Observation of Laura Knudson: 10.29.14
Observed by: Cat Mahaffey

Raw observation notes:
Laura introduced me to the class and announced I would be sitting in.

Attendance?

Laura announced she had gotten an email about the due date for the project. She pulled the assignment sheet up on Moodle to verify the due date and acknowledged that she had input the date incorrectly and reminded them that Nov. 12 was the correct due date.

She told the class how excited she was about their various projects and named several of them.

Laura opened up a document with an in-class writing prompt she referred to as ICW: What was the research process that lead to the article you brought with you today? Why did you choose to bring this article? Students quickly began to write for 7 minutes (a good balance of time). Some students typed their ICW while others wrote in daybooks.

When a timer went off, Laura asked for students to share what they had written. A male student shared while Laura asked questions and mirrored his thoughts. "Who else?" asked Laura. Another male student shared in the same way. There was a good amount of back and forth as Laura reinforced what was going well and pushed students to think of other things. "Who else?" asked Laura. Another male student responded. His discussion prompted Laura to discuss research methods for a bit.

"So pay attention to search terms ... you might find some you haven't thought of yet." said Laura. "Anybody else? Did anyone use the library?" One student raised his hand and Laura expressed great excitement at this. Then she talked about how important it was to use scholarly sources. This student then shared what he found and why he went there.

Then Laura shifted the discussion away from their ICW toward a previous homework reading, asking if they had applied the reading to their research. One student said yes and Laura said she was very excited about that. This student shared about what he had applied. Laura teased out things like reading with intention (using headings etc.)

Then Laura directed them toward their recent homework reading, she asked progressive questions to guide the students through a discussion. Some Students pulled out their books to look at article. Some didn't seem to have their books. (some may have had an ebook version)

Laura asked if anyone could summarize the reading, and a male student did. Laura teased out how the reading applies to their EIP. Laura asked, "Is the EIP academic writing like it's described here?" Some nods. "It could be."

Then Laura asked about what it means to "establish a territory" (something referenced in the reading). A student made connections to discourse community, genre, and audience. (Note: Laura was sitting along with the students during the discussion time).

Next Laura asked about "topic generalization" (another concept from the reading). There was a brief pause that Laura waited patiently through and then a student connected the meaning of this to a stepping stone. Laura complimented this connection.

Laura continued working through the text and asking pointed, engaging questions while encouraging and complimenting students' connections and insights. She conducted the discussion so that students were making the meaning.

At 4:00, Laura ended the discussion, encouraging them to get into small groups of 3 to work through the articles they brought and apply the reading and discussion to them. "Let's see if Swales is giving us a bunch of hooey," said Laura.

Students immediately got into groups of two or three and started talking. Laura noticed one student sitting alone and asked him to join a group. There was a mixture of quietly looking over the articles they had printed and brought and talking about how to apply the reading. Laura joined a group of two girls and began to share with them. I was impressed that almost everyone had an article. I will note that the group work was somewhat hindered by the layout of the classroom. It was hard for students to move around and face each other, but Laura made it work even so.

Laura wandered around the room and asked groups how they were doing. She expressed great interest in their topic choices and the variety of things she'll eventually be able to read and learn about.

When Laura joined a group near me, I heard a female student ask if she could change her topic, and Laura told her "Yes" and then asked about her new topic. She thought it was a good idea and encouraged the student to make the change and then suggested how she might think further about the topic and what genres she could use. She encouraged the student to do "a little bit of research" to see if she really did want to pursue her new topic. Laura even brought in how this change and the reasons for it would be something to talk about in the student's portfolio.

When her timer went off at around 4:15, Laura brought the class back together and asked what they had come up with to apply the reading to their articles. Pause. A female student shared and Laura teased out how it applied. "Who else?" A male student shared. Laura continued to ask questions and tease out how to apply the reading. One student made a connection to author credentials and how that applied for everywhere and not just this course.

Then Laura asked students to put this reading with a previous reading they had done. She mentioned that this would apply after they leave this class as well. I sensed a good understanding of concepts of genre, audience, flexibility, writing as conversation, and evaluating authors as well as texts.

At 4:20, Laura shifted to looking more closely at the EIP assignment. She pulled it up on Moodle and asked about where students were in their projects. She announced that one student was changing her topic and how that was okay because that's how an inquiry process works. But she did tell them to change their mind soon. She encouraged them to email her and discuss any topic changes.

She pointed them to the assn doc on Moodle. "Be sure you revisit the assn sheet many, many times. Once when I was an UG I wrote a paper I didn't need to write. Make sure you have all the things necessary."

She said all parts are due at the same time. (I didn't get a chance to see all the components, but I did notice that there was an annotated bib and three genre pieces.)

Students asked a few questions about the assignment but not many. They seemed to have a good understanding of what was due and when.

