

Illustrating the Effects of War: A Journey through Graphic Novels and Beyond

Instructional Decision-Making

To be quite honest, the transition from student (of English Education) to teacher (of English IV) has not been a necessarily tough one for me—I feel as though my years as a nanny have prepared me well, especially since nannying for a couple of toddlers is not much different than teaching a classroom full of seniors. Both professions require me to have patience, compassion, and a sense of humor, as well as eyes in the back of my head, an “I-mean-now” voice, and the ability to redirect a behavior with a simple look. However, despite the ease with which I was able to take on my new role, I still find it quite challenging to remember that “real world high school” is not the same as “what-they-teach-you-in-Education-classes high school.” In the real world, students do not always have the answer (even if it’s right in front of them), they do not always hand in the homework, they do not care whether or not a lesson is fun because, to them, it’s still work, and they certainly are not always ready (or willing) to jump right into what I have planned for the day. It is with this last realization that I have learned that sometimes it is best to simply go with their flow at times—as that it may be the only way to avoid chaos and not completely lose them.

My period 6 English class consists of twenty-seven talkative, amiable, socially-accepted, mutually-acquainted college prep seniors. Most of them have known each other since elementary school, which is great because it makes for a very comfortable classroom. However, this comfortableness can sometimes work to my disadvantage: if one is having a bad day and feels the need to share during journal time, they ALL start dispensing advice or they all start relaying stories of similar plight. Usually, I can get them to settle down if I promise that we will

revisit So-and-so's journal entry at the end of class assuming that we get through the day's lesson. More often than not, this works—the kids settle in, we do what we need to do, learn what we need to learn and for the last five minutes or so, we all have a little pow-wow. The students respond well to this ounce of freedom, and it lets them know that I am there to listen and guide them when needed. It lets them know that I am human.

Still, sometimes I simply cannot rein them in, and their needs hijack my lesson. My favorite example of this happened in late September. The class had been “mine” for a little over a week, and things were running rather smoothly. I had already begun my unit and the students had even had their first quiz at the beginning of the week. I was on track and feeling pretty proud of myself for moving along at a good pace—especially since we (my fellow student-teachers and I) had been joking previously about how SLOW the lessons actually go in “real world high school.” So, needless to say, I was feeling rather confident when I walked into my classroom directly after lunch on this particular day and wrote the day's journal prompt on the board: “What does freedom mean to you? Describe a time when you felt the most free.”

The students filed in, and after a few moments, settled down to begin writing. For ten minutes they were relatively quiet—with only a few murmurs here and there. The prompt, not particularly tough but definitely thought-provoking, seemed to take them over. Even as I announced that time was up, numerous pens continued to glide across paper. It was obvious that I had struck a chord in quite a few of them with this particular journal assignment. As usual, I asked the class if anyone would like to share. Sharing their journal entries is not a requirement, but I definitely encourage it in my classroom. I feel as though they learn a lot from each other when they take the time to share their thoughts. At best, I can count on one or two

students to always want to share—Natasha and Esther are always my go-to girls, willing to share at the drop of a hat; on this day however, a few new hands flew into the air. I started with a student who does not share often, and listened intently as he gave his definition of freedom: being able to do what you want within the realms of the law. He then went on to say that he didn't feel free all that often, despite the fact that he is a "good kid" who gets pretty decent grades and hardly ever disobeys his parents and never gets in serious trouble. Another student jumped in and claimed that he felt the same way but also threw in some thoughts about freedom and respect going hand-in-hand. His biggest issue was freedom in school, and that he felt, as seniors there should be certain freedoms allowed (like being able to use the bathroom during class if absolutely necessary) but that the faculty and administration do not respect the students enough to allow for these privileges. His exclamation led others to nod in agreement, and a low wave of murmurs slowly rolled over the classroom. Before I even had a chance to assess the situation, I knew I was going to lose the battle if I tried to fight the inevitable—I knew I had to make a decision right then to allow this class the "freedom" to voice their thoughts/opinions.

