

The following text is an excerpt from a course portfolio that Amy Goodburn produced during her fellowship year in the UNL Peer Review of Teaching Project. To see the primary class documents (such as the syllabus and samples of student work), you can visit UNL's Peer Review of Teaching website at <http://www.unl.edu/peerrev/goodburn/index.html>

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Peer Review Project Course Portfolio  
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## **COURSE PORTFOLIO** **English 476: Reading Theory and Practice**

### I. INTRODUCTION TO PORTFOLIO

This document is excerpted from a course portfolio of a "Reading Theory and Practice" class that I taught in fall 2000 at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This document is divided into four sections: 1) Syllabus Components, 2) Intellectual, Programmatic, and Disciplinary Rationales for the Course, 3) Analysis of Student Projects, and 4) Overall Assessment of the Portfolio Process. Links have been provided so that interested readers can view primary course documents (such as the syllabus or student projects). Comments or suggestions for the author can be emailed to agoodburn1@unl.edu

### II. SYLLABUS COMPONENTS

#### Course Goals

The course I've chosen to profile, English 476: Reading Theory and Practice, is one of a set of courses required for pre-service English/Language Arts majors in the Teachers College (they usually take Composition Theory and Practice in the same semester). Because this is one of the first courses in which students enroll after they are admitted to the Teachers College, most students are juniors and have taken a considerable number of English and Education courses. But this is one of the first courses where they are asked to "take on" the identity of a future teacher.

As my syllabus states, a main goal of Reading Theory and Practice (RTP) is to invite students to reflect upon their reading/writing experiences toward the goal of helping them to imagine their teaching identities. One way the course seeks to accomplish this task is by introducing students to the model of a reader's workshop. A reader's workshop environment assumes that the best reading teachers are those who read and write with their students, who participate in a community of readers, and who are self-aware about their reading processes.

In the summer before the semester began, Professor Chris Gallagher (the teacher for 457: Composition Theory and Practice) and I wrote a letter to incoming students introducing them to the goals of the courses and the assumptions underpinning them. In this letter, we outlined four goals for the combined courses: reflecting on their own and others' literacies;

familiarizing themselves with professional conversations in the field; exploring what it means to be a teacher of English; and trying out various teaching strategies. Beyond these general goals, I have more specific objectives that I'd like students to accomplish regarding reading theory and practice. I want students to *know* terminology and concepts that describe reading processes (e.g. comprehension, miscue, transaction,); interpretive strategies and stances which people use to make meaning of texts (e.g. visual imagery, glossing, reader response, efferent) and authentic assessment strategies that teachers use to document student experiences with reading (e.g. anecdotal observation, think-alouds, portfolios). I want them *to be able to* reflect upon and analyze their own and others' reading histories and processes and to consider the implications of these experiences for addressing the needs of future students. And I want them to understand that teaching is an ongoing process of learning, reflecting, analyzing, and acting; that the best teachers are those who model for and with their students their own passion for reading and writing; and that if they don't like to read or write, they shouldn't become English teachers.

An important component that I have added to this course is the Bryan Discussion Circles. Each week, students work in pairs with a group of high school readers at a local alternative high school. During this hour, the group discusses a common literary text. I developed this component because I wanted to provide students with the opportunity to:

- work closely with high school readers in observing and assessing reading practices
- facilitate group discussions about literature and to contribute ideas in designing reading group projects/activities
- see connections between the theory we were reading and “real world” classrooms

### Course Activities & Teaching Methods

This course utilizes small groups, large class discussions, mini-lessons, peer response, in-class activities (writing, drawing, etc.), and class brainstorms. The methods used in the course are designed to model reading workshop principles and activities so that students can get a sense of how a workshop environment might function in their future teaching. Each class period utilizes at least two of the above methods, sometimes more. Typically students work in small groups on an assigned task (responding to each other's writing, discussing a reading, etc.) and then regroup for a full class discussion and debriefing.

Initially, this course was conceived of as solely a reader's workshop, in which students would read literature and discuss/write about it in a workshop setting. The goal was to invite students to reflect upon the experience as a model for reading instruction. In the past few years, however, this course has begun to focus more explicitly on the teaching of reading (via assigned class texts and course activities). While I believe a workshop approach is important to model for students, many of them have already participated in such workshops via other English courses (such as composition courses). What they haven't been asked to do is to reflect upon WHY a workshop is valuable and to consider HOW its use is underpinned by research on reading theory and practice.

As a teacher of future teachers, I feel intense pressure and responsibility to be a role model for my students. In others words, if I argue for the need for teachers to write with their students, then I need to “practice what I preach” in this class. So much of the class activities try to *enact* the theories and practices that the class readings raise. Then we reflect as a class on the various benefits and constraints of these approaches. For instance, when students were reading about how readers “make meaning” with texts, I distributed a one-page

story (Little Red Riding Hood) written in “nonsense” language that they were asked to read. I then asked them to list all of the strategies/processes they used to make meaning of the text. I then introduced a handout of common reading strategies and asked students to compare their lists with the handout in terms of how they approached “making meaning” of the story. We then discussed the implications of their approaches for how issues of “meaning making” can inform the teaching of reading.

