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ENG 60513
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Class Observation

Instructor: Laura Knudson
Class: ENGL 10803
Date of Visit: September 29th, 2008
Time: 1:00-1:50

Laura was on time and came into her classroom with authority. Yet she was also fairly informal as she chatted with students before she began her lecture. From what she said before beginning her lecture, I could tell that the students had gone to the library the previous class session. As she discussed the trip, she brought up different aspects of it that she thought were important.

Laura had a unique teaching style because she incorporated her own experience in her lecture. She came across as knowledgeable but also very personable and approachable. Before the class, the students seemed relatively quiet and many were sitting by themselves. One would get the impression that the classroom would not be very active. However, from the first few minutes of the lecture I could tell that students were not afraid to ask questions. Laura's answers were direct, but at the same time they had some personality to them. She often inserted her experiences and personal opinions in her answers in a way that made her down-to-earth. It seemed that the students could relate to her.

In the first half of the class, Laura went to an online library database to review some of the searching techniques they had apparently briefly mentioned on Friday. To provide examples for the students, Laura used search terms and techniques that she had used for her thesis. By doing this, Laura demonstrated the database's practical use and kept her lecture personable. Using this personal narrative of her thesis experience, she smoothly transitioned into information on how to use other parts of the online resources. These other parts included a particularly open point where she admitted that there were times she had trouble with research and found the "Ask a Librarian" feature helpful.

Although I've used the word "lecture" to describe Laura's teaching, it's not exactly the right word for what Laura was doing. Even though she was doing most of the talking in the first half of the class, her words seemed to engage in direct intercourse with the class. After a few questions early in the class period the class was relatively silent while Laura talked about the databases, but this was probably due more to Laura's engaging informal, conversational style than to boredom or intimidation.

After Laura had finished showing the online library databases, she initiated a class discussion by asking her students about the sources they found on their upcoming paper. A few students had a lot to say. Laura listened to the students and related to the information they found by providing

stories about her own life and experience. She did not present herself as an expert on the students' topics, but rather as someone who was genuinely interested in connecting with her students and finding out what the sources the students found had to say. Her interest was contagious, and a few other students began to join the conversations Laura was having with different students about their sources. While she had the class's interest, Laura would occasionally bring the topic back to the principles of writing the paper.

As Laura's class approached a close, she discussed plagiarism. One of the notable aspects of her discussion was her statement that students who gave her plagiarized papers hurt her feelings. Her discussion of this last point highlighted the relationship she seemed to have sought with her students throughout the class session. She then went over MLA citation guidelines and the importance of their use. At the end of the class she handed back portfolios as the students headed out.

My impression of Laura as a teacher is that she is a personable, clear, down-to-earth authority figure who really cares about her students. I was so impressed with her teaching style that I decided to incorporate some of it into my class later on that same day. One impression I had, which I hope will be constructive, is that Laura's class, at times, seemed designed for the students to be significantly more attached to her than to each other. This was not something I noticed as happening consistently throughout the class period, but at the same time I thought that the students could benefit from talking to each other more. Again, Laura's presence in the classroom was personable and she seemed intent on having a good relationship with her students (which was important), but my impression was that the class would have even more lively dynamics if the students were able to see how important the relationships with their peers were in the classroom, as well.

Overall, I really enjoyed the visit and I learned a lot about how to achieve a balance between having authority in the classroom and being personable. I'm grateful to Laura for the educational experience and the ways it will positively affect my future teaching.