Community of Practice Discussion:
Writing and Publishing a Peer-Reviewed Teaching Practice Article

1 February 2016, 1:00-2:30 p.m./ WI2053/ Leora Freedman

We will conduct a round-table discussion, in which the facilitator will pose a question that each participant may respond to, in order around the table. If time permits, participants may make follow-up comments.

1. Why write an article about teaching practice—as opposed to putting the time into a research study? If you’ve written an article about practice, what was your motivation?

2. What are some of the possible components of a teaching practice article? How would you structure the article?

3. Since you cannot ethically report your internal assessments in a teaching practice article, what kinds of evidence will you use to support your claims?

4. Why would people in your field read a teaching practice article? If you’re writing one, what do you hope your readers will get out of it?

5. What kinds of journals publish peer reviewed teaching practice articles? How can you find them?
Here are links to a few peer-reviewed teaching practice articles which I’ve written or co-authored:

“We Using close reading as a course theme in a multilingual disciplinary classroom”

“Reading to Write’ in East Asian Studies”
http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/reading/freedman.cfm

“Centring the Modality of Speech? Pedagogical Issues and Program Design”

Here are some sample comments I received during the peer review process:

(first reviewer for “Using close reading…”)
Although I know that this is a teaching article rather than a traditional research article, I think your piece would benefit from being more firmly grounded in relevant literature. Before diving into the instructional approaches of this course, I suggest providing a brief overview of the relevant literature in which this approach is situated. You do weave in references throughout, but I think being upfront about the research base early on would help to provide a better foundation for what you share.

Second reviewer: First, headings in the manuscript would assist with the overall organization of the piece. Here are some examples you may want to consider: Introduction or Context, Description of Intervention, Professional Development of the TAs, and Conclusion. These signposts would help the reader trace the author(s) ideas/experience with the intervention in this context more clearly.

Reviewers for forthcoming book chapter based on “‘Reading to Write’…”
This article is solid, but needs a bit more explication of institutional structure at the “four-year research institution”, what EAS is and how it fits into curriculum (e.g., do only EAS majors take these courses or do they fulfill a university requirement comparable to the U.S.’s general education requirement? How do TAs function overall in the EAS Department and in other “four-year research institution” departments—do they always run tutorials, or might their responsibilities be different in other disciplinary contexts in which the “Reading-to-Write” initiative is not being incorporated? More clarity on this background information would help readers better contextualize the “Reading-to-Write” initiative and how it fits into the institution and its current practices as a whole.

Marginal comments by reviewers of “Reading to Write”:
Is there some hard evidence on this?
Not sure what IRB rules you may have in Canada, but as noted in my general memo to all authors, you need to indicate if you cleared your project with your IRB (Institutional Review Board) or determined it was not necessary.

How were these conclusions reached? Were data collected in some way by the TAs? I have the same question related to department morale - what indicators lead to this conclusion?

Most of the positive assessment of the initiative is perception based—is a different assessment also in the works that might reveal students’ growth in reading/writing ability?

(Excerpts from my revised version, which the peer reviewers have received with enthusiasm):

Although a formal study of this initiative has not yet been undertaken, the frequent meetings between the ELL coordinator, the Lead TA, faculty members, and the course TAs led to detailed discussions that focused on the perceived results of this intervention. (Internal assessments for the purpose of revising the program design have been done, with the Lead TA periodically reviewing random samples of students’ writing, as well as distributing student surveys to capture students’ own perceptions of their progress. These results are not included in this article). Some TAs noted that students they observed in their tutorials still seemed to focus primarily on the readings used in the low-stakes writing assignments, and they were often not as well prepared to discuss other readings in class. In other discussions about their tutorials with the ELL coordinator, TAs pointed out that during tutorial discussions it seemed to them that students had done a significant amount of the reading, if not all of it, since they were able to respond to questions and comments from both the TA and other students about the assigned reading—a type of interaction that was rare in these tutorials prior to this initiative.

In reflecting on the reading responses they had marked, as well as on the essay assignments that often developed from these short responses, the TAs also felt that their students had benefited from articulating some of the course concepts prior to writing the research essay. Participants in this teaching initiative told the ELL coordinator that department morale had been raised, since teaching the tutorials was no longer a monologue by the TA for students who hadn’t done the reading, and TAs’ attempts to start discussions were more often rewarded with student participation. The EAS department was also energized by the interest and admiration of its pedagogical experiment among the university’s administration and other departments, as well as the use by other departments of materials generated by the initiative. The significant drop in plagiarism cases contributed to this aura of success. At the end of the year, the Lead TA was nominated by students and faculty in EAS for the university’s TA teaching excellence award, which she won.