

Goodwyn's Teaching Notes

by Kate Marie Ryan JOURNAL ENTRY 5 The eight week placement at Glendowie College has literally flown by with little time until now for proper reflection on the progress I have made as a student teacher. Goodwyn's article notes that the teaching cycle comprises of planning, teaching and evaluating. I aim to focus this particular entry on these three areas, combining the influence of my four associates within each area. Goodwyn notes that the planning stage is all about what the student teacher already knows. It is also about the selection of the range of possibilities that have been observed or recommended. Easily this has affected the level of ease or difficulty I have found in planning my lessons. For my junior English class I was given free reign of teaching a poetry unit. No framing was given except that I had to incorporate classical forms such as ballads or sonnets. As poetry is one of my favourite texts I found I could bring into the planning my own resources (including those accumulated on the course) and background knowledge. This made the planning stage much easier and I received a great deal of enjoyment out of it. My associate proved helpful in the earlier stages of planning by lending me her folder for stimulus and recommended good websites for reference. The Head of English also lent me a resource and encouraged me to challenge the accelerate class with Year 11 texts such as Browning. Meanwhile the senior English class was tackling Achievement Standard 3.4 with the visual text of 'O Brother Where Art Thou'. Luckily I was familiar with the film and also a teaching unit had been purchased by the school which helped guide my planning. Unfortunately due to time constraints of getting through the material prior to exams I was only able to teach four lessons with this class. The lessons I prepared focused on character and theme. My associate assisted me by suggesting possible tasks such as splitting the class into groups and completing individual character studies which were then presented to the rest of the class. As I am familiar with close reading film and also poetry texts I found the planning for these classes enjoyable and less intensive as for my other two classes, media and drama. The planning stage is definitely made easier if one knows what they are teaching! Unfortunately my knowledge of the development of the documentary genre was zilch and I had to complete some quick study over the weekends prior so I felt confident enough to teach the material to the students the following week. Without visual resources to back up my explanations of the modes of documentary I felt the planning for these lessons extremely challenging. Especially as it was quite dull material on technological developments. I felt that given more time to become acquainted with the material I could possibly have come up with better planned lessons that would engage the students more. Instead they were left with a jigsaw activity, a cloze activity and a group matching activity which ended up being quite confusing. My associate was helpful in the earlier stages by lending me her NCEA booklet on Media which was a great springboard to use. The remaining of my material came from past lecture notes I found over the internet. Unfortunately due to training and other commitments my associate was unable to see most of my teaching of the genre documentary so all of my planning was done independently and I hoped for the best! The other area where I was less familiar with the content was within my drama class. I hadn't observed many lessons so was unfamiliar with the group dynamics and capabilities of the students. Most of my planning was pitched for a more confident class so it ended up being a constant struggle to keep them motivated and their confidence levels up. My associate had not given me a framework with which to work from so from a planning point of view I found this quite a challenge! Perhaps I should have consulted her more at an earlier stage however it proved difficult to find time together to discuss the issues I was having with planning. Michelle Hesketh on the other hand was most helpful during this time in allowing me to see the wood for the trees and I managed to plan a heroes unit with relatively positive outcomes. Throughout my placement I feel that my planning has progressed considerably. During the first half of my placement I began writing word-for-word scripts, however I have now moved away from these and treat the lesson plans more like a 'blueprint' of what 'should happen'. Throughout the whole placement I have used the GRAPES method in planning (with the exception of drama which has instead been adapted to suit the nature of the subject) which I have found an invaluable structure to use. Earlier on I found that my pace was either too fast or too slow and rarely did it match the timing I had on my plans. Flexibility and awareness of how long activities take has therefore been the key to planning progress here. I also found that I was often planning the night before I had a lesson which proved unhelpful as I was unable to obtain feedback from my associate prior to lessons. In this respect my lessons were done entirely independently with little associate guidance in the planning stages however their feedback proved valuable during teaching and evaluation stages. My first teaching experience still remains a bit of a blur as I was so nervous and it went so fast. I taught a lesson on listening which coincidentally by the end of the lesson was as far from quiet and listening as we could get! My first teaching lesson had been learnt. Lay down the ground rules for absolute quiet and respect for those who are speaking! I quickly developed styles to suit the levels I was teaching. No surprises that the junior classes required much more discipline, repetition and explanation than the senior classes. I had many lessons that I would come out of on an absolute high and then also lessons where I couldn't wait for that bell to go to get me out of there! My senior English class was difficult to teach due to the fact that at times my associate remained the 'teacher' during my lessons. This left me feeling slightly un-empowered when it came to classroom management and gaining respect, however overall the experience and her advice was still invaluable. During the teaching stages I feel I progressed in terms of my instructions for activities and also in the developing knowledge of when not to get sidetracked or roped into silly behaviour. The evaluation period I feel was one of the crucial areas to my development over the eight week placement. Secondary English Magazine writes that an invaluable role associates' play is that of monitoring and developing the student teachers own reflection on their own teaching. I found that my junior English associate was especially effective in this way. Usually I would take onboard the feedback, both verbal and written, that she would give me at the end of each lesson. I would then go away and jot down some of my own ideas and general reflection on the lesson. Her observations of my teaching isolated a problem with my questioning right at the beginning. I was asking open ended questions to the whole class and not getting any feedback. I changed this to asking open ended questions to specific students by using their names, especially those sitting down the back, to ensure that they remained on task and engaged. This is a technique I also picked up for the other classes. Simple but effective. Her feedback was often positive even when I felt that things had not gone so well. For example when I gave them a task

