

Peer Classroom Evaluation of Teaching for Dr. Laurie Ramirez
Fall 2013
Conducted by Damiana Gibbons

Date of observation: October 20, 2013

Time of observation: 4-5 pm

Location of observation: RCOE 430

Class observed: CI 4450 - Middle Grades Portfolio Exhibition

Context

Laurie Ramirez asked me to observe her Middle Grades Portfolio class, and I was happy to observe Laurie's teaching. I know that Laurie has a strong rapport with her students, and I was happy to see this in action during her class.

In this review, I will discuss the strengths that Laurie brings to her teaching. She is an asset to the Middle Grades program and to the entire Curriculum and Instruction Department.

What are the 2-3 major strengths you observed?

Laurie is such a strong teacher, and her classroom is a joy to be in. Some of the strengths that I will focus on is: 1) her willingness to try new technologies, 2) her rapport with her students; and 3) her timely and relevant feedback on student work.

Trying new technologies

The day that I observed, Laurie was trying out a new technology called Airplay, which is something we've been discussing using in CI2300 but have yet to use. Laurie is ahead of the game, in other words, in trying out new technologies that even the Media Studies faculty have yet to incorporate into our courses.

This day, Laurie planned to use the Airplay for students to share their work on their portfolios. Before class began, she spent time consulting with John Spagnolo to set up the Airplay machine and link them to a class set of iPads. Laurie told her students to get an iPad, and she introduced Airplay to the students, telling them how she planned to use them in the class. As Laurie waited from some students to arrive, she and I did some troubleshooting of the technology. Laurie handled all the technology glitches smoothly. Finally we got her Dropbox to work, and Laurie opened the PowerPoint for the class.

The best part about how Laurie used Airplay, though, is that she used it for a real pedagogical purpose. For instance, for part of the class, Laurie used her PowerPoint on Airplay to guide the discussion as she leads her students through a couple of Think/Pair/Share questions in which

they discussed their experiences in their student teaching placements. She began by asking: “What about your student teaching has been the most rewarding thus far?” The students readily discussed their experiences, and Laurie circulated as the students talk to one another about their student teaching. The next Think/Pair/Share question focused on what has been the most challenging. As the students talk to one another about their challenges, she speaks to a student who had been having an especially challenging time, offering advice. Her last Think/Pair/Share question focused on the following question: “Looking forward, what goals do you have for yourself that you have not yet accomplished (or had a chance to try)? How might you make that happen?” The students refer to the question on the screen, and they readily talk with one another.

Building rapport with her students

One of Laurie’s greatest strengths is her strong rapport with her students. From the beginning of class, it’s clear that her students feel very comfortable talking with Laurie. She greets every student as he or she walks in, and she clearly has built a strong relationship with them. Throughout the entire class, students share information with her (and with each other). It began with a student speaking about new boots he bought for his wife. Another student spoke with Laurie for awhile about trouble she was having at her placement. Laurie offered her advice and strategies. And, another student spoke about how he had landed a teaching job, discussing when it started and how it felt about it as a possibility.

It’s clear that Laurie cares about her students. For instance, as the students discussed their last Think/Pair/Share about students making future plans, Laurie spoke about how they needed to make plans if they can. For example, she mentioned that, though volleyball season was over and coaching volleyball wouldn’t be an option for that semester, other coaching opportunities were there. She also suggested that they try to plan for learning more in their first year to build a strong experience base, but she also suggests that they try to find a balance as well. She urged them to take care of themselves because teaching can become an all-consuming job, especially when one is just beginning. She urges them to make plans because if they have a specific plan in place, then it is more likely to happen, especially when one is also dealing with one’s first teaching job.

Providing feedback on student projects

The last key strength that I will discuss is Laurie’s expert feedback that she gives her students on their projects during class. Another way that she used Airplay was for students to workshop their final portfolios for the class. Laurie began by asking for a volunteer and explaining to the student how to project their portfolio draft using the iPad and Airplay. Then, the student showed her portfolio, and Laurie and the other students provided her feedback, namely about how to work on her introduction page.

Laurie also referred back to the feedback she had already given the students, especially giving information about each of the artifacts that they include on their sites for standards. For instance, she reminded them that their readers might now know course names, such as CI 3400, or what the YACIP project is, so she suggested that they explain each project with that in mind. She also suggests that the students be concise and purposeful in the artifacts they choose to include, and

she provided some examples about what to include and what not to include as the students showed their work and discussed each example.

Laurie was also good at facilitating the conversations so that the students helped one another on their portfolios. For example, as one student was showing her portfolio, Laurie mentioned that she had had a good way to do the “Contact Me” page and asked the student how she had created it. The student described how she customized that page, and the other students discuss what could go on that page and ask the student questions. At one point, a student asks whether they should take out the names of people in the class projects and papers they include. They all discussed this for awhile, and Laurie made a note for herself to ask this at the next Middle Grades meeting and get back to the students. This easy exchange of information and expertise is not easy to achieve in a classroom, but it is clear that Laurie sets the stage for a strong Community of Practice in her classroom, which made this type of interaction commonplace in her class.

What are the areas in which you would suggest alternatives?

As a former English teacher who taught a lot of classes on writing, all workshop based, I thought that the way that Laurie engaged her students in the writing process of their projects is exactly how it should have been taught. She helped them to see what was successful in their projects as well as what could be improved. And, she helped them to point these out for themselves, which is a skill they will need to do not only in their coursework, but even more importantly, in their future teaching. She also incorporated technology in a way that is pedagogically sound. She didn’t use technology to use technology; she used technology to help her students to learn. This was good to model for the students, and I’m glad that this sort of teaching is going on with other professors in the College of Education. I wouldn’t suggest any alternatives to how she did her lesson.

What additional comments do you wish to make about this person’s teaching?

It is clear that Laurie really cares about her students and their success. The students respect her, and she respects them. They were actively engaged the entire time. They offered one another support and guidance, and it was clear that this type of interaction was something that was modeled by Laurie herself throughout the class. Laurie is an asset to the Curriculum and Instruction department, and we are lucky to have her.