

November 30, 2011

I observed Jessica Corey on Friday, November 4th at her 8:50 class in Moulton Hall. I noticed immediately that Jessica had a great rapport with her students. I arrived about ten minutes early, and she and several students were already in the class. She held a casual conversation with these students about different books which she and the students had read and they all might enjoy. She also asked these few students if they had received the e-mail from her. It seems an assignment that had been posted on the Vista site had problems, and she had sent an e-mail to them to correct the problems. They all mentioned that they had received the e-mail and thanked her for the corrections. It was obvious that this teacher knew all her students by name and had established a good classroom relationship with them.

The class began on time. It was a small class with only eleven students. Jessica knew all the students and marked their presence in her class when they arrived. Several students seemed to be absent; she asked the students present if anyone knew where the missing students were; no one did, and she began the class. She begins this Friday class by bringing up her syllabus and discussing the next assignment. She reminds the students what Monday's class reading and assignment will be and makes what they are to do very clear. She also reminds them that they are all to bring in an old paper which they will revise in class. She asks the class if they have any questions about Monday's assignment and then, when no one has any questions, she reminds them that they can e-mail her any questions that might come up or stop by her office.

Jessica's students had a reading assignment due for that day, and she breaks the students into groups of four before class discussion over the material. The students have obviously done this before and immediately break into groups. I ask Jessica, and she informs me that she always allows the students an opportunity to discuss questions she has prepared together in groups before they have a class discussion. She said that she has noticed that there is better class participation when the students have had the opportunity to talk together and prepare some answers. This seems to work well.

Two of the groups jump right in; they have formed a bond in these groups and seem to work well together. The third group is rather reticent and slow on the uptake. She walks to this group and begins to ask them questions involving the reading. A student walks in late; Jessica acknowledges him, and he immediately walks to the group with only three students in it and begins to do the questions. This group activity lasts approximately ten minutes. Jessica is walking around the class the entire time, stopping at groups and interacting with them by asking further questions and giving positive feedback.

The full class discussion begins and the students begin to answer the questions. I was very impressed with not only this activity and the students' responsiveness, but also with the kinds of questions that the students were tackling. They were asked to make connections between this particular reading from "The Freedom Writers Diary" and three other authors on writing that the class had read at various points during the semester. The ability to make these connections asked for much higher-order thinking skills. I could tell that they were developing these skills but were still having trouble, since most of their high school experiences probably did not train them for this type of critical thinking.

One group was eager to please and came up with answers almost immediately; a second group was a little slower. I was eager to see how she handled this third group which appeared not as committed to the class as the other two groups. But with a little prodding this group was brought around and came up with some answers as well. Not all members of every group participated verbally, but all were alert. Jessica wrote all their answers on the board and, with their help, made difficult correlations between what the different authors had said about points of the writing process. The students seemed to get excited as they made these connections. It is obvious that Jessica knows this material very well and does not just lecture about the material but is able to allow the students to discover what she thinks is significant. This is definitely a student-centered but teacher-directed classroom. She is completely in control but her students are definitely involved. The students mentioned that they enjoyed the excerpts from *The Freedom Writers Diary* the most of all their readings; but it is also obvious that they got much more from this reading because of how Ms. Corey had prepared them for their understanding with other articles from experts in the field of writing.

Jessica Corey is a good teacher. Her material for this class is difficult for college freshmen, but I believe that these students rise to the challenge. From looking at her syllabus, I can see that Jessica mixes up the class assignments, and those students are not faced with these same activities every day. I enjoyed the class and Jessica's teaching.

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