For the next 45 minutes, the students and I had a conversation about respect, freedom and rights, both as students and as people. I have never seen them so respectful towards each other. They would raise their hands if they wanted to speak, say, "Excuse me" if there was a need to interject, and applaud whenever someone made a valid point. They were respectful of me, listening when I had something to offer and responding to my questions in a non-defensive manner. To ensure that this class was not a total waste of time, I asked the students to do some soul-searching and writing at the conclusion of class. Each student was asked to write about

how they feel when someone shows them respect/disrespect and describe a time when they felt respected/disrespected. While reading over their exit slips later that day in the library, I felt a sense of pride and when my name and the events of the day's class were mentioned more than once as a moment of respect. It made my heart hurt at the thought that in their twelve years of schooling, my decision to allow them a voice that day may possibly be the only time they ever felt respected by an adult or authority figure.

The next day, I wanted to show them that their efforts to be heard were not in vain. I pushed back my lesson once again and decided to conduct my all-time favorite activity with them—Bad Poems! I called them Cheesy Poems because I did not want to establish a negative connotation between “respect” and “bad poem.” I showed them two examples—one I found online, which I am pretty sure was not meant to be considered bad, and one that I wrote myself. We came up with a list of criteria for writing a bad/cheesy poem and they ran with it! At the end of the period, they all shared and boy, did we laugh! These students wrote some of the absolute best bad poems I have ever heard. It really was great—and the success of the activity really validated the decision to forego my original lesson plans during those two days. Knowing my students as well as I do, I know that

After Bad Poem day, period 6 really seemed to be on a role. They were generally more attentive during class, they were acknowledging me in the hallways, and they were beginning to call me by my name—no more just “Miss” for me! Homework was being handed in on a consistent basis, and we were plowing through the book at a reasonable clip. Yup, things were going so smoothly...until the day before the Senior Portfolio Reflections were due.

I walked into my classroom a little later than normal, and was quickly bombarded with requests to go into the Senior Skills classroom to print materials for God-only-knows what. I told each student to hold wait until the end of the period; I would let them leave a few minutes before the bell and they could run into the Skills class and print what they needed. This seemed to appease the worrywarts. As I began class, and the students started in on their free-write journal prompt, Natasha came spinning into the room: a flurry of tears, panic and “OMG’s!” I called her up to where I was sitting—journaling with them—and asked her if everything was okay. She looked at me and tried to claim that she was fine, but the tears started to spill and she could barely keep her voice down. She needed to finish her portfolio reflection. Well, actually, she needed to start her portfolio reflection, but she couldn’t because she did not have all the pieces that were to be included in the reflection. She was shaking, and I knew that I was going to have to let her go—there was no way her mind was going to be anywhere near my lesson that day. Again, I had to do some quick thinking.

I let the students finish up their journal entries, but did not have anyone share. Instead, I asked who still needed to work on their portfolio reflections. All but one or two hands flew into the air. I sighed, but called Mrs. Cellucci into the classroom, and quietly told her the class’s dilemma. Luckily for them (and for me, because once again, I knew I would lose them if she had said no) she relented and let them into the classroom—under the stipulation that each and everyone of them was working on either finishing the reflection or working on the individual piece reflections. Those who had absolutely nothing to work on were to continue reading *Pride of Baghdad*.

This class went well, and as I walked around, I could tell that many of my students were breathing sighs of relief. While I would have been comfortable sending just Natasha into the Skills room (knowing full well that she'd be able to catch up on the missed lesson), I am happy that I asked the entire class who else needed more time to get the work done. This way they all met the deadline, and score one for me because I really helped them out.

These two instances have taught me that I am actually very intuitive to the needs of my students. I was always afraid that I might not relate to them—that maybe too much time has passed and I have forgotten what it's like to be in high school, but that does not seem to be the case. In fact, I think I am pretty good at relating to them, at going with their flow. While these two instances don't relate directly to my unit goals and objectives, I feel they are important examples of instructional decision-making because of the fact that I am teaching only seniors, especially the second example. At North Providence High School, much emphasis is put on the Senior Portfolio—as I mentioned in my Contextual Factors, there is even a mandatory class solely dedicated to Senior Portfolio and Senior Project. The decision to allow them to take a break from my unit so that they could work on this component of their senior portfolio that is absolutely essential for graduation was by far one of the most significant decisions I made throughout my student-teaching. I have decided not to die on any insignificant hills.

