

LIBERAL ARTS FACULTY INTERVIEW

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON TEACHER EDUCATION
116 ERICKSON HALL
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
EAST LANSING, MI 48824-1034

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INTRODUCTION

To the interviewer: *Comments and questions to be addressed to the person are indicated by bold typeface.*

Say: I really appreciate you making time for this interview. I'll be taping the interview when it has been completed. I want you to know that we will not show this transcript to anyone else in the department or university/college. As you may know, I am part of a research project that is investigating the nature of teacher education across a number of different programs in the United States. Although your class is a liberal arts class and not a teacher education class per se, we are very interested in including that claim that the primary prerequisite for teaching is a sound understanding of the subject matter. This stance suggests that liberal arts education is actually the heart of teacher education. Whether or not this claim is true, it is true that teachers take many liberal arts classes in the course of their education. Thus, if only by default, liberal arts faculty are teacher educators and we are interested in understanding what happens in those classes, as well as classes that are officially housed in departments or colleges of education.

The interview has two parts. In the first part, I am going to ask you to walk me through your course. I'll ask you questions about things like the content of the class, its aims or objectives, and the nature of the students who you have. I will also ask you questions about the ways in which you evaluate your students, specifically what standards of performance you set for them.

During the second part of the interview, we'll switch gears and I will present you with a series of vignettes about what teachers have said to use in our interviews and observations thus far and ask you to react to them. Your reactions will not only help us with our analyses, but they should also shed light on the ways in which you think about teaching and/or teacher education.

Do you have any questions?

Part I: Walking through the syllabus

Say: I will start the interview by asking you a few general questions about the course.

-If you were to summarize the course in a couple of sentences, what would you say?

-How long have you taught this course?

-Did you create the course?

Probe: **If so, how did you decide what it should be about?**

Probe: **If not, who did?**

-Are students required to take this course?

-When do students typically take this class?

-Is this course related to any other courses in the department or the university?

-Are there any prerequisites for the course?

Probe: **Are there any prerequisite courses?**

Probe: **Are there any other prerequisites, e.g., experiences?**

Is this course a prerequisites for other courses?

Does anyone else teach this course?

Probe: **If so, who are they?**

Probe: **If so, is there any standardization across components? That is, do you use the same syllabi , assignments, or handouts?**

Probe: **Do you meet as a group to discuss the component?**

-If so, when?

Okay. Let's move on to the objectives of the course.

-Can you tell me about the objectives of the course? What are they?

-In the best of all possible worlds, what would a student take away from the experience of participating in this course? That is, are there particular things that you expect interns to know about or care about as a result of their participation in this component?

-Do you think that there are special ways to teach this subject matter (e.g., given its organization or substance)?

Probe: If so, might students learn anything about teaching this subject matter from what you do in class?

-Do you think there are special ways to learn this subject matter?

Probe: If so, would a student learn anything about what you have to do to learn this subject matter?

Now I'd like to move on to the texts and/or readings that are associated with this course.

NOTE: If there are a lot of readings for the course, ask the following. If there are only a few readings for the course, ask the first set of questions for every reading.

-Could you select the three most important readings for the course and describe them for me?

Probe: **What is the name of the first piece?**

Probe: **What is the author of this piece?**

Probe: **What would you summarize the piece?**

Probe: **What makes this reading significant to the class?**

Probe: **Can you briefly explain to me what you hope students will get from it?**

Probe: **What has been your experience with how students react to this reading?**

Probe: **What is the name of the second piece?**

Probe: **What is the author of this piece?**

Probe: **How would you summarize the piece?**

Probe: **What makes this reading significant to the class?**

Probe: **Can you briefly explain to me what you hope students will get from it?**

Probe: **What has been your experience with how students react to this reading?**

Probe: **What is the name of the third piece?**

Probe: **Who is the author of this piece?**

Probe: **How would you summarize the piece?**

Probe: **What makes this reading significant to the class?**

Probe: **Can you briefly explain to me what you hope students will get from it?**

Probe: **What has been your experience with how students react to this reading?**

-Are there any other readings that are particularly important for the course?

Probe: **What are they?**

Probe: **Could you briefly describe them for me?**

Probe: **What makes them important?**

-Have you changed the readings over the course of the time that you have taught this class?

If so, in what ways?

Now let's talk about the schedule of topics for this component.

-Can you list for me the topics that are covered in the course?

-How are these topics ordered?

Probe: Why are the topics ordered in this way?

-Are the topics clustered in any way?

Probe: **If so, how are they clustered?**

Probe: **How are the clusters related to one another?**

-Can you walk me through a typical meeting of the course?

