

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications -- Department of English

English, Department of

9-1-2002

(Re)viewing Teaching as Intellectual Work in English Studies: Insights from a Peer Review of Teaching Project

Amy M. Goodburn

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, agoodburn1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Goodburn, Amy M., "(Re)viewing Teaching as Intellectual Work in English Studies: Insights from a Peer Review of Teaching Project" (2002). *Faculty Publications -- Department of English*. 10.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications -- Department of English by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

(Re)viewing Teaching as Intellectual Work in English Studies: *Insights from a Peer Review of Teaching Project*

Amy Goodburn

**Associate Professor of English
University of Nebraska, Lincoln**

This essay draws upon my experiences within a university peer review of teaching project, first as a participant and now as a faculty coordinator, to consider some of the issues raised when faculty create and use new genres for representing teaching as intellectual work in English Studies. I begin by describing my process of creating a course portfolio—a genre that asks teachers to document and assess student learning and performance within a particular course over a semester. I then discuss the external reviews that this course portfolio received

Published in *Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy* 47 (2002), pp. 83–108. Copyright © 2002 University of Pittsburgh. Used by permission. <http://www.pitt.edu/~reader/index.html>



Reader

when it was assessed by faculty within and outside of English Departments at several other institutions. I do so as a means of considering issues that arise when faculty seek to use traditional scholarly conventions, such as peer review, in order to represent the intellectual work of teaching as parallel to research and thus equally deserving of institutional rewards.

One long-standing disciplinary issue for English Studies is the prioritization of research over teaching and service within postsecondary institutional reward systems. Many have vigorously called for changes in how English Departments define, distribute, and reward faculty labor, particularly in terms of rewarding teaching commensurate with faculty scholarship (Mahala and Swilky; Murphy). As the report by The MLA Commission on Professional Service notes:

the traditional representation of academic work as research, teaching, or service does not simply differentiate faculty activities in a neutral or objective way but also implicitly ranks them in order of esteem. This hierarchy both reflects and powerfully reinforces the ideal of research as the highest function of the academy. Institutional and professional practices in higher education are systemic, pervasive expressions of the research ideal. (169)

The “Final Report” of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching concurs, noting that the lower value assigned to teaching within English Studies is systemically tied to the devaluation of teaching in the profession at large:

The problem of making teaching matter is inextricably linked to what our committee has identified as the need to foreground teaching in our profession. That need stems from institutional and cultural practices and holds significant, public ramifications for the profession. To matter, teaching must be concretely, emphatically valued by tenure and promotion committees; by those who make part-time and adjunct appointments; and by those who award prizes, publishing contracts, sabbaticals, and grants. (227)

Even the area of composition, which historically has claimed teaching as a site of knowledge-making, tends to prioritise published scholarship

about writing classrooms over the local work that takes place in them. As Bruce Horner suggests:

The discourse of professionalization limits how we think of the work of Composition, defining legitimate work as the acquisition, production, and distribution of print codified knowledge about writing. . . . In this discourse, the work associated with such activities as teaching is deemed “labor,” the implementation of the work of professional knowledge. Knowledge itself is recognized only as it appears in textual, commodified form as explicitly theorized. (375)

Despite this absence of institutional rewards, though, most faculty still view teaching as important to their professional lives. As George Levine notes in a recent issue of *Pedagogy*. “The point is not that faculty do not work at teaching or value it, but that the profession systematically divides the two activities and rewards one half much more than it does the other, even when both activities are done by the same faculty member” (9). In response to this disciplinary hierarchy, some have begun to explore how English Studies might better conceptualize teaching as intellectual inquiry *and* have it rewarded as such within institutional structures. For instance, Levine suggests that English Studies “needs a whole new orientation toward the question of the relation between teaching and scholarship, and a whole new genre that would make it possible to see discussions of teaching as integral to the development of knowledge” (12).

While discussions differ about what such a genre might entail, most assume that teaching—typically viewed as a solitary, individual act that takes place behind closed doors—will not be valued as intellectual work unless it is represented as a text and made available to be read and evaluated by others. Indeed, the MLA report on Professional Service states that in order for teaching or other professional activity to be considered intellectual work, it must have a public dimension that is “explicitly available for assessment, evaluation, and modification by a critically informed group of peers as well as by those

benefited or served by the work” (176). Outside of English Studies, several organizations for higher education have come to similar conclusions. Loosely organized under the “scholarship of teaching” movement, organizations such as the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), the Carnegie Inundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the Pew Charitable Trust have sponsored initiatives to help faculty textually document and make public their teaching through mechanisms such as teaching portfolios, peer review of teaching projects, and individual scholar projects. While these initiatives vary, most ask faculty members to produce texts about their teaching that can be read, evaluated, and used by those outside of local contexts. In this respect, the scholarly conventions typically used to evaluate research (such as peer review) are considered equally useful for assessing teaching. For instance, Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff outline six criteria used for evaluating faculty research (clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique) that they believe can also be used to read and assess teaching as intellectual inquiry. In this essay, I discuss how the scholarly conventions of research have been formative in conceptualizing a teaching project at my institution designed to help faculty document teaching as intellectual work in the same vein as research.

