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## Teaching Styles and Teacher Growth

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Teaching Style and Teacher Growth: An Examination of the Impact of Teaching Style on

Student Learning

Evan Spooner

Honors Project

Spring 2014

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### Teaching Styles and Teacher Growth

The main concept behind doing this project was to look at how differing teaching styles between mentor and student teachers affect student learning. In order to properly research this question I decided to go into three different Great Ideas sections and teach one unit in each class. Having already peer facilitated for Great Ideas twice, I was already familiar with the purpose and content of the course so teaching Great Ideas made for the easiest transition from student to teacher of any class that I could have taught at BGSU. Three professors, Jay Jones, Heath Diehl, and Allan Emery, volunteered to turn over their classes over to me for one unit. The units that I taught were Greek humanism in Professor Jones' class, postmodernism in Dr. Diehl's class, and Marxism in Dr. Emery's class.

### **Literature Review**

As it turns out, there has been very little research conducted on this topic. I think the reason for the lack of research is that there is an assumed drop-off, at least in terms of skill, between mentor and student teachers. This assumption does not however take into account the teaching style of the student teacher, or whether or not the change in teaching style would affect student learning positively or negatively in any significant way, and with no scholarly evidence to support this assumption, it would be difficult to try and project the amount of impact different teaching styles have on students. Further research would certainly be required. In lieu of academic research that directly pertained to my research question, I have combed through several academic articles that are related to other aspects of my research. Many of these articles focus on

the impact of creative lesson planning on student learning, teaching college millennial college students, and developing an engaging teaching persona.

An engaging teaching persona is an invaluable tool for any teacher. I knew that for my own teaching persona I would have to figure out how to incorporate humor into my classroom. I found Alan Seidman and Stephen C. Brown's article "College Classroom Humor: Even The Pundits Can Benefit" to be quite helpful. This article touches on several different ways that teachers of college students can incorporate humor into their classroom. Seidman and Brown suggest using short, funny videos to break up the monotony of classes and regain students' interest (394). I actually used this idea in Jay Jones' section of *Great Ideas* by using two videos from the 3-minute Philosophy series on YouTube. Seidman and Brown also state that using riddles and puns to break up instruction is an especially helpful tool (395). Although puns are great, I thought that these types of humor seemed a little forced and decided to stay away from them in favor of a more organic type of humor while I was teaching.

Although humor is an important, it is only one aspect of the teaching persona. I have always considered myself something of an open book, but I realize that I cannot be an open book to my students. Janine Davis, in her article "Storying the Student Teaching Experience: Trying on Teacher Personae," suggests that student teachers make themselves like "an interesting literary character" and only divulge a little bit of information about themselves at a time (123). It is certainly an interesting thought. I tend to think of each lesson like I do a book. At the beginning of the lesson there is exposition, necessary facts that will get you through the day. As the class progresses, we have more application, rising action, perhaps the introduction of an activity. Finally, in the climax of any lesson, there is the big point; the ah-ha moment so to speak, where everything clicks for the students. I find it tempting to place myself in that narrative as

well, except instead of students gaining information about me over the course of one lesson, it would be drawn out over the course of a year. However, due to the fact that my time with each class for this project is so short, I did not really feel the need to hold much information back. As a student, I learn much better from teachers I am comfortable with, and I wanted my Great Ideas students to feel as comfortable with me as possible as quickly as possible in order to best serve their needs as learners.

After deciding that I wanted to be open, and at least try to be funny with my students, I thought that it would be necessary that I research how to actually teach my students. In order to ensure that I was teaching as stylistically different as possible from the students' normal classroom teacher, I thought that I would need to be as creative as I could with lessons and activities each day. *The Education Digest* ran an article by Martin Nikirk that talked about how to teach 21<sup>st</sup> century students. The article gave a list of 10 tenants to follow as a classroom teacher. Being a millennial student myself, I found many of the tips to be common sense. They included things like fostering student creativity and critical thinking, teaching with a goal in mind and focusing more on student-centered approaches to teaching (42-44). However, something interesting caught my eye. Martin states that students are able to retain 90% of the information taught to them if students are able to work through the information by themselves (43). As the student teacher, I wanted to make sure that I make the gap in teaching ability and experience between my mentor teacher and myself as small as possible. I decided that in order to maximize the amount of impact my teaching could make on students, and make myself seem like the best teacher possible, I would need to do a lot of different, creative, application based lessons and activities on the material that we read for each day. In doing so I was not only able to

distinctly break away from the teaching styles of my mentor teachers, but also make myself the best student teacher I could be.

It was with all of these things in mind that I went into each Great Ideas section to teach. For the most part, I was able to put these concepts into practice. However, without having been able to find any type of previous research regarding the effects of differing teaching styles between mentor and student teachers on student learning, creating a testable hypothesis was difficult. As I stated previously, I can only assume that the lack of research is due to the assumption that the significant drop-off in teaching experience, regardless of teaching style, would negatively impact student learning, so this is the hypothesis that I went with.

### **Method**

A total of 69 students at Bowling Green State University took place in this project. The students were all enrolled in the three Great Ideas classes that I was allowed to teach. The majority of these students were second semester freshman. Before coming in to teach each section of Great Ideas a pre-assessment survey was administered to the students. Students were asked to respond to a series of ten statements and score their feelings about those statements on a seven-point scale ranging from 1: *Strongly Disagree* to 7: *Strongly Agree*. The statements that the student were asked to score covered topics such as how the students felt like they were doing in the class before I came in, if they thought that a student teacher would inhibit their learning, and whether or not the students enjoyed routine in their classes. All of these statements pertained to students' preferences as they regard to both their education in general and specifically their education in their Great Ideas section. Of the 69 students enrolled in the three sections of Great Ideas, 55 students responded to the pre-assessment survey.

