How have I taught? How do I understand my own teaching? What have my students learned? When I say that a methods class—a class in teaching prospective teachers—went well, that the students did learn, that I think they’ll be good teachers, what do I mean? And how would I know that such assertions were true? Could I theorize more generally about my course; and more, could I theorize about how such a course-qua-type fosters the development of the student-becoming-teacher?

Short of treating students like rats in a lab or plants in a rooting medium, we can’t know the answers to these questions—if by the word know, we mean the product of a monological process characterized by a scientific, technical rigor that is predictive in nature. I take it as axiomatic that since students aren’t rats or plants, we can’t know in that way. More precisely, I take it as axiomatic that when we work with human beings, such knowing is impossible: such knowing is too singular, too reductive, ultimately too inhuman. Life and the people who populate it are too rich and too complex for such a knowing.

Which (alas) doesn’t get us off the hook: we do have a need to know what works, especially when we are working with people, perhaps more especially when we are working with people-who-are-our-students. We need to be able to identify causes of desired effects so that we can repeat them deliberately and purposefully. Given the diverse populations we serve, we need to learn how plural (perhaps even how contradictory) those effects are. And speaking very specifically as a teacher working with college students who think they too want to be English teachers—that is, as a very real teacher with very real students—I
need to know what “works,” what in my curriculum helps students develop the identity of teacher and how and why it “works,” and for whom it works. Likewise, I need to know what gets in the way of that goal, and if that obstacle blocks only all students or just some. Ideally, I would take this knowing and weave it into something larger, a theory of how such a course achieves its goals and not: first, for this term’s students-who-want-to-be-teachers; second, for the general group of students-who-want-to-be-teachers.

This chapter hopes to demonstrate how to theorize in this way—from practice and by means of reflection—as it weaves such a theory.

***

One way to know how a student, a class, and a curriculum work—is it together?—is to see our own teaching and learning practices as a source of knowledge, metaphorically as a text that can be systematically observed, questioned, understood, generalized about, and refuted—in a phrase, reflected upon. In defining our our practice this way, as a source of knowledge, we also define ourselves as causal inquirers. According to Donald Schön, a causal inquirer focuses on a particular situation in a single organization in order to understand the problems and discords and even successes produced. Such understanding, such knowledge, is produced not by means of scientific laws, but rather through models of behavior that are generated from specific situations. As Schön puts it,

when it [reflection] is successful, it yields not covering laws but prototypical models of causal patterns that may guide inquiry in other . . . situations—prototypes that depend, for their validity, on modification and testing in “the next situation." “Reflective transfer” seems to me a good label for this kind of generalization. (97)

Reflective transfer, the procedure that enables us to learn from and theorize our practice requires four steps: that we (1) observe and examine our own practice; (2) make hypotheses about successes and failures, as well as the reasons for each; and (3) shape the next iteration of similar experience according to what we have learned; when we (4) begin the cycle again. In the methods course, such reflective transfer has a specific application: to help us understand the processes by which students learn, the assignments that motivate and structure such learning, the responses to assignments that invite both insight and continuing engagement, and the tasks that resemble “real” teaching enough that to complete them one acts as (in the process of becoming) a teacher.

As defined here, reflection is necessarily collaborative: I might plan and “deliver” the curriculum, but my students will “experience” it. The points of intersection among both—the delivered and the experienced curricula—locate the place where learning and teaching occurs. In its location-as-intersection, the curriculum might also be seen as a kind of contact zone where students and the teacher negotiate their teaching and learning. To understand
curriculum-as-negotiation, of course, we rely on students’ articulation of it—that is, not so much on their articulation of what they’ve learned that we planned, but rather their articulation of what they learned that we might not have expected. When such articulation is written, it is made visible and thus subject to review. It is, then, through their articulation of experience and a teacher’s review of that articulation in light of her intent—in this case, my own—that she begins to understand the phenomenon that we are calling the methods class.

As I have discussed elsewhere (Yancey 1998), I began thinking about these issues several years ago when I determined either to teach this course in a more productive way, or to give it up. Basically, what I did was to re-design the course, replacing texts, devising new assignments, and building in reflection throughout—in bi-weekly letters, in a closed email listserver discussion, in informal texts that asked students to record and comment upon their own learning, and in formal texts that made the same demands but that called for more definitive conclusions.

