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Responding to the Challenges of Teaching High School Journalism

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Responding to the Challenges of Teaching High School Journalism

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The Journalism Classroom

The class:

- elective course in which students learn about journalism and produce the school newspaper
- 2 sections
- 3 levels

The students:

- sophomores, juniors, seniors
- Journalism I, Journalism II, Journalism III
- range of academic ability

Fall 2009 Journalism Students – Totals

Journalism I:	18	(7 sophomores, 3 juniors, 8 seniors)	8 males	10 females
Journalism II:	16	(0 sophomores, 8 juniors, 8 seniors)	5 males	11 females
Journalism III:	2	(0 sophomores, 0 juniors, 2 seniors)	1 male	1 female
Total students:	36	(7 sophomores, 11 juniors, 18 seniors)	14 males	22 females

Guiding Questions

- How can I effectively teach high school journalism and advise a school publication in the midst of all of its diversity and variation?
- How can I effectively individualize instruction with the common goal of producing the newspaper?

Methodology

Setting: the journalism classroom at a Central Illinois high school enrolling over 1,800 students

Time Frame: Spring 2009—Pre-student teaching
*Fall 2009—Full-time student teaching
*Spring 2010—Continued observations

Participants: Cooperating teacher, veteran adviser
36 journalism students (30 the final two semesters, 14 all three)

My role: Implemented and examined different pedagogical strategies while co-planning, co-teaching and helping to advise the newspaper

Data: Student feedback evaluation forms
Informal conversations with students
Conversations with cooperating teacher

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who helped to make this inquiry a success, especially the journalism students and my cooperating teacher, who provided the inspiration and the information for this study. I would also like to thank Dr. Robin Leavitt for her support and guidance throughout this entire process, as well as the school, the district, and the students' parents/guardians for allowing my data collection.

"Sometimes it's easier to listen to your peers; they understand what you're going through and they appreciate your work and the steps you're taking."

"There are Journalism I students who do just as much as II and III students; we all have different skills."

"You have to learn this on your feet; you learn from the practical experience."

"We're passionate about it; we love it; it's in our hearts."

"We're like a family."

Spring Semester Informal Conversations

(10 students—5 Journalism I, 5 Journalism II—in groups of 2 and 3)

Student volunteers and I discussed their experiences with journalism. We talked about what they enjoy about the class, how they feel they have grown and what they attribute that growth to, the most effective ways that they receive feedback on their work, how the class differs from other English classes, the importance of working with their classmates, the current separation (between two class periods) and heterogeneity (mixture of levels, ability) of the students, and the frustrations and rewards of taking the class.

Literature Review

In order to provide a context for my study of high school journalism, I reviewed professional and scholarly literature on the following topics:

- Scholastic Journalism
- Cooperative Learning
- Differentiated Instruction

Conclusions

The structure of the journalism classroom enables student growth if it is embraced by the adviser and the students.

- The learning environment promotes responsibility, teamwork, and independence.
- The diversity of the student population provides opportunities for students to learn from one another.
- The production aspect of the class gives students the practical experience that is necessary in truly understanding the material.
- The variety of activities that the students are engaged in must always include conferences with the adviser. These conferences allow for effective individualized instruction.
- The relationships built in the journalism classroom contribute to student growth and result in a strong publication.

Limitations

- One school, one journalism program
- Informal conversations with only a portion of the class
- Few written reflections from observations

Findings and Interpretations

In looking closely at and reflecting upon all of my data in the context of my inquiry questions, I was able to gain further insight into my observations and determine certain trends that helped me to begin drawing conclusions as to what is truly effective and meaningful in the high school journalism classroom.

Fall Semester Written Student Feedback

(33 students—15 Journalism I, 18 Journalism II/III)

1. Ranking Effectiveness (instructional strategies)

- majority rankings
- differences between levels

2. Open-ended Response (what the students enjoyed most and least about the semester, their growth and what has helped them to improve, and what they believe to be the benefits of taking the class)

- patterns & trends
- more diversity within levels

Journalism Students' Preferences