After the students completed the pre-assessment survey, I came in their classes to teach. While teaching, I tried to teach as stylistically different from their normal Great Ideas teachers as possible while still trying to maintain my normal teaching persona. Stylistic differences primarily manifested themselves in the form of vastly different and varied lesson plans for each class in each section of Great Ideas. These lessons not only varied widely in terms their relation to one another, but also to the style of lessons with which the students in each section had become accustomed. Since the students were used to having the same routine in class each day, the unpredictability of my lessons each day added yet another level to the difference in teaching style between the students' usual professor and myself. Based on my observations and comments from the students, the primary form of instruction from professors in all sections of Great Ideas was large-group discussion with occasional opportunities to break out into small groups. However, my lessons were much more heavily based on work in small groups. In addition, I incorporated a significant amount of creative lesson planning into each section. The creative lesson activities were designed to not only take the burden of instruction off of me, but to also force students to apply key concepts from the course material in ways that they were not used to applying them. That being said, some large group discussion was unavoidable in order for me to assess that students had at least some level of understanding of the content before I turned them loose to do their in-class activities. These discussions were intentionally kept short to ensure that my teaching style did not begin to blend with the style of the students' usual professor.

Once my time in each section was over, I gave students a post-assessment survey that was conducted in essentially the same way as the first. Students were asked to score their opinions on 9 statements regarding their education on the same scale of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The statements were primarily the same as the statements on the pre-assessment

survey, but the wording was changed into past tense so they had a more reflective feel to them. One question was taken out and replaced with a non-mandatory comment box for students to leave more personalized, anecdotal feedback. A total of 44 of the 69 participating students responded to this survey, and of those 44, 18 left comments.

## **Results**

There were a number of interesting results that came from the pre and post assessment surveys. On the pre-assessment survey, when asked to score their opinion on the statement “I feel like I am doing well in this class,” 49.09% (27/55) of the students polled said that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Interestingly, when students were given the statement “I still feel like I am doing well in this class” on the post-assessment survey 72.09% (31/43) of students polled answered that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This would seem to indicate that there was a significant positive relationship between my teaching and how well students felt they were doing in the class. In addition, while 50.91% (27/55) of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “I feel that a student teacher would inhibit my learning” on the pre-assessment survey, on the post-assessment survey 67.44% (29/43) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “I felt like the student teacher inhibited my learning.” This could suggest that students were somewhat skeptical of the idea of having a student teacher come in and teach their class at first, but ended up feeling they were benefitted by it in some way. Finally, when students were polled on the statement “I feel like I have an opportunity to contribute to this class” on the pre-assessment survey, 60% (33/55) of students marked either agree or strongly agree to this statement. On the post-assessment survey, when given the statement “I felt like I had an opportunity to contribute to this class,” 84.09% (37/44) of students polled marked either agree or strongly agree.

**(A link to the answers to all polled questions will be provided via email)**

### **Conclusions**

Based on the results of the surveys, students generally seemed to either be unaffected or had a positive experience having me as their teacher. Although I am quite pleased with the results, they are unexpected. My original hypothesis was that these students, due to the fact that they are honors students and I am a neophyte teacher, would not only have not taken well to having little to no consistency in their day to day lessons, and would have found me to be inadequate as a teacher due to my lack of experience and my break from their routine. Instead, it seemed like they relished the opportunity to try new things, and enjoyed having me teach their class. Based on the results of the surveys, it would seem that depending on the teaching style of the student teacher, differing teaching style can make up for lack of experience, and can result in little to no significant decline in student learning when being taught by a student teacher. Students seem to enjoy having a break from their routine, and perhaps teachers with different teaching styles working with the same group of students, regardless of the amount of the teachers' experience, would be beneficial to student learning.

### **Acknowledgments**

Several people have helped me with this project in all its incarnations, and they deserve a thank you for their part in helping me on it. In no particular order, those people include: Dr. Heath Diehl, Dr. Allan Emery, Professor Jay Jones, Professor Ron Werdebaugh, Dr. Simon Morgan-Russell, all of the faculty in the BGSU Honors Office, the students who were willing to let me come teach them, and Megan Sympson for putting up with hearing me talk about this project every day for the past six months. Thank you all so much.

## Reflection Journal Preface

Although this project in part research based, the primary reason I decided to do it was because I have always wanted to be a teacher. Ever since eighth grade, I have known that my place was in front of a classroom. I went through high school without a doubt in my mind that teaching is what I wanted to do. Now, in college, the dream of becoming a teacher is coming close. Maybe a bit too close. Before I get to have a class to call my own, I thought that it might be a helpful to borrow someone else's for a time, just to make sure that teaching was really what I wanted to do after all. This is where Dr. Diehl, Dr. Emery, and Professor Jones graciously stepped in and allowed me to commandeer their classes a couple weeks. What follows is my reflection journal of every day that I spent teaching their classes. It was a great ride.

## Reflection Journal

### Jay Jones' Great Ideas Class

*Day 1: "Allegory of the Cave" - Plato*

My opening activity went very well. I decided to do a role playing activity for "Allegory of the Cave." I cut shapes out of cardboard so the students couldn't see through them, and unbeknownst to all but one of the students in the class, I had drawn pictures on the cutouts. I placed the shapes on an overhead projector so that only the shadows of the cutouts would be visible. I then chose 5 students, two of which I had spoken to earlier about the activity earlier, and had them try and guess what each of the shapes casting shadows on the walls actually were. After each student had attempted to guess what the shape was, then I had the class vote on which guess they thought was the correct one. I would then mark down how many students agreed with each guesser. For example, one of the shadows was cut out in the shape of a circle, but drawn on the cutout was a picture of a ladybug. Each student would guess what shape they thought the

circle was, and then the class would vote on what they thought was the best answer, and then I would score the answers.