### Course Reading

The books for the course address a range of issues related to the teaching of reading and the teaching of literary response. Goodman’s *On Reading* outlines key terms and principles about reading and addresses “commonsense” notions of reading within the public sphere (i.e. the phonics movement vs. whole language, invented spelling, etc.) Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* focuses on the teaching of literature, with particular attention to promoting literary responses, in k-12 classrooms. Tierney and Readenc’s *Reading Strategies* is a compendium of reading practices and the research underpinning these practices also for k-12 classrooms. Students also are reading from a coursepack of essays that raise issues of the literary canon, literacy assessment, and sample student responses to literature. Finally, students are reading literary texts that are being taught at Bryan Community: Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* and Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*. Our class is also using *The Giver* as a common text through which to explore varying strategies for responding to literature. Another form of course materials are class handouts. I usually create handouts for each class lesson, including discussion questions for the assigned reading, prompts for the formal writing projects, sample lesson ideas for the Bryan Community discussion circles, samples of student writing to reading, and summaries of class assessments. Besides providing students with clearer expectations, creating handouts helps *me* to articulate more clearly my own goals for each class session.

### Course Writing

While RTP focuses on reading, students are expected to do a lot of writing, both formal and informal. There are four formal writing projects: A Reading History, an Interpretive Narrative, a Case Study of a Reader and a Literacy Belief Statement. Each of these projects goes through multiple drafts and averages between 6-10 typewritten pages. Informal writing consists of 2-page observation journals about their Bryan experiences, responses to class reading, and self-assessments and reflections on their learning. Below are descriptions of each formal assignment and the rationales underpinning their use:

#### *Reading History*

This assignment asks students to examine their reading history and to identify significant moments/events that can be explored in terms of their value for understanding reading processes/theories. This assignment is designed to help students consider the importance of understanding the meaning of their own reading experiences in and outside of school. It assumes that reading teachers need to understand themselves as readers and be reflective about the processes/assumptions they bring to the reading classroom. This assignment also serves as a starting point for students to compare and test some of the theories about reading that we’ll be reading with their own experiences. Finally, it allows class members to learn from

each others' experiences, which are usually diverse, so that they can begin to see that reading is not a "natural" process but rather a highly socialized and cultural activity.

#### *Interpretive Narrative*

This assignment asks students to select a one-page text (poem, short story, song lyrics, etc.) and to ask three readers of diverse experiences (age, class, race, gender, region, religion, etc.) to do a reading protocol for this text. They then interview the readers about their reading histories/experiences. Their goal is to analyze how the readers make meaning of the text and then account for the similarities/differences in these meanings (using the readers' interviews as well as course texts that discuss literary response). Students are asked to discuss the implications of their analysis for the teaching of reading. This assignment is designed to help students explore more fully how different readers make sense of texts and to consider the implications of these differences for the teaching of reading in the 4-12 classroom. My main goal is to help students closely analyze how readers make sense of texts (rather than "uncover meaning") and to consider the value of the course readings in helping them to analyze these differences. I ask students to examine other readers because, building upon the first assignment, I want students to consider how their reading experiences may differ from others and the implications of these differences for how a reading environment should be structured.

#### *Case Study of a Reader*

This assignment asks students to do a case study of a school-age reader over the course of several weeks. It builds upon the first two projects by asking students to closely observe a reader within a school context; to collect that student's writing about texts; and to interview the student about his/her reading history and the processes s/he uses in various reading contexts. This assignment is designed as a "culminating" moment in the course in that students are asked to apply what they have been reading and learning throughout the semester via an analysis of this particular reader's strengths, weaknesses, and implications for reading instruction. Students who choose to profile a Bryan Community student also have a secondary audience for this project—the student's teacher.

#### *Literacy Belief Statement*

This belief statement asks students to "pull together" their learning across 457 and 476 by representing their most significant beliefs/values/goals for the teaching of reading and writing. This assignment is designed to be an initial document that students will carry with them and continue to revise/expand throughout their next two years in the Teachers College program (it is used also to place students in their student teaching positions).

#### *Informal Assignments*

In addition to the above assignments, students do informal writing each week consisting of response journals to assigned class readings, in-class activities (such as generating discussion questions, visual imagery exercises, mapping their reading), and self-assessment letters at the midterm and final points of the semester. I use the

response journals as a way of assessing students' engagement with the course material, particularly in terms of the connections they make between the theories they are reading about and their own experiences with reading and observing others' reading. The in-class activities are designed for students to "try out" reading strategies and activities that others use in reading classrooms and to consider their value for their own teaching (at Bryan as well as in future contexts). The self-assessment letters are designed for students to be reflective about their own learning--to be meta-cognitive about their experiences in the class, to assess their strengths and weaknesses, and to develop goals for their learning.

### III. INTELLECTUAL, PROGRAMMATIC, AND DISCIPLINARY RATONALES

#### Rationale for Overall Syllabus

This course is designed to provide students with an initial foundation in reading theory and practice that will be built upon in the students' next semester, when they take a course in language foundations. Because this course is one of the first in my students' pre-professional English Education program, there are basic ideas, concepts, and habits of mind that they will be expected to build upon and explore further in their next semester. In the short run, they need to begin to develop a vocabulary for describing and understanding what goes on in a reading classroom. In terms of "product," the belief statement (which they write in common for 476 and 457) is a document that they carry with them and continue to revise/expand throughout the remainder of their two years in the Teachers College program. The Bryan Discussion Circles are designed to provide a "real life" context in which students can begin to develop and enact their ideas of how to promote discussions about reading/the teaching of literature in a relatively low-stakes environment (that is, they are not responsible for evaluating/assessing students and it is only for one hour a week).