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Analysis of Student Learning

Part I (Objective 3): Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of literary elements, such as point of view, tone, figurative language, etc. through multiple writing exercises (including but not limited to poems, essays, journal entries and short stories).

Whole Class

Student	Pre-Assessment (Literary Elements Survey— 10 points)	Post-Assessment (Literary Elements Quiz—20 points)
Priscilla	10 (100)	20 (100)
Tatiana	10 (100)	20 (100)
Katelyn	7 (70)	18 (90)
Ryan B.	10 (100)	20 (100)
Ali	9 (90)	20 (100)
Erin	8 (80)	19 (95)
Greg	7 (70)	19 (95)
Alycia	9 (90)	20 (100)
Ryan C.	8 (80)	20 (100)
Gianna	5 (50)	18 (90)
Johanna	9 (90)	20 (100)
Randy	8 (80)	19 (95)
Aaron	8 (80)	18 (90)
Nick	9 (90)	20 (100)
Steve	7 (70)	18 (90)
Esther	9 (90)	20 (100)
Jason	9 (90)	20 (100)
Maria	8 (80)	19 (95)
Nico	9 (90)	20 (100)
Josh	8 (80)	18 (90)
Natasha	9 (90)	20 (100)
Dimas	7 (70)	19 (95)
D.J.	8 (80)	18 (90)
Elyssa	9 (90)	20 (100)
Tayla	8 (80)	18 (90)
Dennis	8 (80)	20 (100)
Desiree	9 (90)	20 (100)
CLASS AVERAGE	8.4 (84)	19.2 (96)

Analysis

Whole Class: For the Objective 3 pre-assessment, I used a ten-item quiz in which the students had to provide the literary term with the correct definition (see attached.) I wanted the students to provide authentic answers, which is why I chose not to assess them with a multiple-choice option. I also wanted the students to feel comfortable with the pre-assessment, so I decided to call it a “survey.” When I passed the survey out, I asked them to answer as honestly and provide as much information as they could. I also reminded them (numerous times) that this was not a quiz and it was okay if they did not know the answers. With this pre-assessment the only rule I had was that they could not provide examples; the answer had to be a definition of the term.

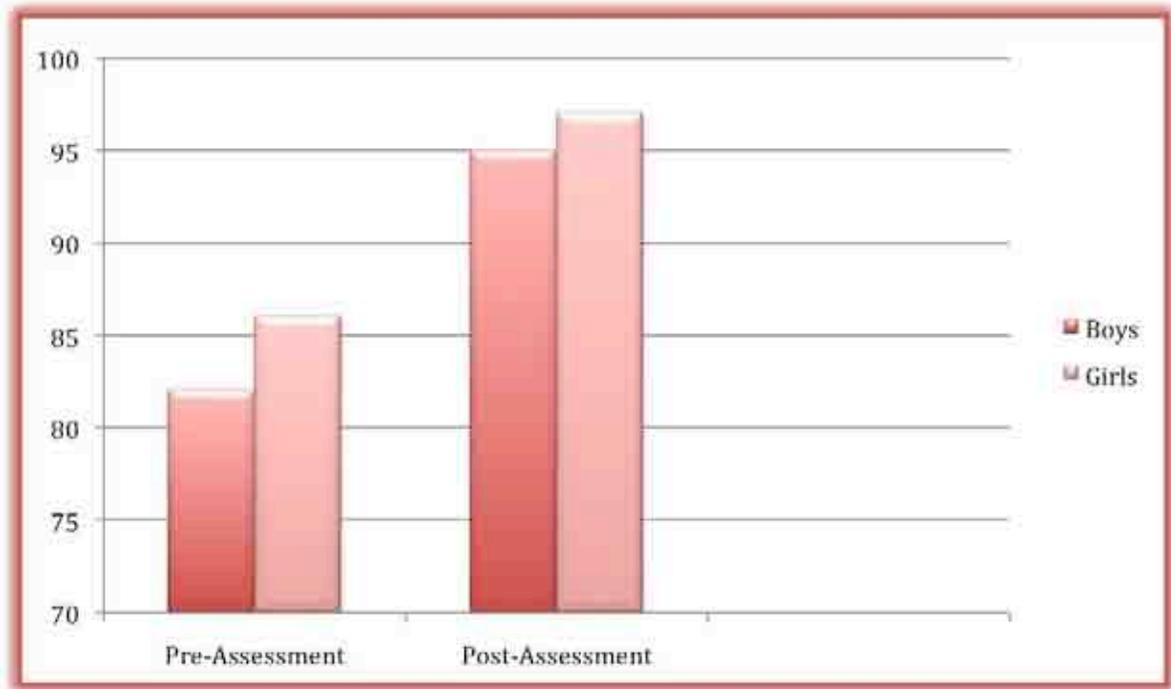
I found that as a whole, the class performed at about 84%. Simile, metaphor, alliteration were the most well-known literary devices, while onomatopoeia and hyperbole were often left blank. This shows me that while students have been encouraged to use literary devices in their writing throughout the school career, it is evident that more time has been spent on teaching them to use the more common devices. Also, when it comes to literary elements, the definition of first-person point of view came easy to most of the students, but many confused the three variations third-person narration. The majority of the students was also able to correctly define symbolism in their own words, but had trouble defining irony.

