

Learning Essay

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This semester, the U212 class I taught seemed to revolve around four separate-but-interrelated themes: Emotion, Experience, Adaptability, and Activity. All four themes were present to some degree last semester when I taught this course. But this time around I was more sensitive to these ideas as I did not have to focus as narrowly on the mechanics of each class.

### Emotion

Both the class readings and some personal events this semester have made me much more aware of my own emotions as well as those of my students. I felt that by being in touch with those emotions I was a more expressive and caring instructor. I was better able to monitor both my own emotions and their own and react to them more quickly and appropriately. In doing so, I think I set the expectation among my students for regular and honest feedback and that was very helpful and healthy for the class as a whole. I don't think that all of my students quite embraced it and some probably think I'm flakey but I'm okay with that.

### Experience

Teaching the class for the second time was definitely much easier. I imagine that would be true for any class but especially true for a novice teacher. I was especially happy the one day I had a "reserve" activity up my sleeve just in case we finished early. That's something I would not have thought of last semester. In fact, I don't know if last semester I would have been able to anticipate that we might finish earlier than expected. I was also able to better anticipate some of their questions and keep abreast of the class schedule better as I didn't have to expend all of my energy just keeping up with the class material. I didn't use any old assignments as examples as I had considered but I was able to give more explicit instructions for many of the assignments this time around both by using my experience last

year in grading the assignments and in having a better idea what kinds of questions might arise in general.

### Adaptability

Last semester, I was adaptable by necessity. This semester, I was adaptable by choice. I was able to make changes in anticipation of potential problems this semester instead of reacting to them as I did last semester. I still feel bad about some of the changes as I should have caught the problems much earlier (50 pages of reading for one day and on the same day that an assignment is due? What was I thinking when I made the syllabus?!). I also learned some very harsh but practical lessons last semester related to preparation so this semester I was just more prepared in general. For example, I had some trouble with the equipment last semester so I began arriving earlier this semester to ensure I had time to check it out and make sure everything was set up and working.

### Activity

I tried my very best to make the classes as active as possible this semester but I was not near as successful as I would have liked to have been. In fairness to myself, I know this will take a lifetime to begin to master. But I am still unsatisfied with my own efforts thus far. I am not only unsatisfied with the number, variety, and type of activities of active learning activities but also their depth. I am greatly unsatisfied with the depth of many of the activities and I am convinced that their lack of depth encouraged a similar lack of depth in how my students and I approached the material.

More importantly, I am unsatisfied with the general structure of my class. I am unsatisfied with the inherent instructor-led nature of my course, a structure that seems to underestimate the ability of undergraduates and restrict them to only the knowledge that I deem important. There has to be a medium between the necessity to have some structure and

meet learning goals while allowing students freedom and responsibility for structuring their own learning. I am hopeful that others like Michael Wesch are helping us find that medium.

### Conclusion

Freed from having to spend all of my energy on the mechanics of each class, I was able to open myself to the bigger ideas that linked each class. I believe this openness made me a more effective and approachable teacher. Like everything that makes us vulnerable, this openness opened me up for potential abuse as a “weak” teacher. I acknowledge that danger but remain convinced this made me a better teacher and person.