In the long run, I think it's important for 476 students to be able to accomplish the goals outlined in the syllabus because I believe it's important to introduce them to the most current research, theories, and practices for how to promote lifelong reading and writing. Also, I think it's important that this course invite students to learn more about the disciplinary conversations in which English teachers participate with respect to reading theory and practice. In addition to introducing them to national organizations (IRA, NCTE) that can support them in their teaching, I seek to emphasize the importance of teacher research—in their own professional development and in the contributions that it makes to our overall understanding of reading theory and instruction. Thus, almost all of the reading in the course is written by practicing teachers and some of it explicitly refers to teacher research as important to classroom practice. Finally, I want the course to be a starting place for understanding the role that collaboration plays in teachers' ongoing development and growth. Because students enrolled in this course will "stay with" other class members throughout the next four semesters, I want them to begin thinking about how collaboration with others can be useful to their thinking and learning, during their coursework at UNL and when they begin teaching upon graduation.

My perspective of the discipline has definitely shaped my goals and practices. Because I teach in the English Department rather than the Teachers College, I come to this course with a decidedly English Studies approach. The perspectives that shape my approach

to RTP include the following: I assume that reading is the process of *making meaning* with texts (rather than uncovering meanings within a text); I am heavily influenced by reader response theory, poststructuralist theories of language, the goals of critical educators, and the process movement in composition; and I believe that the best teachers of reading are those who are avid readers, who model their passion for reading with students, and who are self-reflective about their reading processes. Although I teach at the college level, I am also conversant in literature focused on secondary schools and have a Master's certification in the teaching of high school English.

#### Rationale for Methods, Materials, and Assignments

As stated previously, this class attempts to model workshop practices/principles for reading instruction (an established model in the discipline of English Education). I've tried to develop projects that are directly tied to the course readings and to the experiences with the teaching of reading that students are experiencing in their Bryan discussion circles. For instance, one of the assigned readings is from Vine and Faust's *Situating Readers*, which describes a study of over 100 readers who responded to the same poem using a reading protocol. After we read two chapters from this book and did the reading protocol to the poem in class, I assigned the second formal project, the Interpretive Narrative Project. Students used the same protocol but chose their own texts and their own readers. They were encouraged to integrate the categories of literary response described by Vine and Faust (as well as Langer, Goodman, and Probst) into their analysis of their readers' responses.

There are tensions with trying to both model a reader's workshop and provide space for discussing issues raised in structuring and teaching via a workshop model. It takes time to actually do the activities and sometimes I feel rushed between having students do the activities and then providing enough reflection/assessment time to not only consider how it worked for them but also the issues it might raise for them as teachers. Sometimes students do not see connections between what they are asked to do as students and what they might do as teachers in their own classrooms. Frequently students come to this course with very traditional notions of what a reading/literature classroom looks like (teacher lecturing about the symbolism in a particular text, only expository writing about the literature, etc.). So in addition to modeling different approaches to the teaching of reading, I also have to address some built-in resistance to these approaches.

#### Programmatic Connections of 476 to the Secondary English Teachers Program

English 476 has a clear programmatic connection to other courses required of pre-service English/Language Arts majors. Typically, the same students are concurrently enrolled in Composition Theory and Practice, Linguistics for Teachers, and Adolescent Literature. After this semester, the students move, as a group, into their Language Theory courses in the Teachers College. Thus, these students take courses together for four semesters until they graduate. In many ways, this course doesn't have programmatic connections with the English Department (outside of 457). Although pre-service teachers are a large population in many English courses, the courses themselves are not designed to meet the needs of this specific group.

One programmatic tension is that separate courses for Reading Theory and Writing Theory make it difficult to address the necessarily interconnected nature of writing and reading instruction. While Dr. Gallagher and I have created "common" assignments to

connect the two classes (the Reading/Writing History and the Literacy Belief Statement), I still find it difficult to negotiate these tensions, particularly when both of us utilize similar approaches and writing/reading tasks (such as portfolios, small group peer response, etc.). Last year we tried to spotlight this tension by requiring a common portfolio—one that crossed both classes and was collaboratively assessed by both of us. But that structure was a disaster—students who received poor portfolio grades felt that they were being “penalized” in two classes, and they felt it was too difficult to maintain a sense of distinctions between the two courses. This year we scaled back the common assignments to just two—the reading/writing history at the beginning of the semester and the literacy belief statement at the end. We chose these two assignments because we thought that it made sense to begin the semester by having students think broadly about their literacy experiences, then move into the separate courses with different assignments and then culminate their experiences with a document that crossed both classes at the end of the semester. We collaboratively responded to and assessed these assignments. While this approach mitigated many of the concerns that students had about the common portfolio, it still wasn’t well received by students. And despite the extra work it required on both of our parts, it wasn’t commented upon at all in students’ course evaluations as being useful or important.

