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Teaching & Learning III

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Round Reflection #1, Spring 2016

Today, February 11, 2016, I joined Jen for her round with juniors in English at University

Park Campus School. Her lesson centered on her open-ended unit of creative writing, where

students had the opportunity to draft and write original creative pieces that could be

workshopped by classmates. Jen's round consisted of showing the rounds-goers what the peer

revision process looked like, and in this case it took the form of two workshop circles running

concurrently. I found her lesson plan and execution to be a very welcoming, authentic

environment. On top of that, her work today was definitely Best Practice, as student voice was

paramount and the writing process came alive. My favorite aspect of her lesson was how she had

clearly done work scaffolding discussion; students knew what they were talking about in their

work as well as each other's work.

Jen's class began with some time for direct instruction. Students seemed to trickle in at

the leisure, and class started a few minutes late. Jen calmly explained the work for today and

how it was like other days the past two weeks. Students then were tasked with breaking up into

their two workshop circles—at which point they were completely released for the remainder of

the period. Each group was given two twenty minute blocks of time, enough for two students in

each circle to share their work and receive feedback. I was impressed in the circle I sat with that

they gave each other thoughtful and substantive feedback throughout the process. Also, with less

teacher "interference" (though I do not like the negative connotation of that word), students each got the chance to give feedback.

I like how Jen created an open-ended unit with a lot of structure. Students were made very aware of daily expectations, and this showed. Jen did not visit our group, because she did not need to; students were self-starting and self-sufficient. When students got off-track, which happened very rarely, they were able to self-direct back to relevant conversation. I wish that students had taken some time to go over the "Creative Writing Revision Checklist" that Jen provided for them, as this would have allowed me to see whether they took some of the advice offered. Jen will be able to tell, of course, based on the work she receives.

Energy in the room also seemed to be high. Students seemed genuinely interested in the work. At least, that is the impression I got from their commitment to giving good feedback such as "I am curious why you made the decision…," "When you mentioned that, I think the imagery could be stronger; have you tried…?" Students were working with each other. The group next to us seemed to be a bit louder with their energy, but our group was fully engaged and interested. Everyone spoke, and it also seemed that everyone was listened to.

Like others said in the post round, I too agree that all students ought to be required to partake in the workshopping process, particularly because this is good for building a community of writers. Additionally, I also would like to see class broken into four groups, which both solves the first part about running out of time to workshop everyone as well as gives everyone in the groups more time to talk about peers' writing. I think this was all time well spent and I look forward to hearing about the release party for their writing.