Probe: **How do things start?**

Probe: **What do the students do?**

Probe: **What do you do?**

Probe: **Anything else?**

Probe: **How does it end?**

-Are there any special lessons that you have developed for this class?

Probe: **If so, can you describe them for me?**

Okay. Now can you tell me about the course requirements and assignments?

-What are students required to do in the course?

Probe: **Is attendance mandatory?**

Probe: **Do they have to write papers?**

Probe: **Do they have to make presentations?**

Probe: **Do they have to participate in discussions?**

Probe: **Are they required to meet with you independently or in groups?**

-Can you list any assignments the students are required to do?

NOTE: If there are a lot of assignments in the class, you should ask the following set of questions. If there are only a few assignments, you should ask the educator to describe each of the course assignments.

-Among these many assignments, are there different types or categories of assignments that students are required to complete (e.g., study questions, weekly problem sets, journal entries)?

Probe: **If so, can you describe each category of assignment for me?**

-Now I would like you to select two assignments from among the different assignments students are required to complete. Try to pick assignments that are: (1) major, that is, they contribute substantially to the student's work in the class, and (2) are representative of the kind of thing that you want students to learn or to think about in this class. Once you have selected the assignments, we'll proceed.

Probe: **Can you briefly describe the first assignment that you picked?**

Probe: **Why did you select this assignment as one to discuss with me?**

Probe: **What is the student required to do?**

Probe: **Take a minute to recall a good assignment that you received from a student. Can you describe it for me?**

-What made it good?

-How did you respond to it?

Probe: **Conversely, take a minute to recall a poor assignment that you received. Can you describe it for me?**

-What made it poor?

-How did you respond to it?

Probe: **Why is this assignment part of the course? That is, what do you hope to accomplish with this assignment?**

Now I will ask you the same set of questions about the second assignment you selected.

Probe: **Can you briefly describe it for me?**

Probe: **Why did you select this assignment as one to discuss with me?**

Probe: **What is the student required to do?**

Probe: **Take a minute to recall a good assignment that you received from a student. Can you describe it for me?**

-What made it good?

-How did you respond to it?

Probe: **Conversely, take a minute to recall a poor assignment that you received. Can you describe it for me?**

-What made it poor?

-How did you respond to it?

Probe: **Why is this assignment part of the course? That is, what do you hope to accomplish with this assignment?**

-Is there a midterm for the course?

Probe: **If so, can you describe it to me?**

-Similarly, is there a final for the course?

Probe: **If so, can you describe it to me?**

-Do you give students any cumulative, formal evaluation or grade in this course?

Alternative probes include:

Probe: **If so, by what process do you evaluate/grade them?**

Probe: **What are the criteria you use?**

-why do you use these criteria?

Probe: **How are different criteria/assignments weighted in the final evaluation?**

-Are there any other ways that you evaluate students that are less formal?

Before we move on to the second half of the interview, I would like to request copies of the assignments you've described, plus any other course-related documents that you feel would help me get a sense about your course.

Part II: Reflecting on vignettes

Now we'll switch gears. As you know, part of our research involves interviewing and observing teachers who are participants in teacher education programs. Through these interviews and observations we hope to learn about the ways in which they learn and the kinds of things they learn, as well as think about. During this part of the interview I would like to draw upon your expertise as a teacher, getting your reactions to some of the things that our teachers have said and done. I will present you with three selections from the data that we have already collected. Each time I present you with a vignette, I'll ask you the same series of questions.

(Hand TE vignette 1.1) I'll give you a copy of the vignette so that you can read along. Imagine that you are teaching your course and one of the students raises her hand and says: Today a little girl came to class very excited. She told me that she had figured out a theory that I never told them in class. She explained to me that she had discovered that as the perimeter of a closed figure increases, the area also increases. She showed me this picture to prove what she was doing.

Your student then says to you, What should I have done?

-How would you respond to this student?

-Why would you respond in that way?

-Anything else?

We've asked the teachers whom we are studying in this project to tell us what they would do if a pupil approached them with this discovery. One of the teachers whom we interviewed in the fall responded by saying the following (Hand TE vignette 1.2).

Please take a few minutes to read this response and then I'll ask you about your reactions to it.

(After the TE has finished reading the response, ask the following questions)

-What do you think about the teacher's response?

-Imagine that you had observed a teacher respond to a pupil in this way. What would you say to the individual in a post-observation conference about that particular incident?

-Why?

-Anything else?

Finally, before we move on to the second vignette, I would like to put you in the role of teacher. If you were a teacher and a little girl came in and told you about this new theory she had discovered, how would you respond to the pupil?

-Why would you respond in that way?

-Anything else?