After a one-day literary elements and devices review, with a focus on the lesser-known devices—especially onomatopoeia, since it is one of the most popular devices used in the creation of graphic novels, and the difference between the third-person points of view—the students practiced using literary elements/devices by implementing them into their daily writing assignments. As part of the scoring criteria for the culminating unit project, in which the students will create a graphic novel of their own, students are required to use a minimum of three literary devices in their writing (onomatopoeia, simile, alliteration, etc.)

As a post-assessment, I decided to re-test the students, in a very similar manner to the pre-assessment—only this time I did call it a quiz. It’s amazing how that word can get their attention. I announced the quiz two days prior to proctoring it, which allowed them ample time to study. The directions were essentially the same: provide the definition for the literary term. The only change was that for the quiz they were required to give both the definition and an example. Half credit was applied if only half an answer was provided. With the post-assessment scores, I am confident that the students have successfully met my unit objective, as that the class average is 96%—a 12-point increase from the pre-assessment average.

Subgroups: I decided to create subgroups for my data based on gender. As the graph below signifies, the girls (shown in the lighter shade of red) performed better on both the pre- and post-assessments. While it has been documented, in a 2009 study performed by Stephen Proud, a research student at Bristol University in the UK, that on average, girls perform better than boys in Language Arts classrooms, I do not necessarily agree with the theories put forth by this study. Proud theorizes that girls are verbally stronger than boys when they start school at the elementary level. He also theorizes that boys may feel discouraged by the girls in the classroom (<http://www.parentdish.com/2009/04/28/boys-do-better-in-english-when-girls-arent-around>).

Though I tend to agree with his first theory, girls do acquire verbal skills at an earlier age than boys; I don't feel as though the boys in my classroom are discouraged or intimidated by their female classmates. I simply believe that the results may indicate that the girls put forth their best efforts, while the boys simply want to "skate by" with minimal effort. I feel as though I know my students well enough, and have informally assessed them enough times to know that if all the students put 100 percent effort into the post-assessment quiz, they could all achieve a perfect score.



Individuals: I chose to focus on two students, one boy and one girl, who demonstrated different levels of performance on both the pre-assessment and post-assessment, but also completely contradict the study I mention above. The table below displays the results of Gianna—a charismatic young lady who has a hard time keeping quiet in my classroom, and Ryan B.—a quiet, sickly young man who has been absent more than he has been present in my classroom but still manages to get his work in on time. (It must be noted that Ryan B. was in attendance on each of the assessment days.)

Student	Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment
Ryan B.	10 (100)	20 (100)
Gianna	5 (50)	18 (90)

As is evidenced by their scores, Ryan B. clearly is not discouraged by Gianna's presence in the classroom. In fact, he has out-scored on most of the work that I assigned to the class. The reason for this, I think, is that Ryan B. is intrinsically motivated to do well in class. Gianna, on the other hand, is more concerned with her personal and social life. She is never disrespectful

towards me, and I can often get her on task (after a little redirection) but she shows no motivation to do her work. Gianna simply “skates by.”

