Teaching Community Focus: *Pose, Wobble, Flow*

As with the previous teaching community, this semester we investigated challenges, or wobbles, we face in our classrooms. To provide a framework for our investigation, we read *Pose, Wobble, Flow* by Antero Garcia and Cindy O’Donnell-Allen, which gave us a shared language for scrutinizing our practices. Our main focus, as described by Garcia and O’Donnell-Allen, is to “reflect on areas in which [we] wobble with the intent of attaining flow -- those provisional moments that mark progress in teaching.” Through this reflect, we aimed at progressing our teaching toward a more cultural-proactive center, making particular use of the six different “poses” enumerated by the authors.

**Specific Goals for the Fall 2016 Teaching Community**

1. Reflect on and adapt current practice to reflect more cultural proactive approaches.
2. Develop 60-minute teaching demonstration as a result of the reflection/adaptation.

**TC Participants:**

There were four instructors. We met for a total of 10 hours over the semester, each meeting set at 1.5 - 2 hours.

Participants included Swathi Sreerangarajan, Lisa Duran, Julie Ashmore, and Daniel Scarpa.

Facilitator: Scott Warfe

**TC Sessions:**

The first session was dedicated to explicating *Pose, Wobble, Flow* in order to prepare ourselves for our individual inquiries. Then, the group participated in two teaching demos: one given by Daniel Scarpa on student-generated reading quizzes -- Daniel’s attempt to make reading quizzes (a standardized aspect of English 95 curriculum) more engaging and student-centered; and another given by Scott Warfe on developing insight in student writing. After these demos, members workshopped their demos and then finally presented them to other members and non-TC participants from the department.

**The Research Project Guidelines**

Each member was responsible for doing a research project, which included the following:

1. **A teaching demo,** in which members:
   a. Explain, briefly, how a given teaching approach evolved out of their questions about their teaching, out of the reading they have done, and out of their own thinking and reflecting.
b. Identify the specific problems their students have with writing and demonstrate the particular practices they have developed in an attempt to overcome those problems.

c. Involve other members in writing and/or other activities. Rather than merely describe an approach, members must have the other teachers try it out.

d. Include student writing. There is nothing like using authentic work to illustrate a point you wish to make or an approach you have found to be effective. If at all possible, members were to have let the community see both “pre” and “post” examples of their students’ work to illustrate the effectiveness of their approach.

2. A final portfolio, in which they reflect on their inquiry question, the methods used to address it, and the results of their investigation.

Summary of and Excerpts from Teaching Community Projects

Swathi Sreerangarajan

Project Rationale: Swathi wanted to challenge students to read texts more actively and critically. The issue she saw was that “most students demonstrate adequate critical thinking skills during class discussions or even in quick free writes, [but] things typically go steeply uphill for me as a teacher if I make them read a “difficult” text and analyze/discuss it without handholding.” Her project was an attempt to address this.

Demo Overview: Swathi’s demo requires students to mark-up a paragraph from a larger assigned text. She doesn’t, however, have students annotate this paragraph in context of the larger text. Instead, she extracts the paragraph and alters both the font and text color, mixing up both within the paragraph. Swathi explains this play with typography as needing to break up the monotony of the essay form and structure. As she notes, “My best guess is that the tone and structure and pacing of academic essays made them laborious and intimidating to students, regardless of the nature of content. So I designed this activity in the interest of converting the endless lines of 12-point, Times New Roman in an article into something more visually pleasurable and inviting.”

Once students are given the handout, she invites them to “mark up the passage with any free associations or observations that come to you after each sentence. Fill up all that white space as much as you can.” She then asks them to share at least on of their annotations and uses their shares to highlight deeper analysis of the texts.

Results: Per Swathi, “Designing this activity, I was curious to see if shifting how we viscerally react to the academic page would invite closer attention to the actual contents of the page. My students did react well to the activity (one noted that it “slowed down time” and made reading more relaxing). I did sense a renewed interest in the reading after this activity overall, but I haven’t been able to track whether it created any longterm difference. So this is a question I’ll continue to investigate in future semesters.”
Lisa Duran

**Project Rational:** Lisa was primarily interested in developing the efficacy of peer review. Her previous attempts at peer review generated three main issues:

1. The reviewer doesn’t know what comments to leave.
2. The reviewer is afraid of leaving critical feedback.
3. The reviewer focuses on grammatical corrections.