A second programmatic tension is that the common student community created by having students take all of their TC certification courses together sometimes creates tensions among students (because they are constantly with one another every day). I’m not sure how to reconcile some of the tensions that form around small cliques of students, particularly when some of these groups are formed because of experiences in other classes to which I’m not privy. This is definitely one tension I need to explore further in terms of developing small group projects and in terms of negotiating dynamics within class discussions at large.

#### Furthering Programmatic Connections through Collective Curricular Projects

The issue of collective projects for mastery of a course and a curriculum in general is interesting to consider for students in the English/Language Arts program. While the teachers of these courses (457, 476, the subsequent two-semester methods course) have met to discuss approaches and connections among the courses, we haven’t developed together a set of projects that students might accomplish to represent mastery of their subject. The term “mastery” is problematic to begin with, of course, particularly when our courses are designed not only to “transmit” a content about language instruction but also to “model” the practices/strategies/behaviors that we hope they will enact in their own reading, writing, and teaching lives. Chris Gallagher and I did ask last year’s students to develop a common portfolio and it was a disaster. Students were frustrated by combining the courses in this way because it was difficult for them to pull out distinctions among them (which was part of our point—to show the interconnected nature of reading and writing). I think it would be interesting to have a discussion with Dave Wilson, Chris, and anyone else connected to these courses and ask what types of projects would be most useful for students to compile in a portfolio to represent their work over the course of several semesters. At present, students keep portfolios of their work for individual classes and the projects within them are dictated by individual professors—usually in concert with the students’ needs, interests, and goals. While I wouldn’t want to reify particular projects as the only type of projects that are useful for students to complete, it would be interesting to brainstorm, collectively, “mastery projects” that all of us would find useful as a type of certification moment in the students’

programs. The literacy belief statement currently serves this function, but it's the only project that connects the three courses together—and the teachers of 457 and 476 don't see the students' completed belief statements. I think that would be interesting to collect students' belief statements at the end of their first semester in the program and then track their statements throughout their subsequent two years as one record of their learning. It also might be interesting to create "parallel" projects in 457 and 476. For instance, I am asking students to do a case study of a reader and I think it might be useful to have them do a case study of a writer project as well in 457.

### Key Concerns in Teaching 476

This course builds upon students' prior writing experiences in composition courses (particularly 150/151 and 254) and students' reading experiences in literature courses. I assume that students have some familiarity with workshop approaches to writing (i.e. peer response groups, reflective assessment about writing, author's notes, etc.) although I don't assume that students will have considered the rationale or theories underpinning such an approach (i.e. they won't necessarily identify these activities as part of a larger system). I assume that students will have had multiple experiences in reading and responding to literature, although the forms that such responses might take will be highly variable. This course is usually the first (in conjunction with English 457) that asks students to begin considering WHY teachers have structured their English courses and to examine the benefits/constraints that these approaches have had in shaping their reading/writing experiences (toward the ultimate goal of having students envision their own future reading/writing classrooms).

Toward these ends, the key issue that students seem to face is understanding the relationship between theory and practice in the teaching of reading. Many students say that the readings are too abstract or jargon laden and don't apply to the "real world" of the classroom (even though most of the texts are written by teachers about their classrooms!). As a teacher, I am very aware of the need to provide students with a vocabulary for understanding reading processes and for helping them to theorize common practices in the teaching of reading. I want to avoid providing "tips" about what to do in the classroom without having students understand the theories about language learning that underpin them. My students need to have a clear vision of *why* some reading practices are better than others; they need to be able to *articulate* their vision of classroom practice in terms of what constitutes effective literacy instruction rather than rely upon "fun activities" that are unconnected or untheorized. When they begin their practicums, they need to have a holistic sense of what constitutes "best practices" in reading and writing instruction. They need to be able to articulate—to themselves, their students, their students' parents, their administrators—*why* they are doing what they are doing.

Another secondary issue which is certainly connected to the above concern (and which continues to surprise me), is that in the past (and during this semester) students have said that they don't enjoy reading and writing. Frankly, this puzzles me because I can't understand why a person would want to become an English teacher if s/he didn't enjoy reading and writing. What I am discovering in the process of teaching this class, however, is that while some students are attracted to the idea of being a teacher, they haven't given much thought to being a teacher of English/Language Arts. So part of the goal of this class, I think, is to help students think about what being an English/Language Arts teacher in particular

might mean for them. (And some students have used this class to determine that they don't want to teach English. At the end of last semester, one student changed her major to advertising and another changed his subject area endorsement to industrial technology. I don't consider these examples failures—rather, these students learned through the course what they didn't want to pursue, which I think is valuable as well).

#### IV. ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING: THE CASE STUDY PROJECT

For the purposes of this course portfolio, I have chosen to assess student work and learning by analyzing three students' "case study of a reader projects" which were completed at the end of the semester. In some respects, focusing on the case study projects divorced from the students' larger portfolios is problematic. Because I use a portfolio system, I do not assign grades on individual projects. And by focusing on only the case study projects, I am not able to include students' self-assessments of their work, which are represented in their self-assessment narratives that comment on their learning throughout the entire course. In the future, I think focusing on a student's whole body of work represented in the portfolio would be more indicative of their learning. But in the interest of space (since most of the students' portfolios contain over 100 pages of writing), I have chosen the case study projects as one marker of student learning in this class.