Guessing the shadows on the wall was not the only way that my activity mimicked Plato's allegory. As I had mentioned before, every student except for one didn't know that I had drawn things on the cutouts. The one student that did know played the role of my philosopher king. I had told him what all of the drawings were and the order in which I would show them. His job was to not only guess the shapes correctly, but try and convince the class that he was guessing correctly regardless of whether or not his answers seemed plausible or not. As I had hoped, after I had tallied up the votes for all of the guesses, Cole, my philosopher king, had the least amount of votes in support of his guesses. Needless to say, the class was pretty surprised when I told them that I had arranged the whole thing, and Cole knew all of the answers from the start and it was just up to them the rest of the class to listen to him.

I had hoped that the activity would springboard us into some lively discussion about "Allegory of the Cave," but unfortunately that was not the case. My discussions questions seemed to hang and die in the air every time I asked them. It was pretty painful at times, but a there were a couple of my students who clearly did the reading. After a while though, I grew hesitant to call on them since our discussion became more of a back and forth between the two of them.

All in all, the day went really well. The opening activity, which I had been both concerned and excited about doing, went off without a hitch and I had a couple students tell me after class that they really liked the activity. I am really looking forward to working with them again on Wednesday.

*Day 2: Metaphysics - Aristotle*

This was the day that I had circled as the one day that I was most concerned about teaching. The reading was incredibly dense, and fairly lengthy. I chose *Metaphysics: Book 12* as the reading for today in the hopes that the students would pick up on how Aristotle disagreed with Plato. Since even I had a lot of trouble with the reading, I decided to send out a supplemental reading from an earlier section of *Metaphysics* in which Aristotle directly criticizes Plato.

My plan for today was fairly simple. I started with two quick, three-minute videos, one about each philosopher. After having watched the videos, we had a roughly 20 minute discussion about the readings. I thought the discussion would be helpful to straighten out any questions that the students may have had before we got into the main part of the lesson: the debate. I split the class down the middle, and assigned one side to be Team Plato and the other to be Team Aristotle. The debate was over one basic question, which was “why are the theories of your philosopher more valuable from a humanist perspective?” I realize that it is a very vague question, but I wanted them to take into account which theories were more empowering, practical, attainable etc. Then, after having given out the question, I gave the students 10 minutes of prep time to figure out their arguments. I went over to help Team Plato, while Megan, their peer facilitator, went over and worked with Team Aristotle. After the 10 minutes were up we reconvened as a class, and the debate began with me as the facilitator of it.

Although my hopes were high for the debate after listening Team Plato organize their thoughts during our 10-minute prep time, it started out pretty slowly. It pretty much started out as the people who I expected to talk, talking. Then, after each side went back and forth a few times,

more and more people started chiming in. It was great! I was smiling, Jay was smiling, if Megan didn't have to leave for another class, I am sure she would have been smiling too. The whole class started to get really into it. Both sides did a great job defending their respective philosophers, but that wasn't all I wanted them to do. Since I had denied the students the opportunity to defend the side that they actually believed in, I let the students rearrange themselves so that they could move to the defense of the philosopher that they actually believed was the bigger humanist. It ended being 20-4 in favor of Team Aristotle, so I took the side of Team Plato in order to help them out a little bit. We went on like that for a while, with both sides feverishly defending their position, and then class was over.

To be honest, today was the best teaching experience that I have ever had. I could not have asked for more student participation, and I could not have dreamed they would have gotten as excited about the lesson as they did. We laughed. We argued. We didn't cry. It was a lot of fun. I know not every day of teaching is going to be like that, but if it were, my goodness, I would never want to leave school. Today was truly wonderful.

### *Day 3: Meditations on First Philosophy – Marcus Aurelius*

Planning for this day was probably the most stressful out of any of them. I sat and thought about what I was going to do for class for at least a couple hours. My main problem was that I didn't know how to fill an hour and fifteen minutes of class with a section of a book that was only three and a half pages long. Eventually I settled on the idea of separating students into six groups and having them create their own worlds based on the ideas of Stoicism. In order to create those worlds, I have them three essential questions: What does the political system in your

realm look like? What does the cultural system look like? How does religion function in your society?

Going in to class, I knew that my activity could have gone one of two ways. My students would either love it, and get really into the activity, or they wouldn't like it and being in class would be like pulling teeth. The first thing that I asked the students to do was decide on the basic rules that govern their realm. For example, if they wanted dragons in their realm, decide that there are going to be dragons. The groups ended up deciding on doing realms based on the *Wizard of Oz*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Skyrim*, Elizabethan England, the year 3000, and the 1960's. Obviously, these are a wide range of topics, so I was concerned about how each group would adopt Stoicism into their world. Although things seemed to sputter a bit at the start, mostly due to some confusion about what I was actually expecting them to do, the activity ended up going really well. I talked to a couple of the students after class and they told me that they really liked it.

I don't know how well an activity like that would go if I were not working with college honors students. I think that if I were to try the same thing in a high school classroom, the activity probably would have been a flop. To go along with that, I am not sure how I would incorporate that activity into a high school curriculum. I think giving students that much freedom in a high school could end up being more limiting than just giving them straightforward directions. On the topic of directions, I think this activity definitely could have gone a lot better if my directions were explained a bit more clearly. Vague directions have been a bane of mine over the last couple of days, and trying to avoid giving them is something that I am going to need to work on for when I teach my own classroom. Anyway, teaching is going really well so far. I am really happy with my class and they seem to be enjoying me. I find myself wondering what

they are going to say about me on the post-assessment survey, but that will have to wait for another couple days.