The Peer Review of Teaching Project

In 1994, the AAHE organized a consortium of 12 universities to develop models for supporting faculty in textually documenting and assessing their teaching. As an outgrowth of this work, in 1995 the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) developed a Peer-Review of Teaching Project (PRTP) designed to help faculty reflect upon and assess their students’ learning. Faculty members were invited to participate in summer institutes where they worked with department colleagues to write about their teaching goals and to develop plans for curriculum

revision. In 1999 UNL further refined its program when it created a consortium with four other research institutions (Kansas State University, the University of Michigan, Indiana University, and Texas A & M University) designed to support faculty in documenting and assessing student learning. This project invites department faculty teams to participate in a year-long program of discussing teaching issues and of documenting students’ learning within a single course via the production of a course portfolio.’ Faculty are encouraged to use these course portfolios for purposes such as promotion and tenure reviews, (caching award nominations, merit reviews, and program assessments. While a primary goal of the PRTP is to help faculty document and improve student learning in particular courses, another goal is to create an institutional community of teachers who are experienced readers and reviewers of course portfolios. Ultimately, the PRTP seeks to develop mechanisms for making visible the serious intellectual work of teaching and for rewarding faculty who engage in such work.

The first stage of the project focuses on a fellowship year. In the first four months of the academic year, faculty members write three memos (called “interactions”) about one course they are teaching in terms of intellectual content, teaching practices, and student understanding (these interaction prompts can be viewed at <http://www.unl.edu/peerrev/>). Faculty then integrate this writing—with examples of student work—into a course portfolio along with commentary on the overall success of the course in helping students learn. Throughout the year, faculty also meet monthly both in their teams and with other project participants to discuss issues that emerge as they write about their teaching. Once a faculty member completes a portfolio, it is posted on an electronic web site for other participants to read. The fellowship year concludes with a 3-day seminar focused on literature about the scholarship of teaching and teaching issues more generally. In the past three years, faculty at the five participating institutions have cre-



ated over 100 course portfolios on classes taught in various disciplines and at various undergraduate levels. In keeping with the notion that the intellectual work of teaching needs to be made available for use and review by others, the PRTP added a new stage to its program in 2001 when it began sending out course portfolios for external review by faculty at other institutions.

My participation with the PRTP began in August of 2000 when I was selected as part of the English Department team. The three other English faculty included an associate professor specializing in Victorian literature, an assistant professor in composition and rhetoric, and an assistant professor in 20th century literature and critical theory. Because my interests focus on composition and literacy studies, I was familiar already with literature on the scholarship of teaching and had kept a teaching portfolio for several years. Also, as Composition Coordinator, I had worked with graduate teaching assistants as they developed teaching philosophy statements and teaching portfolios for the job market. Thus, while I had never developed a course portfolio prior to the PRTP, I was enthusiastic about the opportunity to do so.

I chose to study English 476, a course in reading theory and practice that is taken by students who plan to be middle or secondary English teachers and who have been admitted into UNL's Teachers College. I selected this course because I had found it to be quite challenging when I taught it for the first time the previous fall. Throughout the semester I struggled to connect with students in this course and their evaluations were the poorest I had ever received. Based on this experience, I had substantially revised the course and was interested in studying whether the changes I had made would positively affect student learning and students' perceptions of the course.

In keeping with much of the literature on portfolio assessment, my experiences in developing a course portfolio quickly led to formative

benefits, particularly in refining my teaching goals and in thinking more critically about how I was assessing students' learning. The extended analysis fostered by writing the interaction memos resulted in the revision of two formal writing projects, the development of a new writing project, the creation of formal criteria sheets for all projects, and a totally revamped reading list. This analysis also spurred me to eliminate one component of the course—a reading partnership with a local high school—for the following year. Studying students' ongoing responses to this partnership in conjunction with the goals I had established for student learning helped me to consider other avenues for meeting my teaching goals within the classroom rather than through this out-of-class experience.