that I thought was too easy for them, she noted that everyone was still engaged and doing it, which showed that learning must have been happening. This was particularly valuable in boosting my confidence which at the time was feeling fragile. My other associates gave both verbal and written feedback although I feel that when they were pointing out where I had gone wrong it would have been useful to discuss how things could have been done alternatively. All of my associates were especially positive about my rapport with the students and noted that this was the first milestone to achieve. Goals set for self development after each lesson focussed on getting the timing right and ensuring closure for each class. In drama I set myself a goal surrounding the behavioural management aspect which I incorporated into the lesson plans. For example splitting up a troublesome group at the beginning of the lesson and also thinking of ways to make it safer for the more 'geekier' of the class so they were free from being taunted. Overall during the last eight weeks I have learnt to become less reliant on word-for-word scripts and more flexible and aware as to what is happening in the classroom. I feel that I have still much to learn regarding how long some tasks take and also about when and how to pull in the reins when running out of time. I also feel that I need to set more time aside for reflection of each lesson so I can fully evaluate if the intended learning outcomes were achieved. My goals for next placement will be firstly where possible to plan my lessons earlier so that my associate will have the opportunity to feed into the planning stages. I feel that I lacked this guidance at Glendowie. Consequently I had been planning tasks to unrealistic learning expectations and timing. Secondly the next goal will be to dedicate myself to learn the names of every student I teach. Not knowing names, especially in drama, has proved disrespectful to the students and has made teaching them much more difficult than it needed to be. By knowing names right at the start I feel I will have a better chance of receiving respect and therefore of achieving learning objectives. Thirdly, I would like to really focus on my timing. I need to find ways of quickening the pace of the lesson so the students are constantly challenged and given deadlines to keep to. They should leave that class feeling like they have accomplished something phenomenal rather than mucked around for an hour. My fourth goal is to incorporate multilevel tasking. As my classes at Glendowie were mostly accelerated I found that they were all relatively on the same level. I realise this is not the case for most classes so once I have my built my confidence on planning and evaluating I would like to do start looking at including multitasking into my lesson plans. My eight week placement seemed to be in the constant throws of assessment with essays, practical assignments or exam revision. The material taught has been Year 9 poetry, Year 13 visual text and Year 12 media genre. Ideally I would now like to have the opportunity to teach either Shakespeare or an extended text such as a novel at either a junior or senior level. I would also like the opportunity to teach a year 11 class as I think it would be invaluable to note the behavioural shift from Year 10 and Year 11. Phil Norman notes in Secondary English Magazine that it is important to communicate to student teachers the 'enduring enthusiasm and optimism about teaching itself'. If nothing else the one main thing I have gained from this placement is the knowledge that I have made the right decision to shift into teaching. Everyone one of my associates thoroughly love their jobs and this has been reflected through the respect their students have for them. It has been an inspiration to teach these students and although the planning and evaluating stages still need some work the prospect of having one's own class next year to develop and inspire learning is an exciting and challenging one!

About the Author

Kate Marie Ryan is a Secondary School Teacher of English and Drama. Born in New Zealand, she has lived in Australia, America, Italy and the United Kingdom. She holds a degree in Communication Studies and after working several years in the UK within Theatre, Journalism and Public Relations industries, she returned to New Zealand to complete a Graduate Diploma in Teaching (Secondary). She currently teaches and resides in Sydney, Australia

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