Both the structures and the timing of these places for reflection vary, as the list above suggests; seen collectively, these forms of reflection provide multiple contexts which themselves encourage insight, both individually and together. Because they work in different genres and because they require different kinds of intellectual work, they provide multiple frames through which to understand the same experience, and it is often, as Arthur Koestler reminds us, through the crossing of such frames that insight is generated. The letters, for instance, are unstructured; they favor the writer who prefers the open page and a personal approach. Other textual places, like the formal assignments, are highly structured and highly conventionalized.

Throughout the term, I read student texts three ways. First, I collect each assignment, I respond to individual texts, and in my response, I invite additional dialogue. Second, I read the responses to each assignment in the aggregate, as a set that helps me see if my expectations are met and to determine if mid-course corrections are required. Third, at the end of the term, I read the texts in a way I am calling “reflective” (Yancey 98). To engage in this reading, I make the two steps that Lee Shulman suggests we teachers must initiate to make knowledge from our practice: (1) occlude the flow of work, and (2) present what we find to a public audience. Given that it’s the end of the term, the flow of work does cease; it’s a convenient stopping place. But before I can present what I may have learned, there is yet another, intermediate step: I have to read the data. In my methods course, that is a lot of material: in addition to a standard midterm, a fairly conventional paper, multiple reflective letters and emails, and about 15 in-class writing exercises, I also ask for a collaboratively produced curriculum unit and a final portfolio. Which data, then, to read? And as important, how to read?

Reading the data isn’t an unusual or unlikely task, not for an English teacher. We don’t call them data, but texts in fact are one kind of data, and English teachers are experienced aplenty in the reading of texts. That’s what
this intermediate step requires, that we read, plot, interpret and evaluate as we do for any fine text. These data are simply fine classroom texts, a set of them that we read in the aggregate as well as individually so that patterns are discerned, absences and presences made real, theory-from-practice made. Which data to read is another question, one that can take different answers. In earlier work with the methods class, for example, I’ve focused on reading a set of portfolios from quite different students, almost as case studies (Yancey 97). That reading has reminded me how different my students can be, taught me that the course I experience as a unified phenomenon is pluralized in student experience. Reading through selected portfolios, however, is only one means of seeing the course. Another way to see the course is to focus on particular assignments, not so much to see if the students learned what I had planned for them to learn, but rather (or perhaps also) to discern what students did learn. To do this, I put carefully designed questions to these texts. Do these texts, for instance, share common themes? If so, what does that tell us about a theory of development for prospective teachers? If not, how might that observation alter our theory? This semester, as we’ll see, I’ve been especially interested in two aspects of teacher development.

- First, how can we help prospective teachers see their prospective students as both like them and as unlike them?
- Second, how can we help prospective teachers articulate their own learning as they learn so that they can “teach” this way, so that they can see how to direct their own—and their students’—learning?

***

It’s a Monday evening early in the term, cool by Charlotte standards. We’ve been focusing on writing and rhetoric, taking up concepts like writing process and rhetorical situation and invention—concepts and processes that I hope these students will take into their classrooms eventually. Unfortunately, concepts such as these are new to these students, regardless of age or gender or ethnicity, and we do have a mix.1 English majors, they’ve written many texts, but they haven’t studied the writing or the rhetoric of texts at all.

Working at state-of-the-art PCs, students are responding to a set of sequenced categories designed to accomplish two goals. The first of the goals is to help further students’ understanding of invention by giving them practice in cubing, the technique through which one investigates a subject by viewing it from multiple perspectives. I specify the first category, description, allowing five minutes for writing. The students compose at the keyboard, Leslie moving fast, her fingers barely catching her swirling thoughts, Sharon thinking for a full three minutes before putting the first finger to key. Another two minutes, and I move us to the second category, comparison; another five minutes, and I move us to contrast; then in their turn to analysis, critique, and evaluation. I’m hoping that students will learn about the power of cubing, about the insight
that can be generated by explicitly moving around and through and within and without a subject.