Other formative benefits to my participation in the PRTP were sponsored by the monthly conversations with Department colleagues as we discussed our teaching, shared samples of student work, and reflected upon curricular issues that were emerging across our four courses. We used the PRTP process to think across the curriculum about programmatic objectives, standards, and experiences for student learning within the English Department. Although my colleagues were writing about courses that represented a range of topics, approaches, and student experiences (Intro. to Critical Theory, Intro. to English Studies, and a senior/graduate seminar in British Romanticism), our course portfolio writing offered starting places for conceptualizing more integrated learning experiences for students throughout our curricula. Our writing spurred us to articulate the types of pedagogical practices and assumptions underpinning all of our courses and provided much needed opportunities for conversation *across* our specialties within English Studies. The formative benefits of our experiences were disseminated further when our chair asked us to report on our PRTP experiences in a Department meeting. By the end of the spring semester, I completed my course portfolio for 476, consisting of fifteen single-spaced pages of reflection



along with analysis of three sample student projects of about 8-10 pages each (this portfolio can be accessed at <http://www.unl.edu/peerrev/>). At this point, the project director asked my permission to distribute the 476 portfolio to faculty at other institutions for external review. In the remainder of this essay, I discuss the reviews that my portfolio received and the issues that these reviews raised with respect to the value and limitations that external reviews of teaching can sponsor. In particular, I suggest that the wholesale import of reading and reviewing practices that we bring to bear on evaluating research publications may not, necessarily, meet the challenges that arise when the intellectual work of teaching is represented and read as text.

Reading External Reviews

In the spring of 2001, my course portfolio was posted on the PRTP website and external reviewers were solicited from other institutions. Because this was a new stage for the PRTP and there was no ready core of reviewers for the course portfolios, the director solicited faculty from the other participating institutions as well as those he knew were involved in the scholarship of teaching movement nationally. The goals for these reviews were modest. Both the director and I were interested in gathering feedback about whether my course portfolio (and the others being sent out) would be considered successful representations of teaching as scholarship. Because a primary assumption of the PRTP is that teaching will never receive commensurate status with research unless it is documented, reviewed, and used by peers in the same vein as research, we were interested in seeing how the course portfolios would be read and assessed outside of UNL.

Faculty who agreed to be reviewers received a handout of guidelines (see appendix) which asked them to comment on categories such as the intellectual content of the course, the appropriateness of teaching practices, levels of student understanding, and

the portfolio author's effectiveness in documenting and assessing teaching. Reviewers emailed their responses to the PRTP website and these responses were passed along to me (anonymously) by the project director. By December, I had received six reviews for my course portfolio authored by English professors, professors in Colleges of Education, and one faculty consultant for a university teaching center.

Initially reading the six reviewers' responses was dizzying. While all were generous in their assessments (and in the time they spent reading and responding to my portfolio), they differed greatly in terms of length (some were two pages, one was six single-spaced pages), focus (some examined teaching practices, others focused on philosophical approaches) and reviewers' teaching and research expertise (some had taught a similar course, some had not). In reading the reviews, I began to appreciate the complexities involved in having one's teaching made available for review and the difficulties that reviewers face in assessing representations of another teacher's teaching removed from the local context in which it takes place.

Not surprisingly, the diversity of the reviewers' responses provided me with multiple vantage points from which to read *my teaching. Like a student writer trying to negotiate multiple responses during a peer group session, I was left to figure out how best to read and learn from these multiple responses. Of course, I had multiple purposes for having the portfolio reviewed to begin with. That is, I was interested in responses that would help me to further improve student learning within 476, issues such as conceptualizing the syllabus, refining assignments, developing assessment criteria, and so on. But I was also interested in how the reviewers would assess my portfolio with respect to how (or if) it represented the intellectual work of teaching.

Basic to most of the reviews was an assessment of my "performance" as a teacher within English 476. On a most pragmatic level, some reviewers suggested specific changes with respect to



assignments and readings for the course. For example, two reviewers suggested that I cut back the length and number of writing assignments, and one suggested that more course readings could address diversity issues. Still another suggested that my grading standards could be more clearly articulated. I found these reviews useful, and indeed, had already revised the course to address some of their concerns before I even received their reviews.

One issue that arose in reading these external reviews was the extent to which assessments of my performance as a teacher were intimately tied to my performance as a portfolio author. That is, while reviewers tended to focus on suggestions for revising and improving upon how I might teach English 476, it was clear that some of the reviewers' assessments were intimately tied to my ability to represent my teaching within the genre of the course portfolio. For instance, one reviewer noted that my portfolio did not clearly represent how I used class time. Because this reviewer was interested in assessing my teaching primarily in terms of how in-class time was utilized, s/he found the absence of description regarding daily class routines a significant gap in my portfolio:

Without documentation of actual classes it is very difficult to learn much about teaching practices. I cannot, for example, even guess how class time was actually used and what sort of congruence there might have been between planning (as evident in the syllabus) and actual use of time in class. The syllabus mentions a number of activities—exchanges of drafts, small group discussions, reading workshop and so on—that certainly have the potential to actively engage students in course material. Here again, however, I have no way of judging the effectiveness of such activities.