##### Course Assignment: Case Study of a Reader Project

Earlier in this document, I outlined three course objectives that connect directly to the case study project. By the end of the semester I hope that students will:

- know terminology and concepts that describe reading processes;
- know interpretive strategies and stances which people use to make meaning of texts;
- and be able to analyze others' reading histories and processes and to consider the implications of these analyses for addressing students' needs.

The case study of a reader project (link to the project prompt) asks students to do a case study of a school-age reader over the course of several weeks. It builds upon the first two projects (a reading/writing history and an interpretive narrative) by asking students to

- closely observe a reader within a school context
- collect the reader's writing about texts
- interview the student about his/her reading history
- analyze the processes the reader uses in reading contexts

This assignment is designed to be a culminating moment in the course in that students are asked to apply what they have been reading and learning throughout the semester via an analysis of the particular reader's strengths and weaknesses and implications for reading instruction. During the last two class periods, students present their findings to other class members.

##### Criteria for Evaluation

I used five criteria for responding to and evaluating the students' case study projects. My expectations are that the case study projects should accomplish the following:

- Demonstrate a holistic understanding of the reader (in terms of processes, motivations, experiences, and abilities)

- Provide concrete evidence from the reader's experiences (class moments and interviews) to support this holistic analysis
- Integrate course material/terminology in analyzing the reader and in suggesting implications for addressing future students' needs
- Organize the data and analysis in a way that is reader-friendly (e.g. using headings, an appendix, etc.)
- Reflect polished and edited prose

Among these criteria, the first three are content driven and the latter two reflect qualities of form and presentation (although form is driven by content, of course). One issue that I raised in class was the importance of incorporating primary data (such as fieldnotes, interviews, journals, etc.) into the project. In the project prompt, for instance, I wrote "use quotes from the reader you are profiling to give the audience a sense of what the student is like [and] to provide concrete examples to support your analysis about the reader's abilities/processes, etc. I viewed this project as an opportunity for students to illustrate their abilities to document and assess reading practices/experiences via primary observation as well as an opportunity to analyze and reflect upon the implications of their observations.

### The Students' Projects

I selected three case study projects (from Katie, Justin, and Cassie—see link to students' projects) that represent a range of quality across the five criteria I outlined above. Since these projects are not evaluated separately from the students' larger portfolios, I haven't assigned them individual grades. But I can comparatively discuss their differences. I first describe some of the features that I see these projects representing and then I provide the end comments that I wrote (excerpted paragraphs from final letters that I wrote to students' portfolios). In addition, I wrote some marginal comments on the projects that can be read on the individual project links.

#### Katie

Katie's project represents a low pass (around a C-/D+ range) based on the five criteria. Overall, Katie is a very strong writer, especially in her use of narrative descriptions (as illustrated in the vignette she uses to introduce her reader). But within the context of this project, Katie's writing style can't hide the fact that she has not studied this reader over a length of time (one of the requirements of the project). Thus Katie doesn't have enough material from primary observation to do a complete job of analyzing Jamie as a reader. Indeed, Katie notes in the introduction that she's observed Jamie for only one and half class periods. Katie's project also doesn't include any supporting materials (which were supposed to be included in an appendix) such as examples of the reader's writing, field notes, interview notes, etc. This lack of primary material makes it difficult for Katie to substantiate the analyses she offers about Jamie's reading processes/experiences. For instance, on the first page she writes "Her [Jamie's] response seemed shockingly honest, and if not honest, it was creative." Because Jamie's actual response isn't represented within the project, it's difficult to understand the context of Jamie's response (e.g. how it was shockingly honest or what her response was in relation to: a short story? a classmate's comments?). As a writer, Katie assumes that the audience (me and her class members) can fill in the context that she doesn't provide. None of her analysis, with the exception of her interviews with Jamie and Sydney (the teacher), is supported with specific examples. Katie's analysis does raise interesting

questions about Jamie's approach to reading and the ways that her school environment is supporting her needs. For instance, she comments on Jamie's experiences in listening to story tapes saying:

This process may help her to understand a specific text at the moment, but I wonder if it helps her at all to improve her reading skills. By listening to the book on tape, she is not forced to work through the words on her own. She does not have to actively participate in the reading process.

She also raises interesting questions about the importance of Jamie participating in class discussions as a means of helping her to make meaning in her reading. Katie's analysis would have been further strengthened by the incorporation of class material, however. Her conclusion is rather vague "I believe teachers need to keep a close eye out for students with deficiencies and special needs." She doesn't connect the course material (on strategies for response, on helping students make meaning of texts, etc.) to her observations of Jamie.

My endnote response to Katie:

Your case study presents an interesting portrait of Jamie. Your opening vignette is very strong—providing a “slice of life” from the classroom helps to illustrate Jamie’s behaviors and attitudes toward reading. Throughout the study there are many places where, as a reader, I wanted more concrete evidence for your statements about Jamie. For instance, when you say her responses were shockingly honest, I wanted to know what her responses were about. Or when you describe the texts she reads outside of class, I wanted more specifics—such as the specific genre and sample titles. Or on page 5 when you discuss how she was willing to share interpretations in her small group, I wanted a “slice of life” of the types of interpretations she made about texts. Because you don’t provide specific examples of Jamie in action, the reader is forced to rely solely upon your interpretation of her actions. Also, the reflections on teaching section is fairly skimpy—there is no overt connection to the class texts we’ve been studying (as outlined in the case study prompt).