*Day 4: "The Divinity School Address" – Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Today I decided that instead of focusing on just the Emerson piece, I should probably do some kind of wrap-up activity on humanism. Since the Emerson reading was much more straightforward than the other two readings were, I only spent about twenty minutes doing a discussion of the reading, and then we jumped right into the activity. I came up with the idea of splitting the class into four groups and assigning each group to cover one of the readings that we talked about in class. Each group was asked to come up with five key humanist tenants of the philosopher that they were assigned. After each group came up with their five tenants, they posted them on a blank word document in front of the class. Then, after everyone had posted their five tenants, we cut the list down to ten key ideas of humanism as expressed by these philosophers.

I thought the activity went fairly well. I mean, my students didn't seem as excited about it as they were with the other activities, but I think they at least understood the purpose of the activity. In all honesty, Jay seemed more jazzed about the activity than they did. There was just too much down time in between parts of the lesson. The problem was I just didn't know how to give them something to fill the time while they were waiting for other people to finish up and have them be productive during that time. My goal at the end of the lesson was to give them something tangible that they created to look off of for the quiz over humanism, and that goal was accomplished, but I think this lesson could really use some improvement.

Today was my last lesson in Jay's class, and I can't even begin to describe what a great experience it was. Just teaching these four classes, albeit in an ideal environment, really reinforced how much I want to be a teacher, and that I chose the right career path. I loved teaching, I loved the students, and I was legitimately sad to have to leave the classroom. Coupled with that, I didn't really see any decline in student learning by my having been there. They seemed to understand the activities and the readings just as well as if Jay was teaching. I would have to conclude that if a student teacher is well prepared, and even if the students like consistency in what they are doing each day in class, as was suggested by the pre-assessment survey, then different teaching styles might even help student learning as opposed to hurting it. I guess we will have to see what they say on the post-assessment.

## **Heath Diehl's Great Ideas Class**

### *Day 1: Twilight: Los Angeles 1994*

I have been pretty excited about doing this lesson for quite some time. I decided to have my students create their own characters and outline how they have been involved in the LA riots following the Rodney King beating. I came up with three questions that I wanted the students to address while they were creating their characters, which were: give a basic description of your character, please describe how each of your characters were involved in the LA riots, explain how each of your characters would describe Rodney King. The students were split into small groups and asked to come up with these characters with the hope that they would come up with six very different characters, and six very different descriptions about how each character was involved in the riots.

Going in to this lesson, I knew that it could have gone one of two ways. They either would have hated it, and the character creation process would have ended up taking about fifteen minutes, and then I would have had to struggle though the whole lesson, or they would have gotten really into it. Luckily, they ended up getting really into their characters. I think Brittany even said that she was going to name her new fish after her character, which made me feel pretty good. The purpose of the activity was to highlight how every group, despite having essentially the same amount of information about the LA riots, allowed their own values and interests led them all to the creation of very different characters. In theory, I was hoping that this would have tied into postmodernist ideas of our inability to all get to Truth in any experience.

As I said, all of this in theory was supposed to lead into postmodernism. The issue was that my tie-in was not going to happen until the second day of the activity. The issue for me today ended up being that I didn't know what to do for a tie-in on the first day. I realize now that, although my student enjoyed the activity, I do not think that I did a good enough job tying the creation of their characters either to *Twilight LA* or postmodernism. If I were to do a lesson like this again, I really need to emphasize the connections between the activity and the text. Even if my students like the activity they are doing, if there is not connection being made between the activity and the text that they activity is based on, then there is no real learning that is happening. Next time, I think I would make sure to include something like a discussion based on the differences between how the students created their characters, and perhaps the process that the author may have used in order to come up with his or her characters, such as the case of how Smith came up with her characters, and how the student came up with theirs.

*Day 2: Twilight: Los Angeles 1994*

I'll be honest; this was a rough day. Well, at least the last 25 minutes of class made this a rough day. I will say this, I am not comfortable standing up in front of the room and giving a lecture. Unfortunately, I found myself at this position at the end of the class. The activity went well. I asked students to expand on the characters that they created the previous day. I gave them 15 minutes at the beginning of class to nail down as many different characteristics about their character as they could. After the 15 minutes was over, I gave the class a list of ten morality-based questions that they would each individually have to answer as their character. The students were not allowed to talk to anyone else in their group, and were to write out the answers to each of their questions. I had hoped that this would take 20-30 minutes, but it only ended up taking about 15, which is where my trouble with the class began. After they had answered all of the questions, I gave the students about ten minutes to get back together with their group and compare answers. The hope was that there would be a wide variety of answers to each question. What ended up happening was that each group had very similar answers, which created even more problems for my lesson.

The main idea of this activity was to show my students how we cannot have a full understanding of anything, and to give an example the postmodern idea of unmediated access. Unfortunately, as I mentioned before, most of the students came up with the same answers to my questions as the other members of the groups. Since everything ended up taking less time than I thought, and most of the students came up with the same answers to all of my questions, I was basically dead in the water, and the only thing that I had planned for the rest of the class was a short debrief about the activity. The debrief was only supposed to last about 5 or ten minutes, but I had about 25 minutes left, so I just started talking. The issue was that I had not read the Ford

chapter in quite a while, and I tried to condense all of postmodernism into 25 minutes. The worst part was that reverted to my lit theory understanding of postmodernism so I started with specific aspects of it, such as the arbitrary nature of language, and then went from there. That was my first mistake. The second was that I only ended up focusing on postmodern aspects of language instead of science, which is what Ford was more concerned with. Long story short, I ended up standing in front of the classroom spouting off information that not only the students were not understanding, but that I barely had a solid grasp of.