This lesson is about more than inventional process, however; it’s also about the subject under investigation, their ideal class, populated by particularized students. My goal in choosing this topic is no doubt obvious. My students have the opportunity—indeed, the task—of articulating what may only be tacit—their dream situation. At the same time, because cubing is multi-perspectival, the task requires that they see this ideal as less-than, as one that brings with it a set of students whose needs and aspirations, even when those students are good ones, can be at odds with those of the teacher. Put in the form of questions: Who are the students in this (ideal) class? How will they cooperate? How will they resist?

Leslie responds with a perspective that I have found to be all too typical: she’s becoming a teacher so that she can become her own high school teacher. “This classroom,” she says, “is almost identical to my own 11th grade honors class. There were three or four students who knew it all, and three or four who never participated. . . . I find that this classroom is unequal, just as my own.” What’s unusual about Leslie’s response is that even as she articulates this vision, she begins its revision:

This classroom is different mainly because it is going to be filled with energy. . . . No boring rows for a small class of 15. This class will introduce a balance between the previous literature and up and coming literature. More discussion, less standardized book report tests, and more “thinking” and “communicating” skills. More group work and more individualized thought. Definitely some sort of free writing whether in journal form or not.

Of course, I don’t know which came first, the chicken or the egg: did Leslie understand tacitly that some changes to her model of the good teacher had to be made, or did the cubing exercise itself “force” such an insight? What I do know is that the cubing exercise—and this is the first time I’ve used it—is producing a kind of process in which as the model is articulated, it undergoes revision. Not that the model itself is the problem. Many of these students did have fine high school teachers, as did Leslie; it’s to be expected (and hoped) that they will work from this model, and by now I’ve come to expect this kind of identification. But the identification wants to be a point of departure, not the terminus: that’s what the cubing offers, a chance to see that identification from multiple perspectives, to contextualize it so as to understand and perhaps modify it; to develop a teacherly identity, rather than assume one already formed. Of course not all students want to replicate previous teachers: at the other end of the spectrum are those students whose schooling was troubled, who want to change school, who seem to want to become the teacher they wish they’d had. We see this in Jill, the second prototype.

In contrast, my ideal class is nothing like my real experiences in school. It was like climbing a mountain with many people situated on peeks above me, ready
to knock me off and send me hurdling back to the beginning. My gear and backpack were like my wits and they kept me on the mountain despite my foes.

Given this sense of her own experience, perhaps it’s not surprising that Jill focuses on her class not from a curricular perspective, but from a social one. She talks exclusively about the students, about their transition from elementary school:

All of my students have just left the security of the elementary school and feel overwhelmed by having so many classes and teachers to keep up with. They also feel threatened by the older ninth graders in the school. Many would like to go back to their smaller elementary world where they were top dog. Now, they are on the bottom of the totem pole and feel vulnerable in their new surroundings.

Jill sees the students as “insecure,” as a “challenge” and even “paranoid,” as she puts it, “as to how they look to everyone else in the class.” And then Jill does something that I am learning to take as a developmental mark of teacher identity formation. Asked to compare her ideal classroom, Jill works as she did before, from a metaphor that provides a frame through which she can connect the old with the new, in this case a familiar race track as frame for her new, imagined class.

Teaching this group of students is like driving a race car around a crowded track. I have to have a lot of competent skills to maneuver in and out of the students working in groups, I have to have the ability to know where each child is and what I can do to help them and still stay one step ahead so I will not be run out of the room or off the track.

Several observations are worth noting here. First, while the category did ask for comparison, it didn’t specify metaphor. Jill supplies comparison by means of metaphor, and we see her rely on this form of conceptualization throughout. Second, the metaphor here makes sense: I can see how teaching is related to the direction and speed and chaos and safety issues we associate with a race-track. How important might it be that the metaphor make sense? Is there a problem if it doesn’t? Third, while I think faculty in general are aware of the power of metaphor to help students grasp the unknown in many different kinds of classes (eg, see Allen), I’m also beginning to think that such metaphorical understanding is a key component of teacher identity formation. I’ve noted it more and more frequently now in student work in this course, not because it was invited, but because it was seized on as a means for students to express relationships they were struggling to articulate. Perhaps as important, I’ve observed that it’s the better students who make this move. If I’m correct about this, then other questions arise:

how is it important;
what does it contribute:
shouldn’t we therefore be inviting such metaphorical work; when might we invite it; are some metaphors better than others; how should we respond to it?