Justin

Justin’s project represents a middle pass (B/B- range). Like Katie, Justin is a strong writer who likes to explore ideas in a witty and casual style. He often digresses or goes on tangents as he unpacks ideas or makes connections to other ideas. Sometimes this tendency obscures the original or main point of his writing, as evidenced at the bottom of page two when he describes his lack of knowledge about Lindee as a reader:

I know she enjoys reading poetry and some books, but that’s about it. She could be the next Emily Dickinson for all I know. Honestly. Ah, there, now I feel that my case is fair, and that I should have unbridled control over this report and experimentation. If further substantiation should be deemed necessary, it would be gladly provided.

This passage explains his rationale for choosing Lindee, but it also takes up a lot of space that might have been better spent providing concrete examples about Lindee (which are not fully represented in the entire project). Justin’s project does do a better job than Katie’s of providing details that help represent Lindee as a reader. For instance, on pages three-four Justin describes Lindee’s responses to an interview about her reading preferences, including titles of her favorite books and her motivations for reading more generally. Pages five-seven are probably the weakest section of Justin’s project, in part because he did not observe

Lindee's class participation first hand (and thus was not able to write about specific examples of how she responds in either small or large class discussions about literature) but also because he doesn't incorporate Lindee's writing into his analysis. He does include samples of Lindee's writing in the appendix, but he doesn't make use of it in the project itself. Like Katie, Justin relies upon general statements without grounding his analysis with concrete evidence. He also doesn't integrate his analysis with any of the course material we studied. The section "My Future" presents his general philosophy of how we want to promote reading, "Give them a dose of something good, and watch their eyes light up," but he doesn't go much further with this idea.

My endnote response to Justin:

It was fun reading about Lindee's experiences with and attitudes toward reading. She sounds intensely independent and honest. In terms of your analysis of her reading practices, there are several places where I, as a reader, wanted to see/hear more of Lindee's voice. You incorporate several strong quotes from her about her views toward reading and the class environment. Yet, as Jeremy suggested in his peer response to your initial draft, there are still several "Whys" to be answered in the text. For instance, there's not much about her actual reading process in terms of the strategies she uses to make sense of texts. And though you include concrete examples of Lindee's writing in your appendix, these materials aren't integrated within the text as a way of helping the reader see why they are important. There also are places in the conclusion that could be strengthened with references to some of the theories/ideas we've been discussing this semester.

Cassie

Cassie's project represents a high pass (B+/A- range). In terms of organization, Cassie's project is the weakest of the three, but her project is better in terms of providing concrete examples of Tyrel's reading experiences within and outside of school and of attempting to analyze his experiences in light of the reading theories we studied throughout the semester. The two weakest features of Cassie's project are 1) the introduction, where the first two paragraphs focus on her overall perceptions about the Bryan reading partnership rather than her specific experiences with one reader and 2) the lack of headings to help guide the reader (and herself as a writer) through the project. Despite these organizational issues, however, Cassie's project does an excellent job of drawing upon primary observations and student writing/response as a means of rendering and analyzing Tyrel's reading abilities and experiences. For instance, on page 2, Cassie incorporates Tyrel's written response to the story "The Scariest Thing I Know" as a means of describing how Tyrel connects reading to his life experiences. When she describes Tyrel's participation in class discussions, she uses his own words, which she had documented in field notes. Cassie provides a chronological narrative of the class periods that she spent with Tyrel and his responses to different reading activities. One drawback of this approach is that Cassie doesn't provide the reader a sense of what meaning she is making of these experiences until after she has described the class event. Some revision at an early draft stage might have helped Cassie make these transitions more smoothly. Finally, Cassie attempts to integrate the concepts about reading theory we discussed in class to her analysis and understanding of Tyrel's reading practices. Throughout the project she incorporates passages and concepts from these texts as a way of further

illuminating why Tyrel reads as he does and how she, as a future teacher, might address these issues in her own classroom.

My endnote response to Cassie:

Your case study project is well done. You provide a descriptive and detailed look at Tyrel's experiences in the classroom as well as his reading attitudes and processes. The quotes you incorporate of Tyrel's voice help to substantiate the claims you make about his experiences. You also do a good job of integrating the course material, particularly references to Goodman's theory of comprehension, as a way of understanding Tyrel's reading experiences. The chronological approach you take to the project works to show Tyrel's development, although at times it leaves more work for the reader because it's not explicit what is learned from each class episode until the end. Your conclusion suggests useful ways of meeting Tyrel's needs as well as challenging him to expand his repertoire of reading strategies. It's clear that you've thought hard about the implications of reading practices for a student like Tyrel.

Learning From My Students' Projects

I continue to believe in the value of this particular project, although I have a much better sense of what I want my students to accomplish with it and how I might go about facilitating their learning as they conduct this project. Several student course evaluations cited this project as "repetitive" (in comparison with their second project: the interpretive narrative) and too difficult. So this mini-study of students' projects has provided me with a better sense of how I might reorganize and sharpen the focus of the project goals (and my course in general) for when I teach it again next fall.