There are a couple of things that I learned from this experience. First and foremost, I need to be more prepared for my classes. Before this class, I was basically on cruise control. All of my classes before this point had gone pretty well, and I just thought that I was the bee's knees. I thought that I was some kind of teaching prodigy. What this class showed me was that I am by no means a good teacher yet. As soon as things took a turn for the worst in my class, I had no idea what to do. I know now, that if things end up taking less time than I thought or if my lesson doesn't go the way that I thought it would go, I need to have some kind of backup plan. The second thing that I learned from this class is I need to be ready for students to not understand the content that I am teaching. Today, as soon as students started asking questions, I froze up and ended up giving confusing explanations to what should have been simple questions. For the first time as a teacher, I was really nervous about teaching these students, and it was scary. I can't afford to go on cruise control again. For the sake of my sanity and my students, I just can't do that again.

*Day 3: Dennis Ford's Chapter on Postmodernism*

Out of all of the days that I was in the classroom, this was probably the most educational, at least for me. When I came into class, I knew that the students were going to have struggled with the material. I mean, postmodernism is a difficult subject. Even I struggled to understand some of the content. Before going into the class, I thought that we would have a fairly lengthy discussion about the topic, and then eventually move to do some kind of informal debate about what they thought about postmodernism. As we started to get into discussion however, it became apparent that the students did not understand the content at a high enough level that they would have been able to have an informed debate about the subject. I then decided that it was more important that the students understand the content than it was to continue on with my planned activity, so I decided not to do the debate that I had planned. Instead, we used the entire class time for a large group discussion of the Ford chapter. It was not what I had in mind, since doing large group discussion is what I wanted to avoid. It ended up going really well though, and the students understood the content much better because I decided to not do the activity.

This was the first time that I had ever been put into a situation that I needed to change my lesson plans to better fit the needs of the students. That being said, since I had already docketed a large amount of time for discussion already, it made the decision to not do the planned activity for the day a lot easier. It was a good thing that I did too, because if I had ended up doing the activity, I don't think that the students would have ended up understanding postmodernism at all. In addition, I saw the discussion as an opportunity to reestablish myself as an expert on the content. Since the previous class was so rough, I thought that I needed to make sure that the class still knew what I talking about when I lectured them.

Honestly, it was a good thing that the students didn't understand the content, at least for me anyway. I was able to show them that I actually knew what I was talking about, and that I

still had some valuable insight to share with them. Thinking about it now, this is probably an issue that a lot of student teachers deal with. Since we are so similar in age to the students that we are teaching, every mistake we make goes that much further in undermining our authority as expert and the leader of the class. Think about that kind of scares me.

*Day 4: Ford's Chapter on Postmodernism*

Due to the fact that I wasn't able to do my activity from the previous class, I had a built in lesson for today. Being honest, I love doing in-class debates, but I had no idea what I was going to do for class today anyway so it was a good thing we didn't do the debate on Tuesday. Anyway, I think the reasons that I love doing them so much are kind of selfish. The way that I figure, there is nothing that students like to talk about more than themselves, and getting them to talk about themselves and what they think is the easiest way to get class participation in any activity. The format of my debates play off that idea. The way my informal debates work is that I pose a statement that the students can either argue that they are in support of or against. Once the students have decided what side they would like to argue, they have to physically move to a marked "for" or "against" side of the room.

After having a brief review of the previous day's discussion, I addressed any questions about postmodernism that the students wanted cleared up, and then we got right in to the activity. Over the course of the debate, I posed only three statements to the class: 1. If we, as a society, adopted postmodernism, it would be beneficial, 2. Postmodernism is psychologically healthy, 3. There is some merit to postmodernist theory. Those three questions were enough to get us through the entire class. We actually spent almost a half hour on just the first question. The students had a lot of great ideas to talk about, but there were a couple of problems. I didn't

realize it until after class, but the issue with students talking about their own opinions, is that if they feel attacked in any way, then critical thinking goes out the window completely. They tend to stick to the way that they have been defending their beliefs for most of their lives, and many of those defenses are riddled with logical fallacies and assumptions. It was my job to make sure that I mitigated these fallacies as much as possible. I thought that I did a fairly good job, but Dr. Diehl has to step in a few times to make sure that we stayed on track.

This was the last day of my time in Dr. Diehl's classroom, and now that I have completed teaching in all three teachers' classes, I can safely say that his class was the most challenging out of the three that I taught. It's not that the students weren't engaged; it was actually just the opposite. They just asked a lot of questions that I wasn't prepared to answer, and when those questions came up I didn't know what to do. Andrea and Hallee were the ones that tested me the most. When they didn't understand something, they didn't just sit there and hope the answer dawned on them. They actively went after getting the answer that they were looking for. They asked question after question until their curiosity was satisfied. I realize that I am going to have students like that in my classroom in the future, and I have to be careful to make sure that I do not let those students monopolize the class. When I was trying to field their question in Dr. Diehl's class, I got concerned that I was focusing too much on them and was slowly losing the attention of the rest of the class. I will have to take better care of trying to balance questions and answers in my own classroom in the future.

## **Allan Emery's Great Ideas Class**

*Day 1: The Communist Manifesto*

First days are always the most stressful days. I never know quite what to expect from my students. In order to get myself comfortable in the class and get the students to be more comfortable with me, I did the same icebreaker activity that I used in Dr. Diehl's class. I let each of the students ask me a question that I would then answer and turn around on them and ask the same question. However, before they were allowed to ask their question they had to tell me their name. This way, I was able to not only learn their name but I was able to associate their name with their answer to the question that they asked me. By the end of the activity, I was able to name every student in the room. The problem with this activity is that it is time consuming, and the daily quiz that they take took a lot longer than I was expecting it to, so I ended up having to rush a lot of the instruction for the class.