Another reviewer made a similar comment with respect to how I had structured the out-of-class high school reading partnership for my students. In this partnership, my students met weekly with at-risk students to participate in reading activities. Because I didn't provide enough information about my role in overseeing this

component or in how I organized student accountability in the partnerships, the reviewer noted:

there seems limited opportunity for preservice teachers in the field and little, if any, monitoring of preservice observation time. . . . Instructor responsibility lies in ensuring equal opportunities for all preservice teachers in securing a bases (sic) for student performance for understanding.

While I initially found this comment stinging (because I had spent so much time during the semester meeting with the high school teachers to assess the goals of the project and to oversee the work that my students were doing), I was forced to acknowledge that my representation of this partnership was clearly lacking within my portfolio. Comments like these forced me to re-read my portfolio from the perspective of someone outside of the course, and to consider more concretely what could (and could not) be represented about my teaching within the portfolio genre.

The external reviews also spurred me to read my institutional context more critically, particularly in terms of how my choices and actions are shaped by institutional goals and assumptions that I do not normally consider. For instance, the external reviews invited me to think more critically about how the organization of English 476 could be read in terms of commonly held values about how best to teach reading and writing. I realized the extent to which I was being asked by the reviewers to *argue for*, rather than simply describe, the validity of my pedagogical goals and practices within the course portfolio. For example, UNL's Composition and Rhetoric program has historically held a strong collaborative vision of what constitutes effective teaching practices. Based on the work of the Nebraska Writing Project and much collaboration with the English Education program in Teachers College, principles of reading and writing workshops (e.g. student ownership, peer response, teacher modeling, etc.) are assumed to be of pedagogical value. In writing about these aspects of my course, then, I used such terms unproblematically, not defining them

for those who might be unfamiliar with such discourse and *not arguing for their importance* in terms of structuring the work of the course.

Reading the external reviews forced me to confront and consider the implications of institutional differences between my assumptions and the reviewers' about what constitutes effective teaching practice in literacy education. For instance, in my portfolio I wrote that one of the central tensions I face as a teacher is balancing my desire to implement a reader's workshop model while also fostering students' critical analysis of this model for their future teaching:

There are tensions with trying to both model a reader's workshop and provide space for discussing issues raised in structuring and teaching via a workshop model. It takes time to actually do the activities and sometimes I feel rushed between having students do the activities and then providing enough reflection/assessment time to not only consider how it worked for them but also the issues it might raise for them as teachers. Sometimes students do not see connections between what they are asked to do as students and what they might do as teachers in their own classrooms. Frequently students come to this course with very traditional notions of what a reading/literature classroom looks like (teacher lecturing about the symbolism in a particular text, only expository writing about the literature, etc.). So in addition to modeling different approaches to the teaching of reading, I also have to address some built-in resistance to these approaches.

In response to this reflection, one reviewer wrote that s/he did not find my concerns compelling because s/he did not view a reader's workshop as an inherently valuable component in such a course:

Because she is so obviously engaged with her students' learning and so careful in monitoring their progress, I think Prof. Goodburn should worry less about modeling, in a college classroom, processes that may be appropriate for much younger students. I am not advocating conventional lectures (although I do think there is a place for some lecture in the college classroom), but rather a sharper focus on how method relates to outcomes. . . .

I guess it is evident by now that I don't see the classroom only as a "community of learners"; I also see it as a site where the expert (the teacher) models practices (including constructing assignments, defining criteria, and evaluating work) that students (novices or apprentices) may need to learn, although they will not necessarily be using all of these practices in the same way when they teach a population (i.e. children and adolescents) whose needs and goals are presumably not identical with their own. If Prof. Goodburn wishes to model practices appropriate for teaching students in seventh grade, these will (and should) be somewhat different from her own best practices in teaching college students.

This reviewer's comments pushed me to consider how my own assumptions about the necessity of using a workshop model were shaped by my institution's values more than any universal best practices of literacy education. And I began to appreciate how the reviewer made visible important distinctions between the different audiences—the pre-service teachers and their future junior/high school students—who were being addressed within 476. Not only did this reviewer's response help me to think more critically about the pedagogical practices underpinning 476, it also invited me to consider the importance of making such distinctions visible and open for discussion to students within the course. While I don't necessarily agree that practices appropriate for teaching students in seventh grade aren't equally appropriate for college-level students, I now realize the importance of raising this issue as a question for my 476 students to interrogate, particularly as I ask them to reflect upon the usefulness of in-class literacy activities. This external review also spurred me to consider more clearly how my goals as a teacher in this particular class are connected programmatically to other courses within UNL's English Department and Teachers College. Rather than conceptualizing a reading theory and practice course that faculty at other institutions might consider "ideal," I understand more fully how English 476 is situated within an



institutional context that might be difficult to “read” within an individual course portfolio.