***

A second task I use this term asks for another kind of identification: of these prospective teachers with students. That may seem obvious—that teachers teach students—but many of the prospective teachers I’ve encountered are like Leslie: the students they expect to teach will, they think, be just like the ones they knew in high school, 3 or 4 students who knew it all, and 3 or 4 who never participated. What they need to understand, first, is that the students they will teach may be—probably will be—quite different than the ones they knew: more diverse, interested in different activities (and even music), challenging in ways they can only begin to appreciate. Second, the role that they as teachers will play with regard to students, of course, will be completely different. The classmate who amused them-as-student is the one who disrupts them-as-teacher. Third, and in some ways more to the point, our students are not like us: they do not necessarily love to read and write, they do not want to participate in class, they do not want to go to college. Despite those differences, however, we need to be able to identify with them, perhaps most especially with the students who seem so foreign to us. Identification is the point at which learning and teaching can begin.

To accomplish this aim of helping students identify with students, I’ve created a focused exercise that comes in two parts. In the first, we look in class at a student text written by a high school student named Ryan: a literary analysis. I ask the members of the class to read the text and to respond to it as a high school teacher. After they do this, we share perceptions and responses. The text itself is read almost universally by the entire class, though given the text I’ve chosen, that’s no surprise. As one student put it,

Looking . . . at Ryan’s Vietnam paper, a paper flawed by grammatical errors, by poor transitions from paragraph to paragraph and by incomplete development of ideas, the reader would deduce that Ryan . . . is an unskilled writer who is trying to complete an assignment but does not have the linguistic skills to do so.

The responses to Ryan’s text are first efforts: i.e., critical, not necessarily because the prospective teachers want to be critical, but because they too read out of their experience, so they think being critical is a mark of a good teacher, the smart teacher. (This in itself tells us something else about our own practice, but this is a story for another day.) We talk about the rhetorical stance of respondent; we talk about the role of praise in developing text and writer; we link the two. What genuine praise can we offer to Ryan?

But more importantly, after this first exercise in reading and responding to student texts, I offer a surprise: an entire portfolio that Ryan has composed. It
opens with a résumé, includes a letter based on a piece of literature, includes the paper we just looked at as well as some invention work and an earlier draft that preceded it. Take the portfolio home, I say, and read it. Think about it. And write:

• Who is this student?
• What can he do well?
• What kind of writing would suit his interests?
• What kind of curriculum might suit him?
• What recommendations will you make?

What my students make of Ryan could fill the course. They do exactly what it is that I do here: read the data, reflect upon it, make meaning. So while we read Ryan similarly, we posit alternative theories about what might work with him.

In answer to who Ryan is: a student who isn’t very academic. “His résumé,” Lynn notes, “doesn’t include the academic courses he has taken . . . but does list his electives [Horticulture I and II, Landscaping, Woodworking, and Drafting]. Judging by these classes . . . I tend to think that his interests are more vocational than scholastic.” Ryan has held restaurant and landscaping jobs, and “he is Vice President of the Future Farmers of America; he’s not only a hard worker, but someone who is capable of assuming a responsible leadership position. His résumé indicates that he is looking for another landscaping position but doesn’t mention his plans (if any) to continue on to college to further his education.”

As to what he can do well, we see the beginnings of disagreement. Some of the students think he can write well—he “seems to have a good grasp on the writing process” and “he is a very good student”—while others think he “appears to be doing just enough to get by.” As to what kinds of writing we might ask of him and what curriculum would suit him and what recommendations we would make, we have many options to consider. Given Ryan’s blue-collar work interests, Karen suggests “Perhaps something with a socialistic ring . . . . I believe leaning it more toward socialistic novels might get more in touch with Ryan’s life. Books such as The Grapes of Wrath, The Jungle, or The Good Earth might be more of an inspiration than Fallen Angels. Alternatively, Sharon suggests a rhetorically informed, work-based approach more congruent with what she understands as his interests:

Ryan’s efforts at writing about a Vietnam movie and book were not successful, but if he had been asked to write a different type of paper on a different topic, the results might have been different. Ryan is interested in horticulture. If he were asked to write directions for a specific task such as planting azaleas, he might produce a document which would be useful to his customers at the Flower Mill. Ryan has also been employed for several years. He might be able to write a list of suggestions that teenage jobseekers could use to get and keep jobs. If he saw a reason for writing something, a job application essay for example, he would work hard to produce an acceptable document. His writing and editing
efforts would have purpose to them. He would be motivated to learn from his mistakes.

