

Reflective Statement on Teaching and Learning

Kristie Kemper

Overview

For me, it is all about the faces. I walk into the classroom on the first day of the term and look at all the upturned faces—some expectant, some a little nervous, some disinterested, some even defiant—but when they look at me, they see their teacher, and I always feel the awesomeness of that responsibility and know that in some very real way I hold their futures in my hands.

My approach to that responsibility has been influenced by teachers from my past who embodied knowledge of subject matter, energy and enthusiasm, compassion, a love of learning, and true concern for their students, and it has also been shaped by the practical experience of many years of teaching.

I believe a teacher's main function is to promote learning, to build self-confidence, and to help students discover how to learn on their own. I also know that I am always learning from my students—and that is one of the things I enjoy most about being a teacher. While I am well aware of the main theories of learning and am following the evolving research into how the brain functions, I decided some time ago that there is no one approach that works for every teacher in every situation. I believe there are many effective teaching methods and that what works best is what each teacher feels comfortable with and is enthusiastic enough about so that the students also embrace that approach. Having said this, I do think there are some basic principles that underlie successful teaching/learning.

Knowledge

First, I think a teacher must be exceptionally knowledgeable in his/her field. Though what is actually brought up in the classroom may be only a small fraction of the teacher's knowledge, in-depth knowledge of the field is necessary so the teacher can make good choices about what material to include or exclude and can answer student questions that probe more deeply into the subject matter.

Learning Environment

A teacher must also maintain a good learning environment. Part of that involves establishing a classroom environment in which everyone is treated courteously and with respect. The teacher who is truly in control of the class is able to maintain quiet during a writing assignment but also orchestrate the controlled chaos of a lively class discussion. I have found it also helps to have a sense of humor and to not take oneself too seriously.

I have taught courses with class sessions lasting from fifty minutes to four hours. I have taught regular sessions, short summer sessions, Maymester, and day and night classes, and I know the approach needs to be a little different in each case. I try to have a basic course structure so students are clear about what is expected of them, but within that I try to vary activities and assignments to keep things interesting and to hopefully use interaction to help students find personal ways to relate to the material. In the long classes, I try to keep things moving. We may change rooms or go to the library for part of the class period. Students may do small group work and then present their group findings in a class discussion circle. We may do some web research and share information found. I may show a video and bring popcorn. I know almost everything done in a “traditional” class violates what is understood about the human attention span, so I try to make the learning process as active as possible.

I like teaching the beginning composition course in the fall because most of the students are just starting college, and I think I can help them in making the transition from high school to college. I make announcements about activities going on around campus, explain what the withdrawal deadline means, help them figure out how and when to register for next semester, show them how to check the web for their grades, and I find the answers to questions they have about navigating through the college experience. I think providing this kind of help is especially important since we are still getting many first-generation college students who really have no idea how the process works. I never think of the few minutes here and there that it takes to do this as time taken away from the subject matter. I consider helping students develop the understanding and skills to be successful in college a significant part of the learning process. I have noticed as the students become more comfortable in the college environment, they also show more confidence in their abilities to learn the course material.

Opportunity

Seizing the opportunity to help a student learn is also very important. For example, some of my busiest days in my composition classes are when students are writing in class. I check on each one's progress and answer any questions individual students may have during the writing process. They are never more motivated, and answering a question or showing them a better way to introduce an idea at the moment they need to know has proved very effective. A few years ago, I started having students come to my office for individual research paper grading sessions. They would bring all their sources in case we needed to check something, and we would read through the paper, discussing good parts and problem areas as we went. If necessary, I kept the paper for further review, but in most cases we were able to finish going over it and get the grade assigned on the spot. I did a lot of teaching in those conferences, and much more learning took place than when I just marked the research papers and gave them back. Now I have moved to a group approach to research papers in my English 1102 classes. I have discovered by splitting the grade so that the student's grade is an average of the final paper's grade and the student's individual group contribution grade that students work hard and motivate each other. Also, I am able to show them how to handle specific problems as the project

develops. It takes a good bit of time to monitor the group work, but I would rather help students learn do something correctly than to mark things wrong after the fact.

Often the opportunity to help students learn occurs outside the classroom. I have a great deal of contact with students outside of class, including in mandatory student conferences in some of my courses, at times when students just choose to drop by my office for help or advice, in academic advising sessions, on school trips, etc., and a good bit of teaching and learning about a variety of things take place in this way. I am also adviser to the student newspaper staff, and some of the most rewarding moments in my teaching career have come from working with students of all majors on the newspaper staff--helping them to develop their potential, learn to respect accuracy and fairness, increase their communication and technical skills, learn how to interact with others, and learn to make ethical decisions and to take responsibility for their actions.