External reviews to my course portfolio also made visible many of the disciplinary tensions regarding teaching within English Studies, tensions that helped me to consider more broadly the possibilities that course portfolios can offer for having teaching rewarded as intellectual work in the academy. In “Difficulty: The Great Educational Divide,” Mariolina Salvatori suggests that when faculty create course portfolios, they should consciously reflect on questions about their teaching that connect to and inform disciplinary conversations:

... teachers should ask questions about their students’ work that grow out of their theoretical background; they should read and engage their students’ texts by asking of them the same kinds of questions they ask of the scholarly texts they read and write. In addition, they should question the theories they espouse in terms of how they affect and reflect their students’ learning. (84)

One tension that immediately surfaced in the external reviews was the difference in disciplinary discourses—both within English Studies itself and between English and English Education programs. As a faculty member specializing in composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies, I was already cognizant of the differences between my discourse communities and those of many colleagues. And, indeed, one of the reasons that I teach 476 for the English Education majors is because my work with teacher development and pedagogy is often viewed as more closely allied to English Education than to literary studies. I was conscious of these differences as I designed the 476 syllabus and as I created the course portfolio. What surprised me, though, is the extent to which the review process highlighted the importance of these differences in imagining a community of readers for my portfolio. I was surprised by the extent to which external reviews were split along these disciplinary lines, particularly in terms of assessing the appropriateness of class readings and activities. These differences were

especially apparent when reviewers commented on the texts I had assigned in the course. For example, one reviewer within an English Department criticized the course readings as lacking theoretical sophistication and suggested texts by literary experts within higher education instead:

Because I am not familiar with most of the theoretical/teacher research materials assigned (or reading, I cannot comment on these.... I think we go too far in giving high school students the impression that everything they are reading must be transparently *about them* or is not worth reading . . . The studies I have found most helpful are those of literary experts in higher education who have published penetrating theory/practice studies related to the teaching of reading and writing (Wayne Booth, Robert Scholes, K. Patricia Cross, Mary Louise Pratt, Mariolina Salvatori, Jerome McGann, Kurt Spellmeyer, Dough Brent). Many of the ideas in these studies are probably applicable to teaching high school students.

In contrast, a reviewer who teaches an English methods course criticized the course texts because s/he felt that they did not directly address the needs of secondary school readers:

I do not have all the course texts at hand and so cannot check the accuracy of my memory, but it seems to me that Goodman’s [book] at least (and perhaps the Tierney and Readence) do not address secondary school students specifically. Since reading and developmental issues intersect, I wonder if the texts are the best choices.

I profile these reviewers’ comments not because I am critical of their suggestions. Indeed, I highly value the work of the literary theorists that reviewer one proposes and I did revise the course readings the following year to focus on texts written explicitly about secondary school readers as suggested by reviewer two. Rather, I am interested in how these reviews point to disciplinary differences between faculty in English and Education departments, differences which raise important implications—both for students who are moving between Teachers College and English Department courses

and for portfolio authors attempting to write for multiple disciplinary audiences.

Indeed, the discourse I use as a compositionist is often just as foreign to my colleagues *within* English Studies as it is within English Education. For instance, one reviewer explicitly responded to the terms I used in describing my pedagogy:

As a literary scholar myself, I am familiar with reader response theory (which is obvious throughout the approach to this class) and with poststructuralism (the impact of which is less obvious to me); however, I don't know what "critical educators" refers to. I imagine this is an education theory, and if the audience is primarily colleagues in English, then the author may want to provide a *very* brief definition. Vice versa, if the audience includes education faculty, she may want to give something on post-structuralism. In short, the final portfolio will probably need to decide to whom it speaks—English and/or Education professors, local and/or national readers.

While this reviewer considered how the production and reception of my portfolio might be read differently by English and Education professors, his/her comments also invited me to consider the differences of readers *within* English Studies. As a compositionist, the term "critical educators" is shorthand for a widely debated area of study involving relationships between culture, pedagogy, and the politics of schooling. This reviewer's unfamiliarity with my discourse highlighted the difficulties involved in finding appropriate reviewers for course portfolios, particularly in fragmented (and sometimes contentious) disciplines like English Studies.