Without my introducing a tech-prep model, Sharon’s response sounds the arguments for it, a curriculum that draws from and also informs the work-related experiences of students preparing to enter the world of work after high school.

Jill begins by identifying Ryan as one of us. “Overall,” she says, “Ryan would probably do better writing about a topic he liked, but then so would all of us.” Of course. But Jill wants the best of both worlds, the tech-prep orientation that extends beyond. Put as a question, is there a way to bridge the gap from what we like to what else we might learn to like? Jill suggests how we might in the language of her philosophy of teaching:

Being an expressivist teacher, I would encourage Ryan to write about a topic . . . which he really cared about. This would help him to develop his writing skills with a topic that he would put a lot of effort into. Once he was confident in his skills, I would lead him into other areas of writing such as the Vietnam paper he worked on for his teacher. At least, maybe it would bridge a gap for him and let him see how all writing is interconnected, and that he could do well writing on any subject.

Ryan’s portfolio was intended to show that while different from us, he is at the same time very like us. By reading Ryan through his own texts, we can see—and value—the kid that our curriculum is supposed to help, we can see the debates about curriculum and how they develop, we can take those up ourselves in the language of the profession—as applied to a real student.

Ryan begins to make the curriculum real. The students begin to work as reflective practitioners.

***

Undergraduate students talk about becoming teachers with an implied sense (almost urgent) that as one migrates to the position of teacher, she or he leaves—abandons or abdicates?—the position of student. But good teachers are always students: learning about their own learning processes, about their teaching, about curricula, about students. And increasingly, teachers are working not alone, but together to undertake this learning, whether they do this within a school, as part of a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)-sponsored research group, as participants in an advanced institute of the National Writing Project, or as members of an American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) teaching circle. The kind of inquiry, then, characteristic of faculty is what the next assignment seeks to foster.

All the students are assigned to a group that is to design a very short, non-graded curriculum unit. The activity is what I call a “finger exercise,” a piano-based term for rehearsal, in this case a rehearsal for the team-based formal curriculum unit the students will create later in the term. Given that they
have never completed a unit before, there is much to be learned, about themselves as learners, about processes and strategies that work (or don’t), about how the pieces of a unit should fit, about thinking like a teacher.

Halfway through the exercise, the students are asked to reflect on it, in a variation of what Schön calls reflection-in-action: “We think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or opportunity; and we may in the process, restructure strategies of action, understandings of phenomena, or ways of framing problems.” (28) To reflect in this way, students are asked to address three questions:

- How’s it going?
- What’s left to do?
- What are you learning?

The first question, of course, requires a kind of judgment-in-process, the kind of judgment that informs formative assessment. Based on such an evaluation, we continue with our plans, or we rewrite them. The second question calls for both projection and planning: given our understandings—of a project in-progress and of what the final product should look like—what else do we need to do? The third question goes to what it is that the students can take with them. It’s here that I focus.

A talented soccer player, Shayna still wants to teach alone:

I would like to say that I am learning how to play nice with my group mates. I am definitely opposed to some of the ideas, but I guess I have to learn to compromise. I know that I would do things differently, more creatively. I am learning that I might not be too bad at this stuff. I have a lot of ideas that are interesting to me, at least. I have learned and I am trying to learn to implement the idea of fit between assessment and class instruction. This is one of the things I am struggling with in my group.

Regardless of task, students always can learn about themselves; the self presents a starting place for learning about material and about students and about how to make those match in useful ways. What happens, however, when what is intended as a starting place marks only stasis?