Part I continued (Objective 4): Students will be able to respond to and interpret visual media (graphic novels) through a variety of exercises (including but not limited to response-to-text prompts, hands-on activities, interpreting non-visual literature to visual media, etc.)

Whole Class

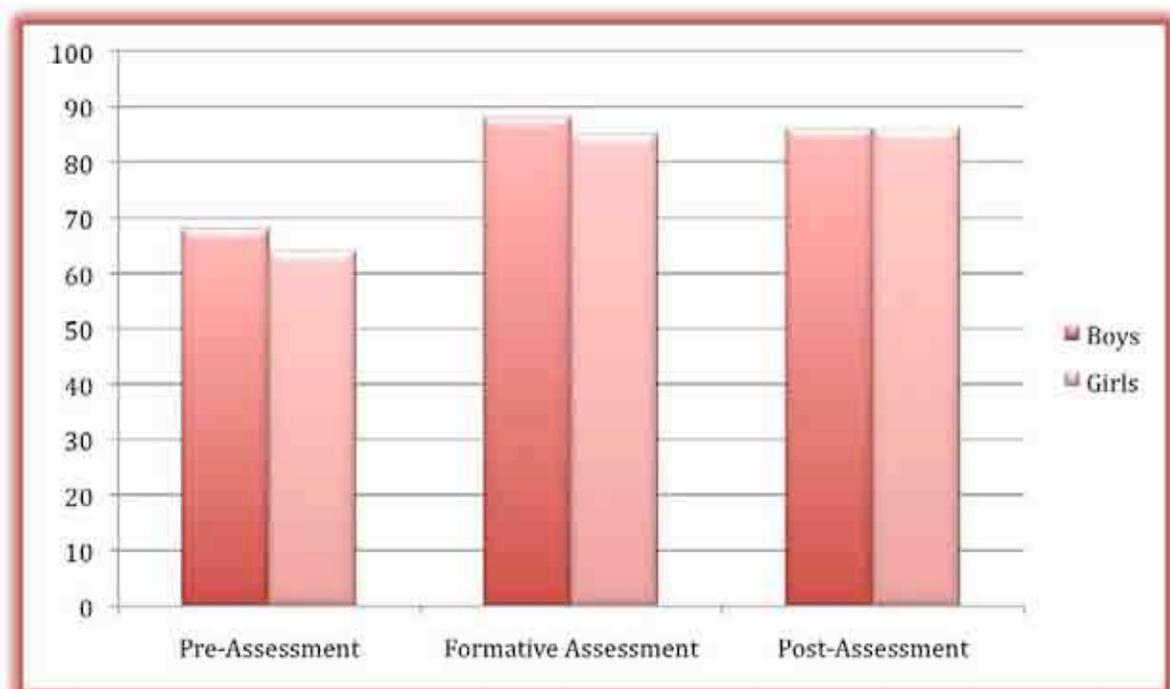
Student	Pre-Assessment (Graphic Novel Survey—10 points)	Formative Assessment (Comic Jumble—20 points)	Post-Assessment (Graphic Novel Quiz—10 Points)
Priscilla	8 (80)	15 (75)	9 (90)
Tatiana	7 (70)	20 (100)	7.5 (75)
Katelyn	8 (80)	20 (100)	8 (80)
Ryan	8 (80)	20 (100)	9 (90)
Ali	8 (80)	15 (75)	9.5 (95)
Erin	5 (50)	20 (100)	8 (80)
Greg	8 (80)	20 (100)	9.5 (95)
Alycia	5 (50)	20 (100)	9 (90)
Ryan	7 (70)	20 (100)	8.5 (85)
Gianna	5 (50)	10 (50)	7 (70)
Johanna	6 (60)	15 (100)	10 (100)
Randy	5 (50)	15 (75)	8.5 (85)
Aaron	7 (70)	15 (75)	8 (80)
Nick	7 (70)	15 (75)	10 (100)
Steve	7 (70)	15 (75)	9 (90)
Esther	4 (40)	15 (75)	9.5 (95)
Jason	7 (70)	20 (100)	8 (80)
Maria	8 (80)	20 (100)	8.5 (85)
Nico	8 (80)	20 (100)	8 (80)
Josh	9 (90)	20 (100)	8.5 (85)
Natasha	4 (40)	15 (75)	8 (80)
Dimas	4 (40)	15 (75)	7.5 (75)
D.J.	7 (70)	20 (100)	9.5 (95)
Elyssa	9 (90)	15 (75)	10 (100)
Tayla	5 (50)	15 (75)	8.8 (88)
Dennis	6 (60)	15 (75)	7 (70)
Desiree	6 (60)	20 (100)	8.5 (85)
CLASS AVERAGE	6.6 (66)	17.3 (87)	8.6 (86)