Have you thought about what genres will you use to create your artifacts? I heard movie poster, ppt, comic book, (a student asked what kind of works-cited should be used for a comic book -- Laura said she would check but that probably the student could submit a works-cited for the sources that inform what they do -- Laura said she would put something on the Moodle page that might help because that's not something she has thought about yet -- an honest and confident answer), small-scale billboard PSA, (keep in mind that you'll be presenting so you can explain what things represent), brochure, (at this point some students said they weren't sure about their genres, so Laura advised them to think about who they want to educate -- other students offered this student advice as well), website (Laura suggested one student could mock-up a t-shirt and put the website address on it - she suggested using cafepress for free) - hosting a debate (Laura considered this but asked the student to talk to her later about what that might look like).

Finally, Laura asked what questions they have - a few questions about the artifacts (one must be tech-related) - It's got to work for the audience you're addressing; that's what's important. She pointed out that videos should be short -- like a commercial.

"I am so pumped!" said Laura - "You are inquiring into a topic. You are learning and you will educate all of us. That's your purpose."

Laura let class out 4 mins early. One student lingered and discussed his topic and ideas one-on-one.

Analysis

Kudos:

> Teacher presence - Laura appeared comfortable and approachable with her students. It was clear she had spent some time talking with them and guiding them through their topic ideas. She remembered nearly every student's project direction.

I found myself enjoying Laura's class. She was excited and passionate about writing, the homework reading, and especially about her students' research projects. They mirrored her excitement and clearly regarded what they were doing in this course as important and interesting.

 like that Laura was willing to say, I can't remember or I don't know or Let me check on that.

Classroom community - During the ICW, students seemed engaged and wrote quickly and easily. They were clearly accustomed to this practice.

I was very impressed with how Laura led the discussion. The students were responsive and comfortable throughout. There was no question that they had done the reading and understood it. It was also clear that Laura had encouraged students to integrate their learning and make meaning for themselves, as seen in the connection her students made on their own between their homework reading and concepts introduced previously (genre, discourse community, and audience).

During the group activity, Laura made her way around the room and engaged with students' ideas and answered questions and offered advice. It seemed Laura touched base with almost every group and gave nearly every student individual attention. Very productive class overall!

Effective planning: I felt the order of activities was solid. Laura reviewed issues and asked for questions about the EIP assignment, then asked about their progress in their EIPs, then moved them into discussing and then applying their homework reading. I especially applaud her willingness to let students "test" the reading's relevance for themselves.

Curriculum: There was so many things touched upon in this class. Even though this is Laura's first semester teaching with us, it's clear that she understands and is teaching our curriculum values. Between the students and Laura, I heard connections around audience, genre, discourse community, portfolio learning, inquiry-guided research, and even the relevance of what they were learning for other writing situations.

The assignment Laura presented was also in line with our curriculum. It involved inquiry-based research culminating in three genre products, one of which must be tech-based. It was clear as she discussed the assignment with the students that she was encouraging them to make decisions based on their developing rhetorical awareness.

Questions/Opportunities:

Establishing a habit of circling up for a discussion would have encouraged more participation from students. While there were a lot of healthy pauses, it did seem that one or two students answered most of the questions (I couldn't always tell who was speaking since we were all seated in rows). It would certainly be better if more students joined in, but those not speaking were listening and paying attention and clearly getting a lot from the discussion.

I did wonder why the EIP assignments were due at the same time. To encourage more inquiry, would it be better to have students complete the assignment in stages? I also wondered about having a specific number of sources required for the EIP final products

(5). Why not have students read and annotate a certain number of sources, say 10, and then allow them to use as many or as few as necessary for their final products?
I did not see Laura take attendance. This could have been due to nervousness at being observed. I point this out because I don't recall hearing many names. This could honestly be a shortcoming in my note-taking or memory, but even if an instructor knows everyone's name, it's important for students to hear them as well to build a strong sense of community.

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This is great feedback for me – I had not considered having them submit their products for the EIP in parts. I met with a student today who was having trouble grasping what he should be working on, and I think the concept of many components to the assignment was tripping him up. It didn't occur to me until now that if I had had them submitting these parts in stages it would help them more than submitting them as a unit. Next time around, I will change that and have separate due dates for parts. They submitted a topic proposal a few weeks back, but the remainder is due all at once.

I think that I will try getting the chairs in a circle at some point – the room is really hard to work in in that respect, but I know I have some students who could speak more, and others who pick up the ball and run with it. Having a circle would help the students interact with each other rather than me, which is really difficult to do in rows.

And yes, indeed, I completely forgot to take attendance. I had been very nervous about observation, and the housekeeping things slipped my mind. I am terrible with names, and struggle every semester to learn names of students. I think next semester I will ask that they also put their pictures on their moodle profiles to help with that.

Thanks so much for the feedback – it really helps to hear that I'm on the right track and that things are going well! This has been such a great experience, and I love the work I am doing for UNCC.