Wendy has learned both about herself and about how to proceed. “I have learned to speak up and to not be intimidated by the rush to get finished . . . . I also should back up my thoughts and support what I am saying to add validity while not sounding like a ‘know-it-all.’” Wendy’s learning about herself is thus relativized to working with others successfully, and to do this, she sees the need to communicate in qualified ways, with support and thought for the sake of validity. And she is learning about sequence as well:

I think that as we developed the unit, we made a mistake by choosing the text and the activity before we stated the goal. I feel that most of our work has been an attempt to create and structure our unit so that it fits the text and activity instead of working from our goal and then choosing the text and activity.
How we structure what we do matters: for teachers as well as for students, which is what Lynn discovered as well:

Although I am not in an actual classroom, I think this lesson is forcing me to learn about the flow of knowledge. There must be an obvious flow to the information students receive and the assignments you ask them to do. This is also helping me understand the length of time needed for specific activities and the importance of the directions you as the teacher provide. If you don’t give good directions, you don’t have much of a right to complain if you get shoddy work in return.

According to Lynn, the flow of knowledge is created through information and assignments and timing and directions. In an ideal world, Lynn could take this unit into a real school and see how it fares as flow of knowledge. Even in our world, however, she understands a multi-faceted way to approach curriculum planning.

Perhaps Leslie says it best: “I’m learning to think like a teacher. That’s a lot.”

***

The end of the term: students have brought in all their texts, informal, formal and those in-between. Somehow they need to select from these a set that will show that they know what it means to be a teacher, can do some of what that requires, understand some of what else needs to be learned. I set a list of questions to help them frame these tasks:

• Describe the student who came through the door in January.
• Describe the teacher to be who is leaving in May.
• What has this person learned about theory?
• How does this theory connect to/extend what you have learned/experienced previously?
• What are the relationships among theory, practice, and reflection?

The intent of the questions is to help the students move, retrospectively, from the student to the prospective teacher, from a knowledge of theory in the abstract to an awareness of practice theorized through the lens of reflection. As I read these finger exercises, I again see the different forms that the course took, the diverse curricula that these students experienced.

Karen plays back to me a clean, reductive version of these inter-relationships: “Via reflection, you tie together the loose strings of your starting theory and the practice you have encountered to create a custom theory that suits you as a teacher and your students to a ‘T.’” Well, yes. But no: somehow it doesn’t seem quite so simple to me.

Naila, a returning student, represents a population that is increasing in size. Surprisingly, the curriculum that was, admittedly, geared to the novice seems to provide what she needs as well, and it is now that she sorts through it all, reflectively.
With knowledge of the various theories of English (such as the social construct, expressive, and the uncommon sense approaches to teaching), I have come to the place where I can at least consider those views rather than ignore them because they do not fit in with my own view of teaching. Ignorance of these approaches only brought fear of these approaches. Now that I have come to understand them better, I am more free to implement them as I see fit.

Leslie, the most typical of the students in this course, talks about who she was, who she is, and how they are still linked.

I would have to say that the person who came into the class in January was very ideal. I had dreams of a perfect class with awesome students. . . . Perhaps, but not entirely, the individual thought more about her future job as “the teacher” and not her job to educate “the students.” I say not entirely because I know that she emphasized students’ needs but did not know the proper avenues to take to prioritize them.

As important, Leslie sees a less tidy, but more accurate way for theory, practice and reflection to work:

Theory, practice and reflection relate in one simple word: teacher. The teacher has to correlate them. He/she has to decide who, how, why, etc. The theory may not always fit the practice, but the reflection will show that mismatch. Basically, I find in practice a theory may have to be readjusted, worked identically, or discarded. A reflection, however, should be constant in order to see what fits, works and needs tossing and revising.

***

I’m reading the portfolios that these students have composed: more than half of them use metaphor as a means of expressing what they’ve learned and who they’ve become.

***

I began this reflective quest by looking at two questions:

• First, how can we help prospective teachers see their prospective students as both like them and unlike them?
• Second, how can we help prospective teachers articulate their own learning as they learn so that they understand how we make knowledge from experience and use that to help them direct their own—and their students’—learning?

I think the tasks I set—the cubing and the work with Ryan’s portfolio—began to help these prospective teachers see their prospective students as something more than replications of themselves (people who love to read and write already). I also think the mix—between the imagined students created through the cubing and the textually embodied real students—was serendipitous. Should I modify the sequence so as to make the mix, and the
textually embodied students particularly, more integral to the course, possibly by introducing the portfolio very early and returning to it periodically; or using a set of portfolios, perhaps from different kinds of students, at predictable points during the term; or asking that the students that we construct through reading the portfolios be put into dialectic with the imagined ones?