Since I know that Dr. Emery likes to do large group discussion for the majority of the class I decided to instead immediately break off everyone into four small groups of approximately five to six. Each group was given the task of coming up with a list of key points and key problems with capitalism that Marx identifies in *The Communist Manifesto*. After about ten minutes of their small group work, we reconvened as a class. Each group presented their list of key points, and we used those as a springboard into further class discussion. During this discussion, I made sure to explain the differences between Marxism and communism. This included talking about how one of Marx's biggest theoretical contributions was the notion that all of history can be explained as a history of class struggles. In order to illustrate this concept, I had everyone go back into small groups. I assigned each group a historical event and challenged them to explain this event as primarily a class struggle. The events I gave them were the civil rights movement, James Cameron's *Avatar*, the Civil War, and the Cold War. The intention of

this activity was not only to show how applicable Marxist theory is, but also to show how it tends to oversimplify many conflicts and show its limitations.

This day was full of new challenges that I hadn't faced before in other classes. In Jay's class, I did something similar by using one text for each day, but the texts that I chose to teach each day were much shorter than the ones that Dr. Emery had assigned. I mean the entire *Communist Manifesto* is a lot to cover in 40 minutes. On a related note, all of the previous Great Ideas classes that I had taught were an hour and fifteen minutes, whereas Dr. Emery's was one fifty minutes. That means that I had to cover more material in significantly less time that I was used to. I had to totally change my teaching strategy. Instead of focusing on specific parts of each text, I had to shift to doing more of an overview of each text, and with texts as dense as *The Communist Manifesto*, that proved to be quite challenging.

*Day 2: "Under the Lion's Paw"; Waiting for Lefty; "Ballad of the Landlord"*

Day two presented many of the same challenges as day one. There was a lot of material to cover in a very short amount of time. However, the material was spread out over three different sources instead of all coming from one text, which created a new set of problems. In order to ensure that each text was covered in class, I began with a brief discussion about the plot and major themes of each text. I made sure that I got the students to understand that each text was not an overt endorsement of communism or Marxism, but instead a critique of capitalism, and every text went about this critique from a different angle. These critiques were also completely different from the critiques of capitalism that they had read about the previous day in *The Communist Manifesto*. *The Manifesto* focuses primarily how capitalism negatively impacts

society as a whole, but the three texts for today focused more on how capitalism negatively impacts the individual.

In order to convey these critiques of the negative impacts of capitalism on the individual, much like the previous day, I broke the class up into three groups. Each group was then tasked with looking at specific aspects of how capitalism negatively impacted morals, the family, and the workplace. The students were asked to use examples from the texts to show how each one of these things was negatively impacted by capitalism. After the small groups had come up with a few examples, we came back together as a class for discussion. Each group briefly talked about how capitalism affected their topic, and then we got onto the topic of whether or not we thought that these critiques were still relevant. We ended up talking about this for a while, and by the time our discussion wrapped up our time was up as well.

After having figured out some of the timing issues the day before, today ran much smoother. I was able to accurately plan around their daily quiz, and didn't have to rush. As far as issues are concerned, I was concerned that the basic structure of today's class was too similar to the structure of the previous day. Since this project is essentially based off of my ability to come up with different new and creative class ideas, I felt like I wasn't really doing the best that I could. Even though the class ran more smoothly, I still had issues with covering all of the texts. I thought that we didn't really give enough time to "Ballad of the Landlord," but since it was the shortest of the three, it ended up getting pushed by the wayside. In my future classes, I don't think that I will ever assign more than one reading a night to my students. I am going to want to make sure that my students understand everything the best that they can, and I just don't think that there is any way to do that when working with so many texts.

*Day 3: The Jungle*

Today was the most fun that I had teaching during my time teaching Great Ideas. It was bar-none the most creative and effective activity that I did while teaching. For class today we read Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. I thought that the most important aspect of this text, much like yesterday, was the negative impact that capitalism had on the family. However, what Sinclair does that I didn't think that the texts from the previous day did was show how capitalism dehumanizes people to the point that they see their own family members more as potential income than humans.

In order to show how capitalism dehumanizes people, I created an imaginary family. Each of these family members had ages, jobs, and an income. I decided to let the students come up with the names of the people in the family. I figured that, that way would be able to form some kind of personal attachment to the family, albeit a superficial one. The family's expenses totaled \$10.00 per week, and at the beginning of the activity the family was bringing in a total of \$11.00 per week in income. However, over the course of the activity, that income was subject to change. I developed a list of ten situations that the family had to face and overcome in order to keep their home and not be forced out onto the streets. The list of situations is attached to the end of this journal. In order for the family to avoid being forced out onto the streets, I let the class make the financial and personal decisions for the family. These decisions ranged from forcing their seven-year-old twin boys to leave school and go out and sell newspapers to bring in another \$0.50 per week for the family, to shutting off their daughter who was infected with TB to a corner of the house to let her die, to selling all of their furniture in order to make rent. These decisions are a list of only what the class decided to do. Worse things were discussed. The

activity ended up taking about a half hour altogether, and the rest of the class time was used for discussion time about the activity.