The reviewers' comments also helped me to re-read my own language in terms of how it participates in these disciplinary divides. For instance, one reviewer pointed out how my course portfolio language devalued my students' learning experiences within the Teachers College. In describing the students' prior background knowledge about reading theory and practice, I had written:

This course builds upon students' prior writing experiences in composition courses . . . and students' reading experiences in literature courses. I assume that students have some familiarity with workshop approaches to writing (i.e. peer response groups, reflective assessment about writing, author's notes, etc.) although I don't assume that students will have considered the rationale or theories underpinning such an approach (i.e. they won't necessarily identify these activities as part of a larger system). I assume that students will have had multiple experiences in reading and responding to literature, although the forms that such responses might take will be highly variable. This course is usually the first (in conjunction with English 457) that asks students to begin considering WHY teachers have structured their English courses and to examine the benefits/constraints that these approaches have had in shaping their reading/writing experiences (toward the ultimate goal of having students envision their own future reading/writing classrooms).

One reviewer, who teaches an English methods class in a College of Education, wrote:

It seemed curious that the instructor sees the course as "one of the first courses where they [the preservice teachers] are asked to take on the identity of future teachers" and points out that the students have had considerable English and Education courses but appears to know little about the education courses or to have incorporated the preservice teachers' knowledge base gained from their education courses.

To some extent, I can attribute this criticism to my failure in representing my work with Teachers College faculty in designing 476. Even though I had consulted closely with a colleague in the English Education program about my students' prior experiences and backgrounds, I didn't discuss such collaboration in the portfolio itself. But this review also points out the extent to which I didn't consider students' general education courses to be as salient as those within the "content area" of English. While I view my teaching and research as seeking to intervene in disciplinary differences between English Education and English Departments, in this case my language reinscribes such differences. This external review



prompted me to question why this was so and the implications for this lack of consideration in terms of how I might more productively build upon students' prior learning.

Reading Teaching in English Studies

Participating in the PRTP has had far-reaching implications for how I conceptualise the intellectual work of teaching. On a most basic level, creating a course portfolio spurred me to think differently about how I design and assess opportunities for student learning. The process also pushed me to think more critically about how the courses I teach are rooted in institutional values and assumptions that I need to make visible and interrogate, for myself, my colleagues, and my students. Because this project was so vital for my thinking about how to document and assess teaching, I jumped at the chance to become a faculty coordinator of the PRTP the following year. In this role, I now support other faculty as they create their course portfolios, and I am currently writing an inquiry portfolio that examines the changes I've made to English 476 over the past three years.

My experience in having my course portfolio externally reviewed, however, seems a more limited and perhaps qualified success. For my own formative purposes, the reviews were certainly beneficial. Beyond helping me revise the particular course, the reviews enabled me to gain a vantage point from which to read the institutional context in which I teach. I now have a far richer perspective about how English 476 fits in terms of national models for English education teacher programs. I also have a more acute sense of the range of issues that portfolio authors need to negotiate as they represent their work for different disciplinary (and intradisciplinary) audiences.

At the same time, my experiences suggest that the premise that peer external review should be used to assess the intellectual work of teaching might need further refinement. As I continue to work with the

PRTP, I am interested in exploring further the questions raised when representations of teaching are made public for review and exchange beyond one's local context.

One issue to consider more fully is how new genres for representing teaching require both *new ways of reading* our teaching and *new communities of readers* who are qualified to assess and evaluate such representations. Because English Studies explicitly takes up issues of readership and textuality, the discipline seems well suited to productively inform these current discussions. Given the ways that the reviewers attended to aspects of my course portfolio in terms of disciplinary differences (e.g. reading lists, assignments, pedagogical approaches, etc.), for instance, how can I guide the readers' experiences (both within and outside of the English Department) in reading these reviews? How might we need to think differently about what it means to "read" one's pedagogy as mediated by a text? If it is difficult to read another teacher's classroom performance within a course portfolio, for instance, what other criteria might we attend to in reading such a text? And how might English Studies foster a community of qualified readers for such texts?

The issue of who is qualified to read such texts is especially significant if the texts are being used for high-stakes assessment such as tenure and promotion. For instance, should the reviewer of a course portfolio be someone who teaches a similar course at a similar institution? Should the reviewer be someone who has created his or her own course portfolio and is thus perhaps more cognizant of the issues entailed in representing one's teaching? Of course, many of these issues can be addressed only within the portfolio author's institutional context. For instance, if a course portfolio author teaches at a research I institution, a promotion/tenure committee might require that his/her portfolio be reviewed by a faculty member at a parallel institution, even if a more qualified reviewer teaches at a four-year undergraduate teaching college. The



concept of “peer review” is not as transparent as it might seem with respect to whom is most qualified to review the intellectual work of teaching.