Now let's move on to the next vignette. (hand the TE a copy of vignette 2.1) **An student in your course says When I was teaching today, one of my second graders asked me whether to use is or are in the following sentence.**

None of the books_____in the library.

The students then says to you, her professor, What should I do?

-How would you respond to this individual?

-Why would you respond in that way?

-Anything else?

One of the teachers whom we interviewed this fall responded to this vignette by saying:
(hand the TE vignette 2.2)

Take some time to read this response.

(After the TE has read the excerpt)

-What are your reactions to this teacher's response?

-Imagine that you had observed a teacher respond to a child in this way. What would you say to the teacher about this particular incident?

-Why?

-Anything else?

Before we go on to the next vignette, I'll put you in the role as teacher again. If you were a second grade teacher and a child asked you this question, how would you, as a teacher, respond to the student?

-Why would you respond in that way?

Alright now, let's do one last vignette. (Hand the TE a copy of vignette 3.1) **Again, imagine that another student in your class is teaching fifth grade in an inner city school. At the beginning of the school year, she says, AI asked my kids to write autobiographies. My main goal for this assignment was to get my students comfortable with writing. During the assignment, I noticed that one little boy wasn't writing. When I asked him why, he said he had nothing to write.**

The teacher asks you, How should I have responded?

-How would you respond to the individual?

-Why would you respond in that way?

One of the teachers whom we interviewed this fall responded to this vignette by say:
(hand the TE vignette 3.2)

Take some time to read this response.

(After the TE has read the excerpt)

-What are your reactions to this teacher's response?

-Imagine that you had observed a teacher respond to a pupil in this way. What would you say to the teacher about this particular incident in a post-observation conference?

-Why?

-Anything else?

Finally, I would like to put you in the role of teacher one more time. If you were a fifth grade teacher who had given this assignment and you realized that this little boy was not writing, how would you, as a teacher, respond to the student?

-Why would you respond in that way?

Part III: Concluding the interview

Well, that's it. Do you have anything else that you would like to say?

I want to thank you for your participation in this interview. I have taken the liberty of putting your name on the Center's mailing list so that you will receive copies of our newsletters and notices about publications. Please feel free to call me in the future if you have any questions or comments you would like to make about this interview or the Center's work. Again, thank you.

Note: Some teacher educators will be participating in other interviews and/or having their components observed by our staff. You might want to make reference to future participation in your final comments if it is relevant.

Vignette 1.1

Teacher: Today one of my pupils came to class very excited. She told me that she had figured out a theory that I never told them in class. She explained to me that she had discovered that as the perimeter of a closed figure increases, the area also increases. She showed me this picture to prove what she was doing.

The teacher then says to you, What should I have done?

How would you respond to this individual?

Vignette 1.2

Teacher: I would say That's fantastic! I would say That is wonderful that you went home and you thought about this and you came back with this new idea. Then I would say, Well, you know I didn't bring it up in class, but you are absolutely right, and I would say People have discovered this, but I didn't mention it. Today I'm going to mention it to the class because you are right, I didn't say it and it's an important fact that's true. I would praise her for it because she did , -a new idea that she thought up-she sat down and developed this new idea without-nobody told her to do this and she did. I would be very excited about it because that's exactly the kind of thing I'm trying to encourage.

Vignette 2.1

Teacher: When I was teaching today, one of my second grade students asked me whether to use is or are in the following sentence.

None of the books _____ in the library.

What should I have done?

What would you respond to this individual?

Vignette 2.2

T: I would say use are none in the library. None but I don't know how I would respond to tell you the truth.

I: Would you say anything to the student?

T: I would tell him that at this point I don't know but I am sure I will learn what to say...That phrase is, none blank in the library. None is in the library. None is in the library does not sound right. It is not right, it is None of the books are in the library.

Vignette 3.1

Teacher C: I asked my students to write autobiographies. My main goal for this assignment is to get my students comfortable with writing. During the assignment, I noticed that one student wasn't writing. When I asked him why, he say he has nothing to write.

How should I have responded?

What would you respond to this individual?

Vignette 3.2

T: Well, first of all, if it was just a writing assignment to them to write, I would tell them that I wasn't going to be grading it per se for a permanent grade. That I just wanted him to get started writing. So that there was no pressure on him in that respect. And then I would ask him questions about his life, if he has taken any trips, what his parents were like, if he has any brothers and sisters, did he have fights with them. And telling him that I would be interested in him writing down like that. It doesn't have to be anything spectacular. I would ask him if he ever went to visit his grandparents somewhere else, something like that. I could tell him it doesn't have to be a very detailed, grammatically correct writing assignment. I just wanted to get him into the feel for writing and so I asked him something about himself because I thought that was the easiest thing to write about because he knows himself better than any other subject.