all historical periods and students from all skill levels, but also teachers who make the bridges between student and text through their awareness of

themselves as readers and writers and their memory of the process of their own literacy.

In general, we aim to encourage students to develop their own theories, their own concepts of how literacy is acquired and how it might be taught and nurtured. We hope to help this new generation of educators realize that theory and research are not abstractions and data memorized to pass courses and dismissed when the real world of the teacher's desk in the English class presents itself. This course invites students to discover that the research they do, the theory they make, is both their own and vital, moving them from behind the desk to reach those who sit in front of it.

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Notes

[1] Professor Eleanor Kutz taught the pre-practice course with me this past semester. Next semester, I'll continue to teach the course, team-teaching units with area high school teachers and Boston Writing Project staff. Professor Kutz will conduct the seminar for student teachers and help supervise student teaching in area high schools. Other English department faculty members will be involved as supervisors of student teachers and visiting lecturers in the pre-practice course.