Initiatives like the PRTP also raise issues about how representations of teaching via course portfolios might be disseminated as knowledge within one’s discipline. Beyond the use of having a portfolio reviewed for a tenure and promotion case, for example, how might a course portfolio be disseminated for public exchange and how might the portfolio author be rewarded for this use? For instance, should the discipline consider creating an electronic archive or clearinghouse for representations of teaching that have been externally reviewed? In terms of rewarding faculty for such work, would the successful external review of a course portfolio count as scholarship in the same vein as research or would a portfolio have to be published in a traditional forum as well? English Studies has established already some outlets for publishing representations of teaching (such as the Pedagogical Exchange in *Composition Studies* or the new journal *Pedagogy*). But such venues also raise important questions that faculty in English Studies will need to negotiate. Even if representations of teaching are published in these venues, will they be rewarded as richly as other forms of research? Given the already pressing demands on faculty life, would faculty be expected to do the hard work of documenting (caching as intellectual work along with traditional forms of research? Or would this work bear pressure on redefining and expanding the boundaries of what constitutes intellectual work in the academy? And if we do believe that external reviews of teaching are important for claiming teaching as intellectual work, what role might professional societies—within English Studies, such as MLA or CCCC or WPA, play in fostering such a community of readers? Might there be established review boards, similar to editorial boards for journals, to which faculty could send representations of teaching for review?

Now that initiatives such as the PRTP have successfully engaged faculty in capturing the intellectual work of teaching, I believe that more studies should focus on how these portfolios are being used and received within various institutional processes, such as tenure and promotion cases, teaching award nominations, merit reviews, programmatic curricular review, and job searches. Mary Taylor Huber’s essay “Balancing Acts: Designing Careers Around the Scholarship of Teaching” provides one example of such study. She describes four different faculty members who have successfully integrated various forms of scholarship in teaching in their academic careers. Thus far most discussions within English Studies about claiming value for teaching have remained hypothetical. For example, the MLA Commission on Professional Service report provides several fictional case studies in order to clarify the uses of its proposed model and to illuminate the type of “perception, interpretation, and evaluation that is critical if we are to achieve a fair representation and analysis of faculty work” (190). In a similar vein, I am now determining how to represent the external reviews of my portfolio within my merit file (which is evaluated by other Department colleagues). Some of the questions I am considering are the following: Should I include the reviews as an attachment to the course portfolio—as evidence that it has been peer reviewed? Should I respond to the reviewers’ assessments in a reflective memo, to demonstrate the “use” dial I have made of the reviews in changing my teaching? Is the value of the review primarily in terms of the assessment it provides or in the uses that I, as portfolio author, make of it? In a similar vein, UNL’s PRTP leadership team is initiating an assessment project to interview faculty about how they have used their course portfolios for institutional rewards. Such stories are vital for helping faculty to make sense of how to use and read portfolios at an institutional level; they are equally vital for gauging how our profession might attend to issues that emerge when representations of teaching are read



and assessed outside of local contexts.

These are the issues that both vex and excite me about the future of UNL's Peer Review of Teaching Project and about the national move to document teaching as intellectual work. While I do not believe that initiatives such as course portfolio projects will *necessarily* secure institutional rewards for postsecondary teachers, I do believe such work can sponsor valuable discussions on how to make the intellectual work of teaching more valued within English Studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the six anonymous reviewers who responded to my portfolio and the two anonymous reviewers who responded to an earlier version of this essay.

NOTES

¹For more on course portfolios, see Bass; Cerbin; Goodburn; Hutchings; Schulman.

WORKS CITED

Bass, Randy. 1999. "The Scholarship of Teaching: What's the Problem?" *Inventio*. 1.1 Internet link: <http://www.doit.gmu.edu/Archives/feb98/rbass.htm>

Cerbin, William. "Inventing a New Genre: The Course Portfolio at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse." *Making Teaching Community Property: A Menu for Peer Collaboration and Peer Review*. Ed. Pat Hutchings. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 1996.52-56. "Final Report." MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching." *Profession 2001*: 225-238.

Glassick, Charles E., Mary Taylor Huber, and Gene I. Maeroff. *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Goodburn, Amy. "The Course Portfolio: Individual and Collective Possibilities." *Composition, Pedagogy, and the Scholarship of Teaching*, Eds. Deborah Minter and Amy Goodburn. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann/Boynton-Cook, 2002.

Horner, Bruce. "Traditions and Professionalization: Reconceiving Work

in Composition." *CCC* 51.3 (February 2000): 366-398.