I think the reflection in action worked fairly well for all the students. Some of them saw how their learning will benefit them as teachers; some saw how it could work for them as students: all them learned. Again, though, I need to make more of an explicit link from this reflection in action to reflective teaching: so, how to do that, and when?

***

My claim has also been that teaching this course reflectively is a knowledge-making enterprise. If that’s so, what have I learned?

That prospective teachers often bring with them a model of a teacher they want to be, their favorite teacher or the one they wished they’d had. Identifying which model they are working from, asking them if it’s appropriate given the other information, and providing opportunities for model revision is a primary objective of a methods course. Question: Do “better” students tend to favor a particular kind of model? Do all models require revision?

That better students tend to focus on the curriculum and the students; weaker ones tend to focus on themselves. Like Leslie and Lynn, the better student, by which I mean the student who has developed some readiness to teach, can move to think about teaching rhetorically—as a subject matter having an audience as well as a rhetor. Weaker students, like Karen, still learn, but that learning is focused more on self, less on the rhetoric of teaching. Question: what activities, what questions can help weaker students move outside the self? Or is there, in fact, a way to accelerate such readiness?

That seeing a high school student through multiple texts exerts a profound influence on prospective teachers. Through such a rich portrait, they see a human being even when he or she seems quite different from them. They then begin to take up important curricular matters, to articulate their own sense of fit between kid and school, to begin to develop their own theory about curriculum and teaching. Question: Is this an activity that we should perhaps start with? Can I be more specific about the kind of influence I think it exerts?

That in many ways this course is an exercise in identity and identification. Now I’ve made this claim before, and it seems pretty obvious (Yancey 1997). What I didn’t appreciate then and am only coming to appreciate now, however, is twofold: (1) the multiple kinds of identity; and (2) the ways they interact and can even be at cross-purposes. For instance:

- We have a student identity: the product of what I’ve called the lived curriculum, including learning styles, work habits, and so on; this is what the prospective teachers bring into the classroom with them;
• We have identity qua invention: inventing an identity, in this case the identity of teacher (and such an identity is multi-selved); this is perhaps the overall purpose of the course, to start the processes that will continue throughout a teaching life;

• We have identification with the teacher: the link between a prospective teacher and a teacher from the past, and the link between a prospective teacher and the group of teachers that she or he will become a part of;

• We have identification with the prospective students: seeing in those students oneself so that the students are not positioned as alien, especially when their linguistic virtuosity seems at odds with the values that tend to inculcate college English departments; appreciating what that student brings to the class;

• We have over-identification with both students and teachers (Yancey, forthcoming): this takes the form of wanting to replicate another teacher, or seeing a student so much as a version of an earlier self of ours that we can’t see the student in any other way, despite what such a frame masks; such an identification needs revision.

Negotiating among these is the life-long act of inventing oneself as a teacher.

That prospective teachers can reflect—can read the data, interpret it, and make sense of it—when they walk in the door. The students in this course experienced no difficulty in reading Ryan’s texts, in talking about his strengths, in using the understanding so gleaned to think about learning and teaching. Such reflection should be a primary activity of the course, particularly of a methods course that does not have a practicum attached to it. These texts provide one means of making several abstract issues real. Question: What other kinds of reflection should we include? Toward what end?

That all students are ready to deal with theory-practice relationships, but the weaker students will tend to understand them more mechanistically. Question: how can we avoid this?

That I am developing here a profile of weaker/stronger student. The weaker student is focused on self, sees relationships mechanistically, tends to want to replicate a model rather then develop her/his own. The stronger student isn’t necessarily more flexible, but is able to manage the multiple variables in a teaching situation in a theorized way; s/she is able to see how something works for students quite apart from how it server his or her interests. S/he also has a stronger sense of the model of teacher s/he seeks to embody.

That if such a profile is accurate, it would have implications for the methods course; what might those be?

That the methods course in some sense isn’t really about methods or materials or goals—about the information on the syllabus—at all, or it’s about much more than that. It’s a rhetorical activity through which students begin to invent themselves as teachers, through which they navigate between and among various kinds of identity and identifications, through which through their own reflections they learn how to articulate these issues.
The term concluded, I’m reading the student evaluations of the course. The resistance to much of this pedagogy and philosophy hasn’t (I’m afraid) disappeared yet. I get high marks for what I know, and high marks for the challenges I pose, but the students also say that it’s too much, too fast, too different. I’ve heard this before.

