

A2 Evaluation of teaching practice: Teaching & Supporting Learning

Introduction

When students share their work, I try not to be the first to respond. Instead, I encourage peers to respond first, only jumping in to highlight links, encourage all to speak, or to add anything towards the end. I've done this a few times on the Writing as Performance project I teach, involving eight Stage 3 students, focusing on developing a creative writing, foregrounding self-expression.

My aim with this approach is to give students the confidence to make work without me - in between sessions and beyond the class. Also, to foster a sense of community among classmates and to show how there are multiple non-hierarchical ways of looking at the same thing.

Background

This approach, is inspired by bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (1994):

'Let's face it: most of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teaching reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal.... As a consequence many teachers are disturbed by the political implications of a multicultural education because they fear losing control in a classroom where there is no one way to approach a subject – only multiple ways and multiple references.'¹

This highlights how a non-hierarchical pedagogy is inter-connected with anti-racist pedagogy or 'multicultural education'. If I can instil in students that there are multiple valid perspectives and approaches towards making and viewing art and writing, then they can also be critical of ideologies where one 'objective' viewpoint dominates, such as colonialism and patriarchy.

'Teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualisation that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students.'²

I reflect on my own experiences as a student in the past, to not uncritically re-enact these now as a teacher. The approach I'm describing leads me to being acknowledged as another student in the classroom, also learning and reflecting.

Evaluation

While the first few classes where I did not respond first led to moments of silence (not necessarily a bad thing), quickly students adjusted and now talk freely, responding enthusiastically to one another's work with references, praise and their own personal

¹ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, p. 35-6.

² bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, p. 15.

experience. Students have said the experience is therapeutic. The students seem to have respect for one another and me, as engaging in a shared learning experience. This is evidenced through attentive listening, detailed feedback and consistent attendance, with students emailing to apologise for absence.

Sometimes the approach means it's difficult to get a word in edgeways. As a result, at the last session I integrated a Miro board, so that students and I could also give written feedback if no time to voice certain comments.

I've noticed how careful use of eye-contact and the arrangement of classroom seating facilitates the approach. As default, I sit us around a square table, us all facing inwards, avoiding sitting at the 'head' of the table. Sometimes students direct their comments at me only, because I'm perceived as 'the authority'. In these situations, I purposefully don't return too much eye-contact, instead actively looking at other students. This facilitates students addressing everyone in the room, which means more of them join the discussion.