Analysis

Whole Class: For the Objective 4 pre-assessment, I gave the entire class a survey consisting of ten general questions regarding graphic novels. The questions ranged from multiple-choice to brief short-answer (see attached). The goal of the pre-assessment was to determine what the students already knew about graphic novels and what I still needed to teach them. For reasons similar to the aforementioned pre-assessment, I called this a “survey.” I figured that the students would not have a lot of prior knowledge regarding graphic novels, so I wanted to reinforce that this pre-assessment was not going to count towards their final grade.

Subgroup: As I suspected, the boys did out-score the girls in this pre-assessment. Graphic novels and comics are stereotypically geared towards males, so I was not surprised that most of the girls did not possess a lot in the way of prior knowledge on the subject. While the difference in scores is slight (an average of 68 for the boys, 64 for the girls for the pre-assessment; 88 to 85 respectively on the formative) it is evident that the boys possess more knowledge than the girls prior to any explicit or implicit instruction.

However, once I led a three-day lesson regarding the elements of graphic novels, the girls did perform much better. It is evident that they learned from the lessons, as their scores on the post-assessment were, on average, 20 points higher than the pre-assessment survey.



Part II: The students were able to meet both of my unit objectives successfully, according to the data collected. With the use of prior knowledge, which had to be called into working memory,

and explicit and implicit instruction during the lessons, the students were able to perform successfully on each assessment. None of the students failed any of the assessments given to them. I think that this is partly due to their prior knowledge on both subjects, but also because each of the formative assessments, which were a combination of formal and informal, were well-suited and relevant to the concept they were being taught.

However, in the future, I would score the “Comic Jumble” activity differently. For the activity, the students had to put four different series of comic panels into the correct sequence. I was very liberal in my grading for this activity, partly because I was unsure of my teaching ability and partly because I didn’t want to anyone to fail. In the future, I would administer this very same assessment, but I will definitely attach a scoring rubric to it—so that students will know exactly what is expected from them and exactly how their scores will be calculated.

After reflecting on my assessments and unit objectives shown here in this analysis, there are a few things that I would change in order to enhance student learning. For example, I would restate the objectives daily. This is one of my biggest obstacles—I always forget to tell the students what the point of the lesson is. I am conscious of my flaw, and continue to work on personal improvement. The rationale behind this decision is that stating the objective, writing it on the board, and reminding the students daily will reinforce the purpose of the lesson and help them to successfully meet the expectations.

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Candidate Reflection

I honestly have no idea where to begin with this reflection—so much has happened since August 31st I often feel overwhelmed when I start to think about it. When I first started at North Providence High School, I was nervous, so very nervous. I had met with Rita Cellucci (my cooperating teacher) over the summer and communicated with her via email on an almost weekly basis, but still I felt as if I was not prepared for what was lying ahead. I felt very blind. Luckily, I spoke with Nicole Lachapelle a lot throughout the summer, and whenever I felt a little bit wound-up, I would call her and have her remind me that it was going to be okay...we were going to be there together. She would remind me that I was not embarking on this journey alone, and that for all the insecure feelings I was having, she was having the exact insecure feelings as well. Seriously, it's some sort of inverse equation of Newton's Law.

Despite all my insane feelings of insecurity, I can honestly say that my student-teaching experience has been a very positive, very life-changing event. For the first time ever I can genuinely say that I am doing exactly what I was born to do—I am a teacher, and a damn good one at that. The last three months have been full of ups and downs, good days and bad, but I have come through on the other side with a lifetime of lessons and the confidence to make exclamations like the one above.

