



# We have to start trusting our students

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Mina Shaughnessy: *intelligence of the student's mistake* (1977)

# Overall goal = present ideas, practices + questions, topics


- Institutional context, basic writing context
- Why trusting students matters
- Reflection + contract grading models, options
- Antiracist, social justice pedagogy

# Albion College—institutional context

- Recent FY classes – increased diversity of students:
  - F16 = 35% underrepresented
  - F17 = nearly 40% underrepresented
- FYW not Gen-Ed requirement: 1/3 of students required or recommended; writing placement during new student orientation
- Graduation requirements include timed rising junior essay exam: WCE (from 1970s!)

# ENGL 100—basic writing class context

- Course taught fall semester only: required based on student writing placement results
- Students in course more diverse than college student population (ethnicity, race, 1<sup>st</sup> gen, NNS, etc.)
- Students who place into ENGL 100 less likely to persist at four-year college



# Why trusting students matters

Asao Inoue (2014: 343-44)

“Students find reasons to learn & grow as writers when their labor is truly honored, & they listen more carefully to feedback when grades are out of the way”

Teachers miss a lot when they only look for evidence in drafts: e.g., expected & unexpected consequences *in & from* the labors of writers; what can be learned from sweaty work (but not seen in products); fostering noncognitive behaviors & rewarding students for those behaviors

Teacher resistance to alternative grading systems “rooted in a distrust of students, a lack of faith in students”

# Why trusting students matters

## Writing assessment, grading

- Poe & Inoue, Nov 2016 *College English* (119): “So much of the writing assessment work we do seems complicit in sustaining inequality.”

## Student reflection, discussion, & revision

- Julie Lindquist on the importance of “knowing students” (175): “histories, social situations, cultural backgrounds, class positions, material situations, learning styles, affective predicaments, & psychic states”  
+ **scarce *time* to learn about & from/with students...**

# Learning about & from students

Bruce Horner (“About Me”):

- *[M]any of the difficulties students experience with college writing result from damaging myths that circulate widely in the culture about what writing involves, and from material (including institutional) constraints on students’ work, rather than from any inherent limitations in the students themselves (emphasis added).*

Poe & Inoue (2016, 123): **Social justice and fairness are always...ongoing mutually beneficial projects**, not competing traditions.

# Learning about & from students

## ENGL 100 student reflections (handout)

- Learning from peers: class discussion, peer feedback, group draft review conferences, etc.
- Learning to be flexible, responsible: manage time, revisions, community membership, etc.
- Learning to write, edit/revise: creativity, interpretation, & learning with others

# Student learning, reflection

Inoue (2014, 347): daily student work with “noncognitive behaviors...promoted in the ‘Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing’ (CWPA, et al. 2011)”

- *engagement*: writing drafts w/out considering quality
- *openness & creativity*: explore new territory, ideas, formats, or ways of understanding
- *persistence*: sustaining interest despite a lack of apparent results
- *responsibility*: for own learning & learning of peers

# Student learning, reflection

Eodice, et al., *Meaningful Writing Project* (2017)

Meaningful writing occurs when students are invited to...

- tap into the power of personal connection
- immerse themselves in what they are thinking, writing, & researching
- experience what they are writing as applicable to the real world
- imagine their future selves

# Student learning, reflection

## ENGL 100 basic writing class

- Designed, taught as transition to college: writing = focus of transition, of class
- Hjortshoj's *Transition to College Writing* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)
- Frequent, ongoing student reflection, self-assessment (individual & group activities)
- Frequent in-class reading, writing, & reflection activities (individual & group)
- Individual & group conferences: drafts, feedback, etc.
- Portfolio revisions, reflections, etc.
- No zero grading policy (for major projects)

# Contract grading models, options

Brief overview of selected models, options, etc.

Movement from written product to writing process;  
+ toward student labor & reflection, etc.

**Border of student labor, learning, & failure/success =  
point of learning, change, identity, & possibility**

**+ problem of time constraints (Lindquist, etc.): time of  
& for students, teachers, programs, degrees, etc.**

# Contract grading models, options

Irv Peckham (IP)

Ira Shor (IS)

Jane Danielewicz &  
Peter Elbow (JD)

Paul Thomas (PT)

John Warner (JW)

Asao Inoue (AI)

# Contract grading models, options

Trusting students (opportunities to show best work, learning, etc.)

- JD: guaranteed B if students do required activities (regardless of writing “quality”); contracts give students more control of grading “activities”
- IP: showing up & doing work = 50% of grade
- JW: for contract to work, need to structure course “around the behaviors of writers”
  - +CWPA habits of mind?

# Contract grading models, options

Student reflection & process = markers of learning

- IP: portfolios (mid + final) = extensive reflections about student's own doing & learning
- AI (2015): reflection letters for major paper drafts; problems posed by own judgment of writing, in peer perspectives on writing
- NCTE Listening Tour (2014) = insights into writers attitudes, beliefs, & writing practices

# Contract grading models, options

Student labor, learning, & failure/success =  
moments of possibility, growth

- JW: writing requires “willingness to risk & fail & learn from those failures”
- IS (2009): After-Class Group = student co-teachers, evaluators of class sessions, activities, doing, & learning
- AI: productive failure: point of visible “unsuccess” = “opportunity to learn, grow, & develop in purposeful ways” (2014: 346)

# Contract grading models, options

Toward antiracist, social justice pedagogy?

- PT: De-grading writing classroom increases importance & impact of peer conferencing by removing teacher from primary evaluator role
- IS: Negotiating terms of grading & learning calls out complex civic behaviors; is counter-hegemonic
- AI: productive failure “creates more purposeful & pedagogical consequences...for students of color, multilingual students & working-class students”



# Time = key factor

Problem of time constraints (Lindquist, etc.):  
time of & for students, teachers, programs,  
degrees, etc.

How to use these kinds of teaching elements—  
reflection, contract grading options, student talk  
& writing conferences—to build time for  
knowing students, to learning from & with  
students, from & with colleagues???

Anything else???