In working on her project, Lisa’s aim was “to clarify the reviewer’s role in the process, to help them get rid of the misconception that their task is to correct or edit or revise, and to help them realize that their purpose is to give feedback as a reader.”

**Demo Overview:** Lisa’s demo revolves around isolating three components of the paragraph: Point, Evidence, and Analysis. To accomplish this, students write a paragraph in its component parts, separating each component by a few a dozen or so lines on the paper.

Students then get into groups of four. Group members will proceed to trade papers, but first, Lisa instructs the author to “fold over” the “Point” component, so that it’s hidden from the other students. Once they rotate papers, students read the “Evidence” and “Analysis” and are tasked with creating a “Point” that incorporates both. After they’ve finished, they will then fold the paper a second time to conceal the new “Point.” This continues until all students have created a unique “Point” for the paragraph.

The original author then receives his paragraph back and analyzes her “Point” relative to the suggestions from her group members. Then, Lisa repeats the steps for the other components of the paragraph.

**Results:** Lisa felt this activity was successful in alleviating the reviewer’s desire to “correct” the paper, while also giving the author a better understanding of how readers are experiencing her work. “Overall,” Lisa writes, “I feel that this activity clarifies for students why instructors are constantly pushing them to strengthen their writing using an activity that shows them rather than tells them why it’s so crucial. Even better, they’re showing themselves, which is more effective than any amount of ‘nagging’ I might do.”

Julie Ashmore

**Project Rationale:** Julie’s project focused on schema building around argumentative/debatable topics. Her aim was to better address Student Learning Outcome 2, which asks students to develop “arguable” thesis statements.

**Demo Overview:** First, Julie has students participant in a gallery walk where students review significant, topic-specific quotes relevant to a highly debatable topic (which, for her, was gun control). From here, students chose a quote that they found most interesting and invited them to
think about the issue and stance presented by the quote. After, students discuss with others who have chosen the same quotes and then share out with the rest of the class.

Results: The greatest benefit of the gallery walk was that it enabled Julie to identify the perspectives that were not included in the curated class readings about the topic. Julie concluded, “I noticed that two of the statements that I used in the gallery walk were not represented in the course readings, so I plan to add readings to include these perspectives the next time I use this unit because my intent is to be inclusive in representing a diversity of opinions. I really want to expose students to a diversity of opinions and to help them recognize and reason their way through ‘cognitive dissonance’ in a way that enables them to develop and support their own well-reasoned position on this (or any) argumentative topic they might face both within or outside of class.”

Daniel Scarpa

Project Rationale: After mulling over the nature of English 100, Daniel determined that “the most important single skill they learn is to engage with an argument and the evidence it presents,” which follows with the new English 100 SLO that asks students to develop information literacy skills.

Demo Overview: Daniel developed a “Reliability Score Sheet,” which allows students to objectively evaluate a source using a numerical grading based system. To facilitate student use of the score sheet, Daniel first reviews different online sources and how these might skews information to fit their own unique purposes. As part of this, the students review and discuss “Memes,” mainstream news content, and “fake news” sites using different aspects of the score sheet.

Daniel then asks students (in groups of four) to practice using a full length article. Different groups focus on different components of the score sheet, which are as follows:

1. Author credibility
2. Publisher credibility
3. Purpose
4. Works Cited

After the groups have finished their evaluation, they report their scores, tally them together, and evaluate them using the following scale:

0-5 - This source is highly questionable. Should not be used in research without suitable justification.
6-9 - The site may be an acceptable starting point for gathering information, but might not be suitable as a cited source in a research project.
10-11 - Good source for research. Information should be confirmed in other sources.
12-15 - Excellent source for research purposes.

Results: Daniel felt the activity was successful, noting, “Students who approach English the
way one might a science or math class – searching for the “right” answer – found comfort in being able to use numbers to determine something that is often subjective.