Again, I think about why.

One book the students read is Mayher’s *Uncommon Sense*, and what they say is true: I advocate Mayher’s approach; I see it as mine. Many of them do not share my enthusiasm, those who do grow into it slowly, and (I remind myself) it’s easy to see why. They embody common sense, these students: common sense is how they have both succeeded and won praise. *It’s not surprising—indeed, it’s predictable—that they would want to be common sense teachers themselves*. I’ve known this, I’ve seen this before, but I’m appreciating it anew. I’m finding another way to articulate it.

As I think about and express this observation, however, I have to do what it is that I have asked them to do, with Ryan: first, read the data; second, read the data from their perspective, not mine, so that I can devise a better curriculum for them. I’ve read the data, and I begin to think about it in the Perry’s terms of dualism, more specifically as applied by Anson to faculty development.

In talking about teaching styles, Anson sketches what he calls a “continuum of development, from the rigidly dualistic style to the balanced, mature, reflective style.” Unsure of “their own expertise and authority,” novice teachers particularly, Anson speculates, may be especially vulnerable to this dualism. Threatened by the prospect of admitting to students that they can’t say with certainty what makes writing ‘good’—that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are actually relative and often subjective concepts—these teachers cling desperately to what they do know and can impose objectively as standards for assessment: the rules of punctuation . . . . For the dualistic teacher, response is teacher-based and egocentric, a way of displaying intellectual prowess, a way of asserting authority. (356) In other words, Anson is suggesting a kind of developmental process, and although he is profiling the teacher of writing, it seems to fit for the developing teacher of English more generally as well. He speaks about moving from the right/wrong stance of dualism, to a kind of relativism, then to a “reflective” teaching “related to the depth of a teacher’s explorations into the practice and teaching of composition” (356).

This makes sense to me, but it raises several questions. If teachers and prospective teachers follow such a developmental process, is it stage-bound? In other words, do prospective teachers proceed in these three steps as outlined, in sequence? If so, shouldn’t I beginning with the first stage, a dualistic one? Worse, have I been short-circuiting a necessary developmental process when I ask students to leap ahead: to practice the stance of a reflective teacher? Or,
assuming a stage-bound model: is there a way of preparing for students for it, even accelerating it? Or: is it the case that the developmental process as outlined here isn’t stage-bound at all, but rather cyclic? I mention this because in working with some graduate tutors to try and determine how it is that they think they learned to tutor—and I take tutoring to be a form of teaching—we decided on “cycling” as the metaphor. There were, these tutors say, various experiences that they as tutors shared, but the progress of those experiences differed from individual to individual. Overall, the progress was recursive. Thus, the metaphor of the cycle. Perhaps that’s what I sense here as well, especially since some of the prospective teachers described herein moved very quickly to relative and reflective stances. In fact, in some cases, I think they started with the more mature stances. That’s what I think I saw in some of the responses, in the cubing, for instance, and in the work with Ryan. But how can I be certain of this? And if there is development of this sort, and if it is cyclic, how else might I change the course to accommodate that? I wonder, even offhandedly, if trying to develop this metaphor and then using it with the prospective teachers would help us all create a new language that we could use to talk about this development, a frame against which we could plot it, a(nother) means for inventing themselves as teachers.

I find myself, you see, like my students: looking for metaphors that help me understand.

***

When reflection “works,” it raises as many questions as it answers, perhaps more. It works from the particular to the general without ever leaving the particular. It works by asking that we articulate the tacit, that we frame our observations multiply, that we look for a coherence that patterns without disguising or discoloring or misrepresenting.

Through a systematic, coherent, and often-analytical reflection, we learn—what we know now, and what we need to learn next.

NOTES

1. This observation, that future English teachers know a fair amount about literature and relatively little about rhetoric, is not news: see, for instance, Beth Burch, “Finding Out What’s in Their Heads.”

2. Although it’s beyond the scope of this paper, there seems to be a clear connection between the sense of identity invoked here and Kenneth Burke’s notion of identification.