First, articulating my criteria for responding to these projects has also helped me to see how I might better introduce the project and better support my students throughout their stages in writing it. This year we spent four days of in-class time on this project—one on analyzing primary data, one on workshopping drafts, and two on class presentations of students' findings. One of my first goals will be to "clean up" the project prompt. Writing about it here has helped me to see how I might clarify my objectives for this project and provide more concrete details about the types of information students should document in their projects. I also plan to schedule a day when students will be assigned to read past case studies (perhaps the three profiled here) and discuss how they meet (or do not meet) the criteria for the project. It's clear that one reason students struggled in their writing process was because of a lack of models.

My second priority will be to emphasize the importance of collecting data over time and of integrating this data within the body of the projects (some students didn't have enough material to work with because they started their projects late while others didn't document the reader's experiences fully enough to represent it in their writing later). While Katie clearly didn't have information to draw upon, Justin did but wasn't sure how (or clear on the necessity) to integrate it within his analysis. One way that I plan to revise my syllabus is by having students do some observation work within class. I might have them do some initial field journals (showing examples in class and having them observe each other during a small group discussion as a way of modeling how to go about collecting and documenting readers' experiences in the classroom. Because they were writing journals about their Bryan experiences, I assumed that they knew how to take field notes—but I clearly need to make

my expectations about what constitutes “data” more explicit. I also need to emphasize specific terms and concepts that students can use in their analyses of their readers. I think I did a better job of this for students’ interpretative narrative projects when I used several in-class activities to illustrate the concepts we were learning (e.g. various stances to literary texts) and then discussed how they might be used as an analytical tool within students’ analyses. I didn’t do this type of work for the third project (in part because we had already done it for the second project and I expected them to build upon this work).

Finally I need to make a clearer connection between the goals of these projects and the “teacher research” literature we are reading. I think many of the students viewed this project as formulaic (perhaps because I was too explicit in the project prompt) so that they didn’t feel they had ownership or investment in the project. Next year, I plan to do a better job of introducing the project as an example of teacher research. I might also provide more latitude if students want to develop alternative projects that utilize teacher research/participant observation methods, although I do worry that “opening up” the project parameters might lead to more confusion than intellectual inquiry. Regardless, I think I might highlight some of the tensions that developing this project raises for me as a teacher, in that I am trying to develop a course that utilizes workshop principles but the formal projects that I require are teacher-based rather than student-generated.

Analyzing these students’ projects has also indirectly helped me to further re-conceptualize the Bryan Community partnership component of the course (in conjunction with students’ and teachers’ evaluations of the partnership). In assessing the overall value of this component, the Bryan teachers and I have discussed the importance of developing a “student partnership portfolio” that Bryan students will keep solely regarding their work with my students (and which my students will be able to use in collecting data about their experiences at Bryan). Working with Bryan teachers to develop these activities over the course of the next several months will further assist me in determining how to help students document and make sense of their experiences with Bryan readers.

## V. OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF COURSE PORTFOLIO PROCESS

Reflecting on my development and teaching of “Reading Theory and Practice” via this course portfolio has been a rich learning experience in many ways. While I write reflective commentaries about all of the courses that I teach at the end of each semester, I’ve never tried writing about my course “in the moment” of teaching it. Moreover, while I frequently include samples of student work in my teaching portfolio to illustrate my teaching goals and expectations, I’ve never done such a careful comparative analysis of sample student work in relation to my stated goals/objectives for a particular course. This dimension of the course portfolio process has been the most important intellectual work I’ve done on the scholarship of teaching in the past few years. As I prepare to teach 476 again this fall, I plan to globally revise this course. Analyzing how these three students did (and did not) address the goals outlined in the case study of a reader prompt gave me insight into how I could better develop and contextualize all of the course assignments as well as reframe the overall syllabus/course design. In future semesters, I plan to do more extensive work with course portfolios by focusing on two or three students’ learning across assignments. Since my students keep portfolios of their work, I think it would be useful to do the same type of analysis on at least formal and informal writing projects for each student. In re-developing some of the formal

projects for this course, I also plan either to include my criteria for evaluation within the project prompts or to have “criteria development” brainstorms so that students and I can collectively generate evaluation criteria. Next year I also want to focus on the Bryan school partnership more fully in my course portfolio, since I view this component so centrally to the course (and to my own professional development as a teacher). This year Bryan teachers said that my students’ participation in their courses helped them to revise their curricular goals/practices (because my students brought innovative ideas/activities to their small groups). So one dimension of the course portfolio that I’d like to focus upon is the role that the Bryan partnership has had in inviting both me and the Bryan teachers to more fully articulate and revise curricular goals/practices.

Another dimension of the course portfolio project that is central to my learning (but which is invisible in this document) has been the collaborative work with the three other English Department colleagues throughout this year. Even though the four of us chose to profile radically different courses (the other three focused on Introduction to English Studies, 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature Seminar in Romanticism, and Introduction to Critical Theory), our conversations about our course portfolios led to many productive discussions about curricular and intellectual relationships across the work of our four courses. For instance, when I read the syllabi for Introduction to Critical Theory and Introduction to English Studies, I realized the extent to which these courses and the Reading Theory and Practice course were underpinned by theories about the nature of reading. In our discussions, we talked about ways we could build upon one another’s curriculum (via assignments and common intellectual moves) as well as ways that we could rethink some of our Departmental requirements. As one example, we discussed the usefulness of requiring pre-service English Education teachers to take Intro. to Critical Theory in their sophomore year so that they would be better prepared to think about reading as a culturally and socially shaped practice before entering 476. We also discussed connections among our courses in relation to the new English major that took effect last year. These conversations have been valuable not only for us but for other faculty as well. In fact, the four of us have been asked by our Department chair to discuss our experiences in terms of revising Departmental course requirements in an upcoming Department meeting.

