ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the approach the author takes in preparing future secondary English teachers through a flipped method. The author’s class is inquiry-based, student-centered, cultural studies oriented, and an experiment in Freirian pedagogy. Rather than a “delivery” or “banking” model of information transfer from teacher to students, the approach understands learning, and the world, as unfinished, in process, susceptible to critical understanding and intervention. This approach, in effect, flips the model of professor as authority telling would-be-teachers how to teach and puts the students, future teachers themselves, into Freire’s hyphenated position of “students-teachers” jointly responsible for learning.

INTRODUCTION

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself [sic] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on “authority” are no longer valid; in order to function authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other… (Freire, 1968, p. 67)
English language arts (ELA) methods courses are expected to accomplish many tasks to prepare teachers for the classroom. In this era of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in the public schools and increasingly specific outcomes for teacher accreditation at the state and national levels, expectations are increasingly fine-grained. This chapter explores the approach I take to preparing future secondary English teachers. This approach can be tied to standards for new teacher knowledge of ELA content and pedagogy, but I radically step away from a pre-scripted, sequential, step-by-step approach to covering material. Instead the class is inquiry-based, student-centered, cultural studies oriented, and an experiment in Freirian pedagogy. Rather than a “delivery” or “banking” model of information transfer from teacher to students, the approach understands learning, and the world, as unfinished, in process, susceptible to critical understanding and intervention. This approach, in effect, flips the model of professor as authority telling would-be-teachers how to teach and puts the students, future teachers themselves, into Freire’s hyphenated position of “students-teachers” jointly responsible for learning. This approach creates an ELA methods course every semester new and refreshed, with focal points that change and diverge. By calling this class “flipped” I am intentionally intending to take the discussion of flipped teaching in English into a new direction. A clear intention of this “flipped” methods methodology is that future teachers might consider how they could bring Freirian approaches to their own secondary teaching. I want them to adopt a critical inquiry stance and approach, consider and learn specific strategies for how they could “flip” their own teaching in the future public school ELA classes they aspire to teach.

This chapter describes my approach to teaching English 4800 Teaching Literature in Secondary Schools, the capstone course in the English major in the curriculum for secondary English certification at Western Michigan University. This course is typically taken the semester before intern teaching. Our students take another English Department methods course, English 4790 Teaching Literature in Secondary Schools, and, recently, early in their program, take English 2790 Introduction to English Education. Our certification program incorporates courses in the English Department and the College of Education, courses that are likely similar courses at other universities. I have written elsewhere about the cultural studies focus of this course (Webb, 2015), and while the cultural studies orientation is relevant to my approach to “flipping,” it is the Freirian dimension of the course I will focus on here.

In the summer of 1992 I had finished my Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon and only a few weeks later would be teaching English 4800 for the first time in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I spoke about the class with a member of my dissertation committee, Suzanne Clark, and, after we talked about possible texts, she said to me, “the most important thing about a methods course is not what you teach, but how you teach it.” Finishing the dissertation, graduating in the summer, trekking across the country with a family and small children, I arrived at Western
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