

Curriculum and Instruction in English, ED 262B
Fall, 2003: Assignment #2
Grossman and Compton

Engaging Students in Discussions About Literature

This assignment gives you an opportunity to explore a set of materials from the classroom of veteran English teacher Yvonne Divans Hutchinson, whose ninth grade students participate in a substantive discussion of the excerpt from Willie Ruff's *A Call to Assembly* that you read this summer. In investigating Yvonne's approaches to organizing student discussion of literature, you will consider ways to help your students engage with texts and will identify strategies for facilitating discussions in your own classrooms.

There are several parts to this assignment. Working with a partner, you will examine the website/CD-ROM containing materials from Yvonne Hutchinson's classroom. The available artifacts include a videotape of a two-hour class session, an interview with Yvonne, and several handouts that her students receive to guide their reading. The second CD includes a number of supplemental materials, including videotapes from the beginning of the school year (two years later), which illustrate how Yvonne sets up some of the routines for her classroom, and documents that outline Yvonne's philosophy of teaching.

We expect that everyone will watch the first video of the entire 2 hour class session on the website CD (A Friend of their Minds). Several of the questions will also prompt pairs to explore supplementary materials on the silver CD.

Your exploration of these materials will be framed by one of the following questions:

- What norms does Yvonne establish for discussion? How does she reinforce them throughout the class period?
- What is the role of the anticipation guide both before and during the discussion? How does having such a guide contribute to the class discussion?
- In what ways do the students connect the text to their own experiences and opinions? What does Yvonne do to encourage those connections?
- Who speaks? How often? What does Yvonne do to encourage everyone's participation? Identify several strategies she uses and how they work.
- What can you surmise about the students' understanding of the story from this discussion? Identify interpretations students generate about the story. Which interpretations seem on target, and which seem less substantiated by the text? How does Yvonne respond to these interpretations?
- What strategies for reading literature is Yvonne teaching? How do these appear in the discussion? How are these strategies introduced early in the year? (see also supplemental CD, videos #2 and 3)
- What do you notice about how the discussion about the text is scaffolded in the two hour lesson in June? Outline the progression of the lesson and how the different segments are connected.
- What does Yvonne do early in the school year to prepare the students for text based-discussions? Focus your attention on video #3 (October 9, 2003) for your analysis. You can also look at Yvonne's written descriptions of her own practice on both CD's.

In order to support you in completing this assignment, we've divided it into several manageable stages:

October 28

You will select a partner with whom to collaborate on the first part of the assignment. Each pair will also receive its guiding question and the necessary CD-ROM materials.

November 4

Each pair will **meet with either Pam or Christa** before or after class to discuss your progress. By this time you should have reviewed the materials on the CD set and have some initial ideas about what you're seeing and what video clip you might use to illustrate your thinking.

November 11

You and your partner should be prepared to **lead a brief group discussion** about your focus question, one in which you share your findings and see how they compare to those of your classmates. Select a video excerpt (no longer than three minutes) to illustrate what you discovered about your question and to stimulate conversation among your colleagues.

Each of you will also select a strategy from Yvonne's classroom that you would like to try in your own classroom. Submit a **one-page description** in which you identify the strategy you will implement in your classroom as you facilitate a text-based discussion among your students. Present a rationale for why you have selected this particular strategy, and if possible, describe the text students will be discussing. Be sure to confer with your cooperating teacher in selecting both the strategy and a text that fits logically within the scope and sequence of the course you're teaching.

November 18 – Part One due

Each pair will submit a **brief paper (5 pages) that synthesizes your findings** from Yvonne's materials and uses specific examples to support your analysis of how and why the discussion among her students unfolds as it does.

December 2 – Part Two due

In consultation with your cooperating teacher, you will have selected a short text (short story, poem, portion of a novel, etc.) that your students will read. Facilitate a discussion about that text, selecting one of the strategies that you observed in Yvonne Hutchinson's classroom to try with your students. You should **arrange for your supervisor to conduct one of your formal observations** on that day so that you will have some additional feedback to guide your reflections. We also recommend that you have your supervisor videotape the discussion to help you recall the details of the discussion later. As an added bonus, it allows you to use this assignment and the written reflection to fulfill the requirements of the observation cycle, thereby killing the proverbial two birds with one stone!

During class on December 2, you will share your reflections about how it went. What aspects of the discussion went well and why? What are the next steps in helping your students improve their discussions? How will you plan for those steps? Submit a **two-page written reflection** that addresses these questions along with any additional observations you wish to share.

Summary of written components:

1. One page description of a strategy or idea from Yvonne's classroom that you would like to try in your own classroom (individual paper). **(due 11/11)**
2. Brief (5 page) paper that synthesizes the findings of your exploration (joint paper). **(due 11/18)**
3. Two page reflection on your experiences implementing the strategy (individual paper). **(due 12/2)**

Assessment

The evaluation of **Part One** will be based on the following criteria:

Answering the question: You thoroughly address the assigned question and select relevant information from Yvonne's materials to present your findings.

Use of evidence: You use specific examples from Yvonne's classroom to illustrate your observations about your assigned question. The video clip you share with the class clearly represents your findings.

Analysis and reflection: You carefully and thoughtfully examine the available materials and draw sound conclusions based on your analysis.

Quality of writing: Your written report is well organized, clearly written, free of grammatical and spelling errors, and represents the polished work expected of an English teacher.

The evaluation of **Part Two** will be based on the following criteria:

Quality of reflection: You clearly articulate a rationale for the strategy you have chosen to implement. Your reflection on your own teaching demonstrates what you have learned about facilitating discussion and how the assignment will influence your future teaching practice.

Use of evidence: You use specific illustrations from your classroom to support your reflections. These examples highlight successful moments, identify areas for improvement, and present lingering questions.

Quality of writing: Your written report is well organized, clearly written, free of grammatical and spelling errors, and represents the polished work expected of an English teacher.