Motivation

I have used the word “motivation” several times in the previous paragraphs, but I think motivation deserves a section of its own. Students come with various motivations—sometimes to make an “A” or sometimes just to pass the class—but it is part of the teacher’s responsibility to try to challenge them to think for themselves, to relate the subject matter to their lives, and to stretch to their full potential. There is no simple way to describe how this is done. Teachers motivate by sharing their own enthusiasm, but also by having a genuine interest in and concern for each student and his/her particular circumstances. When students are treated as individuals and with respect, they almost always respond in very positive ways.

It is also important not to give up on students, even in what seem to be hopeless cases of extremely unprepared students. A few years ago I read an article about how physicians often pull away from terminally ill patients, perhaps out of a sense of failure or frustration or even guilt, just at the time when the patient most needs support and counsel from the doctor. I realized that in a similar way I was sometimes pulling away from the hopelessly failing students and resolved not to do that. While being honest with them about the situation, I will work to help them learn whatever they can and try to help them see that how well they are or are not doing in school is not a statement about their basic self-worth. A few years ago a student who had made an “F” in my English 1101 composition class showed up again in English 1101 sometime later. When she made a “B” on her first in-class paper, I asked what had made such a difference in her writing skills. She said she had been out of school for a while but had been studying the extra grammar review sheets and exercises she and I had worked on during her previous English 1101 class. Somehow she had taught herself how to write. I could not begin to claim credit for the determination it must have taken to accomplish that, but I think encouraging her to keep trying made a difference—at least she thought so.

Innovation

Finally, I think it is important for a teacher to stay fresh by trying new things. If we want our students to stretch and learn, we must be willing to do the same. I am always trying something new—from a specific class activity to the way a whole class is structured. Some innovations work better than others, and I discard what did not work so well and build on what did.

For example, recently, in some of the elective classes in which I have a little more latitude, I have been working with the idea that learning and the evaluation of that learning should proceed together. If learning is going to be evaluated primarily on periodic exams or end-of-semester projects, students will just take notes and go through the motions (or procrastinate) and then try to do all the “learning” in a last minute cram session. In some classes I am now evaluating daily, primarily by assessing a student’s preparation for the class by the quality of involvement in class discussions and various class activities, both written and oral. This daily evaluation is complemented by essay quizzes, class notebooks, papers, etc., but by making everything done in and for the class every day part of the evaluation process, I have found students to be much more engaged. In these classes I encourage them to try to approach learning as they did as children—with curiosity and questions and hands-on explorations of new things. I want to get away from the questions “Will that be on the test?” and “Do we have to know that?” I want them to learn as much as they possibly can about everything that comes up in the course, and I work hard to be sure we keep bringing up references to things “learned” earlier in the class so that it will all link together for them. So far this approach has worked well in specific classes.

Final Thoughts

I think teaching is perhaps the most essential profession, but I did not know I wanted to be a teacher until my last semester as an undergraduate when I did my student teaching. (I had been told a teaching certificate would be something to “fall back on.”) All those ninth grade faces looked up at me, and I discovered I had a talent for explaining things clearly and for relating well to students and felt I had found a way to make a difference in people’s lives.

I have kept in touch with many of my former students, especially those I have worked with so closely on the student newspaper staff. They have gone on to earn master’s degrees and doctoral degrees, to have families, and to achieve success in a variety of fields as journalists, lawyers, pharmacists, biologists, and, of course, teachers. About a year ago an education professor at Floyd College showed me a class project completed by one of her students. The student had been asked to interview a veteran teacher about who had been that teacher’s inspiration. The assignment was shown to me because I was named as the person who had most inspired the interviewee to become a teacher. As I read her comments, I remembered that when this now “veteran” high school teacher was my student, she interviewed me for the same class project, asking what teachers had influenced me. When it works right, teaching and learning is almost a seamless process—everyone gives and everyone receives.

Condensed Curriculum Vitae

Kristie Anne Kemper
Floyd College
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Education

Ph.D. in English with minor in history (1975) and M.A. in English (1970) from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Awarded NDEA and John B. Emperor Fellowships; graduated *summa cum laude*.

B.A. with an Area in English (English major with combined minor in speech, drama, and journalism) and major in mathematics from Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky (1968). Named Outstanding English student (1967 and 1968); graduated *summa cum laude*.

