

MEMORANDUM

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TO: John Egan, Teaching Portfolio
FROM: Allison Tom *Allison Tom*
DATE: December 18, 2001
RE: Evaluation of teaching

The Department of Educational Studies does not usually conduct formal in-class evaluations of graduate student and sessional teaching, but I agreed to visit one of Mr. John Egan's class sessions and review his teaching for the purposes of representing his teaching in job applications. Mr. Egan has taken one course and one comprehensive examination from me but I am not a member of his dissertation supervisory committee.

I visited one meeting of the course EDST 314 "Analysis of Education" on Monday November 26, 2001, reviewed the course outline and discussed Mr. Egan's philosophy of teaching and teaching strategies both before and after class. These form the basis for my evaluation. Other materials, such as the Faculty of Education-sponsored formal student evaluations can be included in the portfolio and so were not included here.

I address the following topics: classroom atmosphere, presentation skills, and course content and structure, using the questions usually used for evaluation of faculty teaching.

Classroom atmosphere. I attended a class late in the term. Students were tired and we were meeting in the afternoon. In spite of this, it was clear that students were attentive and engaged. Students responded to the instructor with warmth and a clear lack of apprehension. There was a good amount of friendly joking as the class moved into the presentation; students obviously felt comfortable with the instructor and with each other and yet took the class seriously. During the class conversation, students from a variety of backgrounds spoke; no student was allowed to dominate the conversation and roughly 75% of the 30 students present spoke during the class session. Different perspectives and different kinds of questions were presented and were responded to with respect. Students treated each other with respect and warmth. I noted clear answers to questions and also a willingness to ensure that the students were satisfied with responses. A student who seemed to have a tendency to interject less-relevant comments was handled with tact – he was not allowed to dominate the conversation but he was not derided either.

It was clear that the class has proceeded in an orderly fashion. There were references to assignments that needed to be turned in, returned, and responded to and I

saw no evidence of confusion on either students' or instructor's part. The mechanics of running a class were handled with great competence.

Class presentation. The presentation led students through a discussion of the elements of reflective practice. The instructor prepared a set of well-sequenced overheads to support discussion, moving easily between presenting his own material and discussing ideas as students raised them. The overheads were well-designed and clear, providing a good visual focus for the conversation. The instructor moved from topic to topic with questions to the students that engaged them in the presentation and discussion. When students' responses indicated confusion, topics were addressed. When students' responses indicated a desire for more conversation, the discussion opened into group conversation until the topic had been fully discussed. The presentation had been thoughtfully organized; it clearly built on previous discussions. Students and instructor referred to the day's readings and to previous readings and to previous conversations. The topics were presented in an orderly and logical way that demonstrated care in preparation; when students raised questions that were not specifically in the "lesson plan," the instructor responded in a way that made it clear that he had thought about and was prepared to respond to such questions.

Overall, the instructor was clearly comfortable with discussing difficult topics and had created an environment where students could do the same. It was clear to me that this class session on reflective practice built on conversations that had made students comfortable discussing such thorny issues as racism, sexism and homophobia in the school environment. Students talked in a comfortable and relaxed fashion with each other and the instructor about these topics, and about the need to carefully attend to their own development as teachers. It seemed to me that an environment had been created where students had indeed been challenged on their own personal beliefs but that, equally important, students had found the environment one in which they could pursue these questions in an appropriate balance of safety and challenge.

I note that this course, EDST 314, is a course required of all UBC teacher education students. It is well known in our department as a class that can be difficult to teach because it engages students with topics they may not want to address and demands that they examine their personal beliefs and behaviours. This makes the obvious ease and depth of conversation in the room very impressive.

Course Outline The course's purpose and general outline is mandated by the Department and the Teacher Education program, but there are significant opportunities for individual instructors to develop their own presentations within these parameters. This section of the course was well-designed. It moved students through the required topics at the best pace allowed by the competing demands of the curriculum and the time frame. The assignments required that students synthesize their readings and understanding and asked an appropriate balance of scholarly summary and personal integration. Descriptions of assignments, due dates and other requirements were clear. I note with approval that the student information form specifically asks students to identify any disabilities they may have that need accommodation. This explicit level of attention to difference demonstrates that the instructor understands and is enacting the material he is teaching and is further evidence of care and respect in teaching.

Summary Mr. Egan's background is in adult education and his skills at engaging and teaching adults were clear in his comfortable and highly competent class management and presentation. Equally striking, he was teaching a group of pre-service elementary teachers with no visible difficulty. He made reference to the types of dilemmas students would encounter in their classes, discussed practicum experiences, and talked about the structure of the school system and displayed his knowledge of and willingness to meet his students' learning needs. Clearly, Mr. Egan has taken the time to learn about the teacher education program in order to teach well in it. This bodes well for his success teaching a wide variety of students at many different levels. Students were offered a good mix of abstract "theory" and opportunities to integrate the material in grounded and practical ways.

In my visit to the class, in my review of the teaching materials and in conversations before and after my visit, I was struck by Mr. Egan's respect for the students taking his class and his commitment to teaching well.