I feel as though this semester has successfully prepared me (at least somewhat) for what lies ahead in my teaching career. I have witnessed many extraordinary moments in my classroom, as well as some heartbreaking ones. As I have mentioned in previous reflections (in seminar and on the Noble Professions blog) my students have a tendency for the need to

“vent.” On more than occasion I have had to throw my daily lesson plan out the window in order to better suit the needs of a class of 26 hormone-ridden, drama-havin’ young adults. I have learned that times like these can be a positive experience—as long as you are able to find the teachable moment. In this instance, the students were so moved by their responses to the journal prompt that they needed an outlet; they needed to share. They had so much to say about the (imagined) oppression they encounter on a daily basis via the school administration. I felt, in my gut, that this was a teachable moment worth having. With the seniors, moments like these, in which I can teach them about respect and the difference between a right and a privilege are very crucial—as that they will soon be leaving the safety of high school and moving onto in “real life.” Whether they are college-bound or instantly entering the workforce, these students need to know that respect is a privilege and must earned, and that in the end, that’s all we really want from each other.

While I have had a plethora of amazing moments, such as the honor of being asked to write a college recommendation letter, being mentioned in a portfolio reflection essay as a teacher who “gets” her students, and watching proudly as the students diligently, productively and excitedly work on their final projects for my graphic novel unit, I definitely have been delivered two blows this semester—that seriously surprised, saddened and angered me.

The first one occurred on the Wednesday after Thanksgiving. One of my students, Melanie, had been absent a lot—the entire 3-day week prior, as well as on Monday. On Tuesday, her fifth day of absence, I asked the class if anyone spoke to her, and they all shook their heads. A minute later, one boy piped up and mentioned that he had heard that Melanie dropped out. I mentioned this to the teacher aide (this is my inclusion class) and she called

down to the guidance office. Nothing came back out of the ordinary. According to guidance, she was just absent. On Wednesday, Melanie didn't show up to my class again—the sixth day in a row. After the period ended, I went to find Rita and inform her of my concern. I had not gotten any requests to send work home, and this concerned me. Without the work being completed at home, Melanie had a slim chance of passing English for the second quarter.

Rita and I went down to guidance, to seek some answers. The senior class guidance counselor was unavailable to chat, and when we asked the guidance secretary, she said she hadn't heard anything and that we should check with the nurse to see if Melanie had excused absences due to illness. We tracked down the nurse, who told us to ask the nurse's secretary...seriously, it's like a game of Telephone! Anyway, eventually we found out that the rumor was true, that Melanie had decided to sign herself out school and not graduate with the rest of her class.

The news of Melanie's decision knocked the wind out of me. I was so saddened by the thought of this little girl sitting at home, making this decision on her own. Where were her parents and what did they think of their daughter deciding to become a high school drop out? How could they sit by and watch her throw away the last 12 years of her life? Why were they not in the guidance office coming up with ideas and plans to help Melanie succeed in the completion of her last 6 months of high school? My questions go unanswered and I am left with the life-long lesson that I cannot save them all. Unfortunately there are going to be some students who fall through the cracks, no matter how ridiculously amazing of a teacher I am.

Another incident this semester took place just yesterday. After a really great last observation with my period 6 College Prep class, I was pretty much floating on Cloud 9—feeling

really confident and excited that my culminating project was going so well. The workshop I had planned, which would be executed in both classes (period 2 and 6), went off without a hitch and all the students were engaged and productive. I was looking forward to conducting the workshop with period 2, especially since they have shown excitement about this project since I introduced it the week before. Period 2 is a very artistic class, and they are so eager to participate in such a hands-on, creative activity.

However, my elated mood didn't last for long. As I walked into the classroom, Kayla D. told me that she had some "random" news. Apparently, Kayla W. moved to Pennsylvania over the weekend and had sent a message via Facebook to Kayla D. asking her to inform me of this. I was slightly confused, as that a decision to move to a different state usually takes some time. Kayla W. hadn't mentioned the move at all during the last week, or even on Friday. After a little investigative questioning, I learned that Kayla D. had actually run away with her biological mother and since she's 18, her adoptive parents have no authority to bring her home. Again, I am left with a slight feeling of hopelessness and loss. When I started my student-teaching back in August, I really never imagined that by December I'd be dealing with such heart-wrenching situations. While I am grateful for the realism of my experience (we all know that not every classroom is perfect) I do wish that it had not come at the expense of some of my students. Both Melanie and Kayla W. were lovely young women, and I do hope for the very best for them.

