NEIL BROWNLEE

REFLECTIVE TEACHING PORTFOLIO

INSPIRATION

At 19 I was drafted into the US Army and assigned to the role of Combat Engineer. Being a NYC kid I didn't know the first thing about the job of a Combat Engineer which is building bridges, roads, air strips and landing areas for airborne forces, all the while serving as an infantryman who could eliminate the enemy. The Army set up teaching on two levels – Advanced Infantry Training and On the Job Training. They were called AIT and OJT for short.

AIT consisted of sitting in classrooms, reading through texts, studying charts and graphs and listening to lectures. In OJT we took the classroom out into the field and applied all the talk to actual action. To my surprise I not only learned how to be a Combat Engineer I found that I also enjoyed actually constructing structures that would be put to use.

Basically this is how I teach. Lecturing and talking and Power-pointing is all well and good. But I see a definite uptick in interest and energy level in the classroom when the students put all the talk into action through writing and creative assignments that they complete either individually or in teams. Not surprisingly I have a number of students in each class who will come to me at the end of the course and tell me they are now considering being copywriters, creative strategists, or broadcast producers.

INSIGHTS

A successful lesson I give in many classes involves soliciting the opinions of students about people they know or think they know. I draw on the blackboard a breakdown of society. I divide the population into age and gender segments such as Men 18 – 24, Women 24 -35, Men 45 – 54, and so on.

Then we go around the room and the students toss out what they think makes these people tick. Do they work or not? Are they married or not? What is important to them? What are their biggest concerns or fears? What are their goals and expectations?

I write their responses down on the blackboard and then we stand back and review them. At the conclusion of the info-gathering I then tell the students that I have been doing this same exercise with virtually every class for the past 15 years and the responses have been basically the same in every class and throughout the years.

What do they conclude from this? They discover that their opinions and views of people who are not in their immediate demographic are not shaped by pragmatic experience but by perceptions and what they have heard or read.

From this they learn that opinions are interesting but if they want to be a successful creative person in the marketing world then they have to go out and experience…gather…undergo personal interaction with the particular market they are targeting.

CHANGE

My most unsuccessful lesson, and I learned not to try it in class after attempting twice and watching it fail, involved expecting the students to comprehend and remember technical definitions that even I rarely use in my work.

The actual lesson involved listing all of the various grammatical elements involved in writing body copy. For example, what is a thesis? What is voice? What is tone? The students would dutifully write down the definition and then after we went through the list they would not only fail to remember the definition but they wouldn't comprehend the meaning when it came to applying it to the writing of copy.

Yet the students needed to understand the terminology. So the next time I went through this lesson I showed an actual piece of body copy and then we broke it down into the pertinent elements. The students learned the term but more importantly saw for themselves how it applies in the real world.

INCORPORATE

Why introduce the use of more technology into my teaching? Ask a student to produce a pencil. Or expect them to stop taking notes on a computer. How about trying to ban smartphones from the classroom.

Technology is a part of the student's classroom life but more importantly an integral part of their lifestyle. And this is not going to change.

Adaptation is a two-way street. As a teacher of marketing and advertising I have to adapt to the needs and wants of my target market which is the students of course. I either practice what I preach or I have to climb down from the pulpit.

SHARE IT OR SHIP OUT

Thanks to the use of technology I can see something one moment and share it with my class in the next moment. Lesson plans can become much more relevant and timely. Breaking news and developments in business can be incorporated into classes almost immediately.

Right now whenever I see an article or program that would interest my students or impact one of my lessons I bring it into class. This not only adds immediacy to the class it also makes it more credible to the students. After all if it's on TV or the internet today, and not just a case history in a tired textbook, it is real and sometimes important.

GRASPING THE FUTURE

Of course all of this technology only works if the students prosper from it. Right now I can see the results of the clips, articles, studies and programs that I incorporate into Blackboard and in the class being incorporated into the work of the students.

I do notice an increased level of attention and understanding on the part of the students – not all of them but a fair percentage.

As teacher and students utilize technologies as part of the learning experience I envision more interactivity between us.

Students can now contribute their own findings and share them with classmates. I truly believe that the sharing of information will become commonplace in teaching and the days of "I talk, you listen" will become less common.

We are entering the age of the "Information Handshake" and I'm looking forward to take hold of it as a teacher and participant.