The activity had just the impact on the class that I had hoped it would. During the discussion they told me that they were shocked at how callous they were toward the family, and how easily they condemned people to either die or how quickly they decided to force kids into child labor. The students said they felt dirty after the activity. I wish I could say that I was sad to hear that they felt so bad, but it was exactly what I wanted them to get out of the activity. I really couldn't have been happier with how well the activity went. It definitely taught me some valuable lessons though. I had to think quickly and adapt my lesson on the fly. The class got much more into the activity than I thought, and had a ton of ideas as to how they could cut costs that I never even thought of. I ended up having to come up with costs, prices, and adjusted incomes for several different things. Before I came up with anything though, I made sure to check with the class to see if they thought the prices and incomes were fair. Coming up with so much on the fly actually turned out to be pretty fun though. Even the class seemed to enjoy it, which was fun. That being said, I don't think that I would want to do that for any of my real classes. I am not a good enough teacher to just go into a classroom and fly by the seat of my pants. Even in this activity where the class seemed to enjoy making it up as we went, I was definitely sweating and worried that I would lose control of the class. Luckily that didn't happen, but I think that was primarily due to the fact that I was teaching honors college students as opposed to a classroom full of high school students. I will have to be more conscious of that in the future.

*Day 4: "The New Class"*

Today was the final day of teaching Great Ideas, and I have to say I was feeling pretty nostalgic. That's not to say that some part of me wasn't relieved that it was over, but it was definitely a bummer thinking that I might never get another opportunity to teach a college class. For today's lesson I ended up going with the staple of my Great Ideas lessons: the informal debate. Traditionally, the last day of any unit in Dr. Emery's class is the day that we read texts that are considered to be critiques of the idea that we have just been talking about, and I thought that the debate, as a lesson, would be the best fit for the day of criticisms. Apparently, due to the fact that I had done these types of debates with Dr. Emery's class last year on the days that I taught and the students like it so much, he decided to do a couple in his classes this year. This was certainly helpful because the students at least had a rough idea as to how the activity was done.

We started with a large group discussion of the "The New Class." I thought that it was, at least as far as Dr. Emery's readings go, a fairly easy one. The basic concept of "The New Class" is that communism cannot exist without the creation of a class system. It exposes the concept of communism creating a classless system as being fundamentally flawed. Djilas suggests that the creation of an all-powerful government could only lead to that governmental system becoming a class more powerful than any other class before it. The difference between previous powerful classes and this "new class" as he terms it, is that the this governmental class system not only had all of the power, but unlike other powerful classes, also had the means to actively institutionalize and make law only things that could keep them in power and oppress the proletariat. After a roughly 15-20 minute discussion of the text, we moved into the debate.

For the debate, I asked the same three questions that I used on debate days in the previous two Great Ideas classrooms. I asked the students if they thought that if, as a society, adopting Marxism would be beneficial, whether the adoption of Marxism would be psychologically beneficial, and whether or not they thought that Marxism was actually a Great Idea. Interestingly, the class was split fairly evenly on the applicability of Marxism socially, but their opinion was overwhelming against applying Marxism psychologically. As was the case with Dr. Diehl's class, everyone in the class saw merit in the idea as a whole.

This being the last day, I feel it necessary to reflect on this experience more holistically. Being able to teach Great Ideas was an incredible experience. Looking back on it now, I realize that this might be the only time that I ever get to teach a college class. It is kind of a tough pill to swallow. That being said, I learned a lot about myself as an educator. I learned that I have to learn how to handle silence. I need to learn how to listen to my students instead of just hoping that they are listening to me. I need to realize that although I am supposed to be the expert in the classroom, I am going to have students that are just as smart as me if not smarter, and it is okay for me to be wrong now and then. More than anything though, I learned that I love to teach, and ultimately that's what this whole project was about. I wanted to find out whether or not my eighth grade dream of becoming a teacher was worth all that time after all. It turns out that it was.

## In-Class Teaching Materials

### Day 3 with Dr. Emery's class: List of scenarios for *The Jungle* activity

Hours are being cut at work, and you are losing about \$1.00 per week. How do you handle it?

Your daughter is dying. Do you leave work to take care of her? You will lose \$0.50 for every day you stay home to take care of her and you run the risk of having your place taken.

You are shorted your day's pay by \$0.75? Do you confront the boss?

You have recently joined a union, and have just been approached by one of the boss' men and asked to act as a spy on the union. They offer you an extra \$2.00 per week to report back to them about each union meeting.

The union you are a part of is striking. Do you strike with them? There is a good chance you will lose your place.

You lose your job at the packing plant. Two kids aren't working but are only 7 and 8 years old. Do you send them out to work? It will bring in an extra \$0.50 cents each day.

A union at another plant has organized a strike, which has opened opportunities as a scab worker. It pays \$3.00 a week, but your neighbor and friend is a part of the striking union. Do you take the work?

Your sister dies from tuberculosis, she leaves behind two children and a husband. Without her working, they have lost their home and have nowhere else to go. Do you take them in? If so, under what conditions? The scab job is still open.

You're getting sick from the factory. You run the risk of dying yourself by continuing to go back, but you are the primary source of income in your household. Do you continue to go to work?

Basic outline of the person:

Has at least three children, and at least one is a daughter.

Does not speak English

Married

Weekly costs are \$13.00 per week

Your family is bringing in about \$13.75 per week

Are a part of a union

You are a factory worker at a meat packing plant

Discussion questions:

How are you guys feeling right now?  
Do making these kind of decisions make you feel good?  
How does capitalism promote this kind of oppression?  
Does it still?  
Is Communism the answer, as Marx would suggest?