Post-graduate course in technical communication at University of Southern Mississippi (1985).

Public Service course in conversational Japanese (1995).

Teaching Experience

Professor of English at Floyd College in Rome, Georgia (1979-present); previous full-time experience at East Tennessee State University-Kingsport University Center (1977-79), Glenville State College in West Virginia (1976-77), and University of Tennessee, Knoxville (1975-76); experience as teaching assistant at University of Tennessee (1971-75).

Courses Frequently Taught

English Composition I and II; Communicating in the Business, Technical and Professional Environment; World Literature I and II; American Literature I and II; Introduction to Mass Media, Mass Communications Practicum; Interdisciplinary Studies.

Curriculum Development

Created and implemented Journalism 1125 (Mass Communications Practicum), English 2151 (Communicating in the Business, Technical and Professional Environment), and Communications 1101 (Introduction to Mass Media).

Served on University System Committee to design Area F of new semester core for Journalism; designed Floyd College Area F for Journalism.

Papers and Presentations

Paper on Harriet Arnow at Berry College's Southern Women Writer's Conference; paper on Herman Melville at Modern Language Association national convention; papers on Ralph Waldo Emerson at Popular Culture Association of the South meeting and at faculty seminars at Floyd College and Kingsport University Center; presentations on newspaper reporting, layout, and design at Southern Regional Press Institute; presentations on written communication for Professional Secretaries Workshops and staff development

sessions.

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Publications

Suggestions for teaching composition and literature in Help! From One to Another: Techniques that Work in the Teaching of English Composition, ed. Carol B. Naab; articles in area newspapers.

Computer Skills

Proficient in Microsoft Word and Windows, Adobe PageMaker and Photoshop, and Norton Connect.Net; served on committee to design first Floyd College web page; oversaw development of online student newspaper (site was finalist in national Pacemaker competition in 2001); wrote computer use instructions posted next to each computer in campus classrooms and labs.

Memberships

Modern Language Association, South Atlantic Modern Language Association, American Association of University Women, American Association of University Professors, Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, College Media Advisers, Community College Journalism Association.

Professional Development

USG Teaching and Learning Conferences; Workshop on Computer Grading (pre-SAMLA program); Seminar on Creative Thinking Across the Curriculum; Georgia Press Association's Symposium for College Educators, SCETC Institute in Technical Communication, NEH 8-week Summer Seminars for College Teachers at University of New Mexico and Northwestern University; National Council of College Publication Advisers Workshop.

Selected Professional Activities

Humanities Academic Adviser; Mentor in Floyd County Board of Education Apprenticeship Program; Faculty Representative to Instructional Council; Adviser for Student Newspaper Staff (newspaper and staff members have won numerous state, regional, and national awards); Faculty Coordinator of Annual Alabama Shakespeare Festival Drama Weekend Trip; Member of Editorial Group for Floyd College *Focus* (promotional magazine); Program Moderator at Berry College's Conference on Southern Women Writers (four years); Program Coordinator for Student Trips to Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario, under USG International Studies Program (three years); Consultant at the Southern Regional Press Institute (three years); Member of Pre-Tenure Review Committee and Post-Tenure Review Committee (two years); Academic Progress Committee member; Judge for Associated Collegiate Press Association's National Critique Service; Co-coordinator for One-Year Campus Visit by a Teaching Intern from Japan.

Miscellaneous

Recipient of Wilton C. Scott Award for Excellence in Scholastic Journalism (presented by Southern

Regional Press Institute).

Documentation of Nominee's Teaching Success

Assessment Essay Passing Percentages from All ENGL 1101 Classes Taught Since the Inception of the Floyd College Assessment Essay

(The Floyd College Assessment Essay is modeled on the Regents' Test and given to all ENGL 1101 students in the 10th week of the semester. The essays are rated by English faculty other than the course instructor. The identity of the student and his/her teacher is not revealed during the rating process.)

K. Kemper English 1101 Passing Percentage on Assessment Essay	Average Assessment Essay Passing Rate for all Floyd College English 1101 Students
Fall 2002 Class 1 76%; Class 2 81% Average 78.5%	68%
Fall 2001 Class 1 84%; Class 2 84% Average 84%	77%
Fall 2000 Class 1 80%; Class 2 88% Average 84%	74%

Excerpts from Most Recent Post-Tenure Review Committee Report (4/27/98)

FINDINGS

Dr. Kemper's dedicated professional work is a major asset to the Floyd College faculty. This review indicates leadership for student activities, instructional methodology and a dedication to the college mission that is truly outstanding. The committee is pleased to affirm her immense value to the faculty of the college.

