

12/3 Seminar Summary

- Today, we divided that meeting into discussions about TAs' teaching philosophies and assessment of teachers. We felt that this was more useful and interesting than the standard "looking forward / looking backward" end-of-semester topic.
- We started the TAs off in their usual groups discussing their teaching statements. Elliot and Tim circulated the room and asked them about their statements individually, spending a minute or two with each, asking about the process of developing a statement (or a philosophy) went for them.
- We polled them about our seminar: what went well? What might be improved? If we have learned nothing else this semester, it is that we have an incredibly nice, easy-going crop of TAs, and none of them had anything negative to say. Either we are doing a great job, or they are truly the most gentle bunch ever assembled.
- We spent about an hour in flexible-grouping mode discussing some handouts, which dealt with the ongoing debate about how to assess teachers in this state. Most of the articles (and the discussion) dealt with primary schools, so may not have been directly relevant to our TAs, but Elliot and I made sure to stress a couple key points: they are public educators, and they are getting into education, and the question "how do I want to be assessed as an educator?" is a vital one, that leads to a great deal of self-reflection about one's practices.
- The discussion was smooth, and took about forty-five minutes. We shared a model with the TAs, they commented on it, and we summarized it. The most interesting parts were pro-con discussions about each plan and each point; for instance, what are the pros and cons of assessing a teacher's impact based on the test scores of his/her students? This led to a surprisingly spirited debate.
- The most contentious debate centered around, oddly enough, the question of whether or not teachers should be expected to attend their own classes regularly. No one in their right mind would argue that teachers should not be expected to do as much, but interesting points were raised regarding sick days and the like (i.e. some teachers may practice a more "holistic" approach and not always see a doctor, and sometimes you just get sick (say with food poisoning) and don't see a doctor, so is it fair to expect teachers to produce a doctor's statement every time they miss work for a "sick day"?).
- We said goodbye to our charges and wished them luck in the future, both in their studies and in their continuing quest to become effective educators. It was a wonderful semester, and we had a great time, and hope our students did as well.