My semester as a student-teacher has really helped me develop my teaching philosophy. I know now that I want my classroom to be a safe place for the students to be themselves. I want them to know that regardless of their mood, how happy or upset they are on any given day, that I will be consistent—in my responses to them, in my ability to care about

them, in my ability to listen to them. Each day that my students come to class, I want them to be assured that I will always give them my all—when I am in the classroom, I belong to them. Also, I now know that on the days when things don't go well, it's not just that the students were acting out or being thorns in my side...no, it's my fault too. On those days, I have to take a moment and reflect on the class, the lesson, my teacher-self and figure out what went wrong. I have to take some responsibility for them and their actions. They are only teenagers; I am the adult in the room.

When I started, I was not only nervous about the content I'd be teaching—English IV at North Providence High School is British Literature, and well, I am not a huge fan of Dickens or Austen—but I was also deathly afraid of the fact that it was English IV! As in SENIORS! I had all these thoughts running through my head of a classroom full of 17-to-18 year olds who were too cool for school, looking at me like I had no business being there. I was afraid they'd all be taller than me—which would lead to mutiny and anarchy when it was time to take over. In my head, when I closed my eyes, I had very detailed visions of my classroom; it involved me tied up and stuffed in the closet while the seniors ran rampant and rummaged through my pocketbook.

Alas, my irrational fears were just that—irrational. North Providence High School has a very flexible curriculum and I was able to forego teaching Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and instead create and teach a unit on war using the graphic novel *Pride of Baghdad*, by Brian K. Vaughan, as my primary text. While I found it somewhat frightening (as much as I love this particular graphic novel, teaching something so unconventional is very out of the ordinary for me), I had so much fun with it, and considering the feedback I've gotten so far from the students about their culminating project—creating their own graphic novel—the students seem

to have had fun with it as well. I honestly cannot wait to have my own classroom and teach this unit again.

As for my seniors (and yes, I have resigned to calling them “mine” as that I feel very protective and very proud of them, as well responsible for them)—well, they are some of the most amazing teenagers that I have ever met. They are smart, funny, extremely talented and (almost too) entertaining. They keep me on my toes, and in doing so, they keep a smile on my face. Each one is so different than the next, but yet they are all so alike—they are the epitome of paradox. On any given day, at least one of them is willing to give me a hard time, whether it’s through hijacking my journal prompt with plights revolving around administrative oppression (which led to Bad Poems!) or simply the need to act up, goof off and be seventeen. But at the same time, for that one student who does not seem to want to work, there are 37 more who “got me” and are ready to do what is asked of them. I really could not ask for a better group of students.

And lastly, no reflection of mine can end without a shout out to my favorite group of women in the whole entire world. I could not have done any of this without any of you. From the laughter and the ideas we shared in class to the sex and drugs seminars in the Murray Center (in which I had to read out loud my absolute least favorite word in the world), all eight of us sitting around the table will forever be an image that I associate with this student-teaching experience. I have enjoyed this journey with you—I couldn’t have for a better mentor than Dr. Cook and I have learned so much from her—especially the importance of the relationship between confidence and humility. Tracy has been my partner-in-crime since SED 407, and I definitely channel her calmness and teacher-y ways when I start to feel myself

nearing the edge. Laura and Amanda remind me each day of my true love of literature and the English classroom, which is often forgotten in the sea of “Miss. Miss. Miss,” and “Are we doing anything today?” and “I know I just had lunch but can I go to the bathroom?” And what can be said for Kathryn and Nicole²? My stomach still aches from all the laughter we’ve shared, both in our “office” and in our classrooms. I can’t imagine how my bad days would’ve played out if I hadn’t had them there in the library after each class. My experience would have been entirely different, and I definitely do not think I would be half the teacher I am right now without them. My sincerest thanks for their friendship, their support and their ability to make me laugh so hard that I cry.