CLASSROOM EVALUATION

Committee members who visited Dr. Kemper's classroom found a well-planned, organized presentation. Technology is a common part of her instruction with the use of CONNECT, a computer-based English instruction program, and through use of the Internet and specific web sites. Dr. Kemper's classes are interactive and filled with discussion. Her concerns for individual student learning were especially noted as she plans with her students and attempts to direct them toward clearly defined goals.

SUGGESTIONS

The professional standards of Dr. Kemper challenge Floyd College to constant improvement.

THE PROCESS

Dr. Kemper made every effort to supply information and assist this committee with this review. She is a true professional and was cooperative in every aspect of the process. The information from provided documentation was thorough, and the classroom visitation with her was a pleasure. The entire committee reviewed and discussed the report and are in total agreement in affirming the exceptional quality of Dr. Kemper's contributions to Floyd College.

Selection of Comments from Recent Student Evaluations
English 1101

This class exceeded my expectations. Being a PSO student I was worried about taking the class. However, now I look back and see that this class was a great experience for me. I particularly found the teacher's eagerness to help very comforting. One usually hears about college professors who are mean and non-personal. This experience has shown me the truth. Also, I found the academic side to be well thought out and presented in a well-constructed and easy-to-learn manner. I have to admit that I am not the best at English composition, but this class has taught me a lot. I have thoroughly enjoyed and learned a lot from this class.

I really enjoyed taking this course (English 1101). I have taken this course before, but I did not find it as effective as this one. I have felt more comfortable about things in this course that I was afraid of before. I have learned a lot about essay writing and grammar. I really did not enjoy English at first because I was not good at it, but your method of teaching has changed that for me.

This was a very good English class! The organization you keep is great; you don't come to class and forget what you asked us to do. My first experience with an English 1101 class here at Floyd College was horrible. I, along with a lot of students in the class, was humiliated. The instructor was more concerned with having us do grammar exercises for homework and convincing us that we couldn't write an essay than he was with teaching us to write.

You really don't realize how helpful you are and not only with writing—helping with the computer and announcements. Before I was so confused about Connect.net and other things. The biggest thing is the way you corrected the essays and then let us use the chart to correct them. Using *Harbrace* to correct them was VERY helpful considering I've been out of school 15 years and have forgotten some of those things.

You are a very great teacher and brought my interest back into what I was doing. I had almost forgotten how much I really like writing.

I really enjoyed having this class this semester. I think it has taught me many things I can use later in my education. Writing the papers and getting them back with the comments and *Harbarce* chapters was very helpful. It showed me my biggest problems with my writing. As for the teacher, Ms. Kemper is the best teacher I have. She keeps the class exciting and different almost all the time. She is a very good teacher. I loved this class and would really love to have Ms. Kemper as my teacher again. The only suggestion I can think of is to allow for more discussion of the stories.

I enjoyed Ms. Kemper very much. I learned a lot in this class, and Ms. Kemper was more than willing to help me. I appreciated the mid-term meeting very much. It helped me know where I was and how I was doing. In my other classes I had/have no idea where I stood. I wish more teachers were like Ms. Kemper.

This class really helped me so much. It told me what level of writing college teachers are looking for. One thing that I really liked about your class was that you were always willing to answer any questions that we might have about anything. You always kept us up to date on things going on in the school. You also told us what our class schedule was going to be like weeks ahead of time. That was good because I knew what to be expecting, so nothing was a surprise to me. I really enjoyed this class. Sometimes I feel like teachers don't really care about their students, but you make us feel special. Thank you for a great semester.

Ms. Kemper, I feel as though you are a good teacher, and you helped me more than many other teachers could have. After I was already in your class for a few weeks, some people said that I should not have gotten in your class because you were too hard. I beg to differ; you are hard, but not unbearable. It does not matter if something is difficult or simple, just as long as things are learned and progress is made. I like reading the stories and your policy for papers (the way you marked on our papers and at the end gave us hints).

English 1102

I thought this class was well organized, and you were prepared for class. Even though I'm not a good writer, I feel a little better writing essays. I liked the three types of literature we looked at. The group paper was a great idea. The group paper taught me how important it is to communicate with others. The classroom had a friendly, positive attitude each day. I plan on taking another class from you. I enjoyed this class very much.