Huber, Mary Taylor. "Balancing Acts: Designing Careers Around the Scholarship of Teaching." *Change* (July/August 2001): 21 -29.

Hutchings, Pat (ed.). *The Course Portfolio: How Faculty can Examine Their Teaching to Advance Practice and Improve Student Learning*. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 1998.

Levine, George. "The Two Nations." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches In Teaching, literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*. 1.1 (Winter 2001): 7-19.

Mahala, Daniel and Jody Swilky. "Remapping the Geography of Service in English." *College English* 59.6 (October 1997): 625-646.

MLA Commission on Professional Service. "Making Faculty Work Visible: Reinterpreting Professional Service, Teaching, and Research in the Fields of Language and Literature." *Profession* 1996:161-216.

Murphy, Michael. "New Faculty for a New University: Toward a Full-Time Teaching Intensive Faculty Track in Composition" *CCC* 52.1 (September 2001): 14-42.

Salvatori, Mariolina Rizzi. "Difficulty: The Great Educational Divide." *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Ed. Pat Hutchings. Menlo Park, CA: Carnegie Publications, 2000. 81-93.

Schulman, Lee. "Course Anatomy: The Dissection and Analysis of Knowledge through Teaching." *The Course Portfolio: How Faculty Can Examine Their Teaching to Advance Practice and Improve Student Learning*. Ed. Pat Hutchings. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 1998. 5-12.



APPENDIX A

Outline for Peer Review Comments on a Course Portfolio

The following headings identify four major topics that could readily be part of a review of a course portfolio generated through our project. We encourage you to use these or similar headings to identify the portions of your comments related to these specific issues in teaching. You need not reply to all the prompts, but they are provided to begin your reflection on the course portfolio.

Please feel free to make your comments in either a narrative format or as identified single sections. Any additional comments about the teaching represented in these documents would be welcome. Please feel free to expand on your reactions to the intellectual quality or effectiveness of this professor's teaching beyond the types of issues that we have posed. Remember that your frank but constructive reactions to what is presented will be very helpful in the development of the course and course portfolio. At the end, please include a few sentences that describe your experience in teaching courses related to the one you are reviewing. It is not necessary that you have taught exactly this course, by type or by content; it is helpful to the author of the portfolio to know your experience.

Intellectual

Please evaluate the quality of the *course's intellectual content*. This may include but is not limited to:

- 1) appropriateness of course material both for the curriculum and the institution
- 2) intellectual coherence of course content
- 3) articulation of intellectual goals for learners and congruence of

those goals with course content and mission

- 4) value/relevance of ideas, knowledge and skills covered by the course

Quality of Teaching Practices

Please evaluate the *quality of the teaching practices* used in the course. This may include but is not limited to:

- 1) organization and planning of contact time; congruence between planned and actual use of contact time
- 2) opportunities to actively engage students in the material
- 3) opportunities (in or out of class) for students to practice the skills embedded in the course goals
- 4) particularly creative or effective uses of contact time that seem likely to improve student understanding
- 5) activities scheduled outside of contact time that contribute to student achievement (this may include extracurricular activities, group projects, electronic discussions, or any other planned course related assignments or activities)
- 6) course structures or procedures that contribute especially to the likely achievement of understanding by learners

Quality of Student Understanding

Please evaluate the *quality of student understanding*. This may include but is not limited to:

- 1) appropriateness of student performance, in light of course goals, course level and institution
- 2) performance levels that reflect challenging levels of conceptual understanding and critical evaluation of the material appropriate to the level of the course and of the students
- 3) appropriateness of forms of evaluation and assessment, given



the stated goals of the course

- 4) creativity in providing students with ways to demonstrate their understanding of and ability to use (lie ideas and content of the course
- 5) alignment between the weighting of course assignments in grade calculation with the relative importance of the course goals
- 6) demonstration of an appropriate percentage of students that they are achieving competence in the stated course goals, or identification of reasons why they might not be reaching these levels of competence
- 7) revisions or modifications to the course that could improve performance

Evidence of Reflective Consideration and Development

Please evaluate the *evidence of reflective consideration and development*. This may include but is not limited to:

- 1) substantive reflection by the faculty member on the achievement of the goals for the course
- 2) identification of any meaningful relations between teaching practice and student performance .
- 3) evidence of changed teaching practice over successive course offerings in reaction to prior student understanding
- 4) evidence of insightful analysis of teaching practice that resulted from consideration of student performance

Reviewer's Experience of Teaching in This Area

What similar courses have you taught? (*e.g.*) class size, level, content). Have you taught using a similar format? (*e.g.*, course structure, presentation format)