Beyond advancing curricular reform in our Department, developing this course portfolio has affirmed for me, once again, the importance of collaboration in a teaching community. While I work extensively with graduate student teachers in my work as Composition Coordinator, I do not often have the opportunity to discuss with other Department faculty what they are doing in their teaching. Although our Department prides itself on having strong teachers, most of the teaching goes on behind closed doors. It was a privilege to work with three other faculty who are so strongly committed to teaching as scholarly work and to the advancing the learning of their students.

*Case Study of a Reader  
Project Prompt*

Purpose:

This assignment asks you to develop a holistic sense of a particular reader's abilities, strategies, and needs through extensive observation and documentation of the reader's reading practices. By examining how and what students read in a high school setting (or another appropriate K-12 setting), we can begin to explore what reading means to students; what issues they face in reading; what strategies and processes they use to read; and what they consider to be successful/useful reading practices. All of these insights can help to inform our practices as teachers of reading/literature. For this project, then, you will select one student reader (either from your Bryan discussion circle or another k-12 school context) to profile and analyze in a systematic way.

Your analysis will culminate in a "Case Study of a Reader" Report that will bring to life what reading has been like for this student and how s/he handles reading tasks within a school context (although you will also explore what this person's reading experiences are outside of school as well). After writing this report, you will share your findings in a five minute class presentation to the rest of the class. By comparing our findings, we can continue to develop a better sense of how to address particular students' needs within reading/literature classrooms.

Method for Getting Started:

To begin, you will need to find a school-age reader whom you wish to profile. You will need to have ready access to this student because you will be collecting data about his/her reading practices throughout the remainder of the semester (those of you who wish to profile a Bryan student will want to choose a student with whom you are working now—at the nine week mark, your students will change).

You should try to collect as much data about this reader as possible—collecting their writing about their reading, jotting down oral responses to texts, interviewing them about their reading, collecting samples of what they read (in and outside of school), etc. Since you need to analyze this reader's processes/strategies *over time*, you will need to collect ongoing data.

Writing the Case Study:

Your final case study will consist of several parts. I've outlined them to give you a sense of the data you should collect and the ways that you might organize it.

*Part A. Introduction and Context for the Report*

What are the driving themes/ideas that you want the reader of this report to carry away about this student? Why did you choose this particular reader and what did you hope to learn from him/her? How long have you known this reader? What is your relationship to him/her? In what contexts did you observe his/her reading experiences?

*Part B. Student's Reading Experiences—In and Out of School*

Using the surveys and inventories we discussed in class or drawing on your own questions, provide a comprehensive look at this reader's experiences in and out of school. (Note: if you are profiling an early elementary reader, you might need to draw upon other sources, such as parents or teachers, for some information.)

What types of stages can you identify in this reader's experiences/development? What types of texts does s/he read in and outside of school?

*Part C. Student's Participation in School Reading Contexts*

Based on your observations (and perhaps the student's own assessment), how would you describe this student's participation in school reading contexts? Is s/he an active contributor to discussions about texts? In small groups? What reading behaviors do you see him/her exhibiting in school-related contexts?

*Part D. Holistic Analysis of Student as a Reader*

Based on your analysis of the data you've collected (the student's writing, your journals about the student, etc.), provide a holistic analysis of this reader.

What are the student's strengths and weaknesses as a reader and how do you know? What strategies does the student use to read texts? What strategies might he/she develop to read more effectively?

With what types of texts is this reader successful? Why? What types of texts cause this reader difficulty? How? What does the student value as a reader? What does this reader look for in a text? What "turns off" this reader?

What motivates this reader to read? Why? What classroom activities/strategies best help this reader to learn? (e.g. collaborative groups, oral reading, silent sustained reading, writing about the reading, creating graphics/visuals, etc.)

*Part E. Reflections on Your Future Teaching of Reading/Literature*

What has this systematic observation of a particular reader taught you about reading instruction, about reading strategies/processes, about organizing the classroom to promote reading, about your own assumptions about reading, about your identity as a future teacher? What texts have we read this semester that connect to/explain/inform some of the observations/analysis that you make about this reader? In what ways?

What recommendations would you make about organizing the classroom/curricula to support this reader?

NOTE: Throughout your report, use quotes from the reader you are profiling to give the audience a sense of what the student is like. Be sure to provide concrete examples to support your analysis about the reader's abilities/processes, etc.

*Part F. Appendix*

Copies of all Data Collected on the Student (interview notes, surveys, worksheets, observations, student writing, etc.)

Timetable:

Thursday, November 9<sup>th</sup> Bring journals and records for case study projects. We will work in class on analyzing and interpreting your data.

Tuesday, November 28

First drafts of Case Studies Due—bring three copies for response tables

Tuesday, December 5<sup>th</sup>

Case Study Project Due and Class Presentations Begin

Thursday, December 7<sup>th</sup>

Finish Class Presentations on Case Studies