I feel that I have learned a lot during 1102 and 1101. I liked the way that you taught 1101 so well that I decided to take your 1102 class. I have never been that good in English, and after being in your class, I feel that my English skills are much better. I particularly liked the way that you carry out the research paper. I learned many new steps on how to write the perfect research paper. The groups on the research papers work well. I think that is much better than doing the whole paper. When doing it with a group, I think that it is easier to focus on doing the paper the proper way rather than just getting done.

English 2111 (Maymester)

Dr. Kemper structured the class great. The activities (acting out plays, taking on character roles) complemented the material we had to read. Learning was fun and innovative. It wasn't the usual bookwork. Hands-on activities and group work reinforced the work we had to do. We became a connected group of students because of the high amount of interaction between us. I loved the class.

Dr. Kemper was a wonderful instructor. She did various class work that everyone seemed to enjoy. I really liked the class discussions. Everyone got to participate equally. Her grading scale was fair. If I had to take another English, I would try to get in her class.

This has been my all-time favorite English course, and I learned more in this short period because it stays with you. You don't have time to forget stuff.

One of the best teachers I have known. She understands everyone's point of view.

Dr. Kemper is excellent! She did what no other literature teacher had done for me; she gave background on the information, the way people thought during this time frame, etc. She "took" me there before we actually read it.

English 2151/BUSA 2105

Dr. Kemper is one of the best instructors that I have ever had.

I have a previous degree and of all the professors I have had, Ms. Kemper is one of the most dedicated teachers I know. She gives 100% to her class and students. A hard course but good.

I like this class because I think it will help me in the future. However, to get a good grade in this class I had to work really hard to try to finish all the assignments. There are a lot of assignments in this class. I think my instructor is a good teacher. She pushed us very hard to finish our assignments for the class.

I never felt that this instructor had an agenda other than helping me to be a better professional writer. I appreciate organization, preparation and a focused delivery in the classroom. The instructor is the ultimate example of "Professional."

Students' Self-Assessments—English 1102 Research Paper

I think that this research paper has been very educational. All through high school, every teacher had a different technique for writing a paper. I am glad to finally know the proper procedure. I used the same procedure on my history paper. Both papers were due at the same time, so everything I learned in your class, I used on my history paper. Now I think I have a good picture in my mind about how to do a paper. With the group help, everyone got to work on all parts of the paper, but we did not have to pull our hair out doing all of the research. I think that it worked pretty well.

I learned a lot from this research experience. Documenting and using sources is much easier now than it was before. I learned much about my topic as well. I see cloning as a more positive thing than I did before, as I did not know it had so many helpful medical aspects to it. The group work was good since everyone did his or her part fairly well. I have already used the research skills I have learned in this class on other research papers, and I have gotten very good grades on these papers. This has been a helpful experience.

I am very glad that I had this opportunity to write a research paper because this is my first one. I was very scared initially because I did not know what to expect. Also, it was intimidating to have to write so much material on a topic that I started out knowing nothing about. However, writing the research paper as a group helped me because I did not have all the work on my shoulders. Also, I was able to get help from my group members and my professor. Writing this research paper also helped me in my history class because we are also doing research papers. Even though I am responsible for the entire paper, I'm confident that I have the skills to do a good job because I have learned how to write a research paper in my English 1102 class. Thank you very much.

December 17, 2002

Dear Board of Regents:

As far as I am concerned Kristie Kemper is the hardest working teacher I have ever come into contact with. I have had several classes with Dr. Kemper and have worked with her on Floyd College's newspaper, *The Six Mile Post*. Dr. Kemper goes out of her way to advise each member of the SMP staff, as well as other students from her other classes.

While advising the newspaper she has spent many late nights in the SMP office. I have worked on the paper for two years now as an editor, and she has pushed me to be better at everything I do. We would not survive a single issue without her guidance or supervision. Her meticulous attention to detail has made the paper the award-winning publication that it is. Under her guidance I know I have become a better writer, editor, and leader. Even my work in the classroom has improved because of my altered work ethic.

But the newspaper is not her first concern. On many occasions Dr. Kemper has had to leave the newspaper office because of meetings with her other students. She encourages students and inspires an interest in journalism and writing. When someone is not particularly doing well, Dr. Kemper works with the student to make them better.

Dr. Kemper deserves any and all recognition that would come with this award, although she would be the last to admit it. No one works as hard or cares as much as she does. To work with her and to be taught by her has changed the way I approach college and journalism. Where I was once timid and unsure, I now have confidence in myself and my work. No one I have ever met in the education world works as hard as Dr. Kemper.

Sincerely,

David Bell
Student Newspaper Editor