**Day 2 of Dr. Diehl's Class: List of scenarios for day 2 of *Twilight* activity**

Scenarios:

1. Your character passes by a ruined drug store that isn't totally picked over. Does he/she take something? Why?
2. Your character sees a black man being beaten up by a group of white men. Does he or she help the white men, the black man, or do they do nothing? Why?
3. Your character sees a white man being beaten up by a group of black men. Does he/she help the black men, the white man, or do they do nothing? Why?
4. Your character sees someone lying injured on the sidewalk. Does he/she call the police to help? Does he/she help that person alone? Does he/she do nothing? Why?
5. Your character is watching the riots on the news. How does it make him/her feel? Why?
6. Your character is trying to describe the LA riots to someone who was out of country at the time, and hadn't heard what had happened. What does he/she say?
7. When your character is not at work, what does he/she like to do? What kind of clothes does he/she wear? Where does he/she usually hang out?
8. It is now a week after the riots. The city has calmed down, but tensions are still high. Would your character feel more or less safe if he/she carried a firearm? Why?
9. After the riots, does your character want to move out of LA? Why?
10. Using only one sentence, how would your character describe Rodney King?

**Day 4 of Professor Jones' class: Class created list of tenants of each humanist philosopher**

Plato:

1. Everyone has the ability to attain knowledge and understand the universe, but only some people will
2. Humans are ultimately good
3. Those who are enlightened and use reason are the ones who should rule
4. Humans have a soul whereas other animals do not
5. The soul is the higher element in human nature and the body is basically the house for the soul

Emerson:

1. Christianity is too ritualistic
2. Man can be reunited with God, this is empowering to humans

3. Go to nature and talk about beauty, what is beautiful is truthful
4. The soul doesn't have limits, it is naturally good, this is our connection to becoming divine (to some extent)
5. Everything comes from the Ought (to do or not to do), when you recognize the Ought, you become divine

Aristotle

1. There is no universal man. Everyone is unique and has reasoning skills.
2. The mind, body, and soul are separate; humans are more than just a body.
3. Everyone has their own form/type of enlightenment. They don't need to be "forced into the light," they are already in the light.
4. There was an unmoved mover who put the world into motion, but it is up to man to create his own destiny.
5. All beings have great potential. and are humans are specially unique from other animals. Humans can gain knowledge and perception, form opinions, and understand.

Marcus Aurelius

1. Life is short, live in the present and put as much effort and motivation as you can into what you do in the present.
2. There's no evil nature, "good" and "bad" things happen to everyone.
3. No one is higher than anyone else and we should all live in harmony with other human beings.
4. Live with moderation, emotions such as anger and desire should be kept under control by reason which is more important and should be used for decision making.
5. Work with nature, not against it.

Day 3 of Professor Jones' class: Worksheet for "Create Your Own Realm" activity

## **Time to Create Your Own Realm STOIC STYLE!!**

**Hello Groups! Today you will be making your own realm based off of the tenants of Stoicism. In order to properly create your own realm, you are going to have to describe three basic aspects of your society.**

### **1. The Political System**

### **a. Should include:**

- 1. Type of government**
- 2. System of laws**
- 3. Ideal leader**

## **2. The Cultural System**

### **a. Should include:**

- 1. What an everyday citizen might be like**
- 2. What a family might be like**
- 3. How would they raise their children**

## **3. The Religious System**

### **a. Should include**

- 1. Basic rules of the religion**
- 2. What are their god/gods like**
- 3. Are there services? How are they run?**

Stoics were concerned with the active relationship between cosmic [determinism](#) and human [freedom](#), and the belief that it is [virtuous](#) to maintain a [will](#) (called [prohairesis](#)) that is in accord with nature. Because of this, the Stoics presented their philosophy as a way of life, and they thought that the best indication of an individual's philosophy was not what a person said but how they behaved.<sup>[2]</sup>

Stoicism teaches the development of self-control and fortitude as a means of overcoming destructive [emotions](#); the philosophy holds that becoming a clear and unbiased thinker allows one to understand the universal reason ([logos](#)). A primary aspect of Stoicism involves improving the individual's ethical and moral well-being: "*Virtue consists in a will that is in agreement with Nature.*"<sup>[6]</sup> This principle also applies to the realm of interpersonal relationships; "to be free from anger, envy, and jealousy,"<sup>[7]</sup> and to accept even slaves as "equals of other men, because all men alike are products of nature."<sup>[8]</sup>

The ancient Stoics are often misunderstood because the terms they used pertained to different concepts in the past than they do today. The word 'stoic' has come to mean 'unemotional' or indifferent to pain, because Stoic ethics taught freedom from 'passion' by

following 'reason.' The Stoics did not seek to extinguish emotions; rather, they sought to transform them by a resolute '[askēsis](#)' that enables a person to develop clear judgment and inner calm.<sup>[19]</sup> [Logic](#), reflection, and concentration were the methods of such self-discipline.

Philosophy for a Stoic is not just a set of beliefs or ethical claims, it is a way of life involving constant practice and training (or *askesis*, see [asceticism](#)). Stoic philosophical and spiritual practices included logic, Socratic dialog and self-dialog, contemplation of death, training attention to remain in the present moment (similar to some forms of [Eastern](#) meditation), and daily reflection on everyday problems and possible solutions. Philosophy for a Stoic is an active process of constant practice and self-reminder.

A distinctive feature of Stoicism is its [cosmopolitanism](#): All people are manifestations of the one universal spirit and should, according to the Stoics, live in brotherly love and readily help one another. In the *Discourses*, [Epictetus](#) comments on man's relationship with the world: "Each human being is primarily a citizen of his own commonwealth; but he is also a member of the great city of gods and men, whereof the city political is only a copy."<sup>[30]</sup> This sentiment echoes that of [Diogenes of Sinope](#), who said "I am not an [Athenian](#) or a [Corinthian](#), but a citizen of the world."<sup>[31]</sup>

(Excerpts of Wikipedia page on Stoicism)

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