

Special issue: Innovative Teaching Personal Essays

“I get by with a little help from my friends” (Thanks, Ringo!)

Annie Bauer, Steve Kroeger, Yvette Pennington
University of Cincinnati

This is a personal essay with two coauthors. Yes, that is an oxymoron. However, as I reflect on innovation, without someone to push and someone to calm, my efforts to continuously improve my teaching would not occur. I’m naming names – Steve Kroeger and Yvette Pennington -- and I am going to describe the push and pull to sustain innovation.

The Push. My ongoing concern is that my aspirational pedagogy does not always match the pedagogy I am using day to day. I catch myself lecturing about not lecturing. I have provided students with copies of the lecture slides rather than a reading guide with reflections. I have my excuses – I have 70 students, I teach first year students, my students are more concerned about grades than learning. When I have used other strategies, such as journaling about StrengthsQuest results, students posted one or two lines, often beginning with a statement about how much they hate reflecting. I’m not whining about students; I’m frustrated that I can’t seem to consistently engage them in higher order thinking. At times there are “now I get it” moments. I use self-assessments to bring home information about learning styles, mindset, deep/superficial learning, and others. The students indicate when it is made personal they understand.

Enter Steve. I worked with Steve when he was in our licensure program, then again as he pursued his doctorate. He explains epistemology to me; I struggle to spell the word. Steve has implemented evidence-based practices that have calculated effect sizes greater than .40 in his classes. He has shared his interteaching ([Saville et al, 2006](#)), reading guides, and mini-lessons. He pushed me to recognize the coercive nature of instruction (Friere, 1970) and to increase dialogue with my students that requires that I trust them to co-construct knowledge with me. Steve met with me, shared materials, and continued to serve as my interpreter of Friere’s view of

learning. It was so much easier just to stand there and talk and tell funny stories that the students liked, but deep in my heart I knew I was out of sync with my aspirations. So, in Fall 2018, instead of lecturing about not lecturing, I will “rigor up” the class. I’ll bravely implement interteaching, anticipation guides, and protocols with students with histories of passive learning, where they read a section, answer the questions, and get a grade. I’ll refocus my lens on engaging students as partners in the process (I hope). I’ll have 70 students to engage in interteaching and anticipation guides. I will jumble them up into pairs or small groups, pushing them to interact with other students outside of their comfort group. I’ll have Steve to cry to if the students talk about it being too hard, not getting full points, you know, cognitive dissonance. I’ll use Class Dojo to provide students the opportunity to submit “I feel” or “I need” statements to inform me of their concerns.

The Pull. As part of the course I co-teach with Dr. Yvette Pennington, our first-year students – primarily white, middle class females – tutor children who currently attend an elementary school in a lower socioeconomic class neighborhood where most of the students are African American. These students also work as instructional assistants with students attending the highest poverty school in the district. It is often the first time they have been the minority group in a room or have worked directly with someone who doesn’t look like them. As our students are leaving the elementary school, I must have “that” look on my face, because Yvette, my conciliator, say, “They’ll get there. What do you expect?”

I am stunned by her patience. We both grew up fed, clothed, and loved, but our parents struggled economically. I’m an old, jeans-wearing, no make-up ex-hippie whose father was a medic during WWII because he was a conscientious objector and whose mom was smart enough to go to college but due to being “lower class” did not. Yvette is an African-American woman who presents herself professionally in dress and demeanor when teaching college students, and knows how to do that three different color eye shadow thing with her makeup. I smell like essential oils, she smells like perfume. I was a teacher and head teacher, she was a special education administrator. How can she not scream at our students who talk about “those parents,” “those kids,” and are stunned that the inner urban Black kids we are working with are “smart”? Yvette’s approach is that every student enters our classroom with their perspective based on their personal development, and it is our job as professors to assist them in developing new skills when teaching students from a different culture.

I have learned that it is easy for me, an old white lady – to be indignant. Yvette has had to confront challenges just because of her race. I’ve had the privilege of being white and escaping any pre-judgement because of my race. Due to Yvette’s professional experiences she knows far more than I do about discrimination, stereotypes, and microaggressions than I ever will. But I’ve lived in the safety of being able to be indignant with no questions about the root of my concerns.

So...Any innovations I make in my instruction are metered doses. I am pushed by Steve’s exploits, and I am ready to change the world. I am pulled by Yvette’s sense of reality and am learning that development is more expected than enlightenment. Without either of them, I would be a far less effective teacher.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, Continuum.

Saville, B., Zinn, R., Neef, N., Van Norma, R., & Ferreri, S. (2006). A comparison of interteaching and lecture in the college classroom. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 39(1), 49-61. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.2006.42-05>.