Incorporating Comics into Lessons on Drafting and Revision

Mini-Lesson prepared by Steven L. Berg

"One solution I thought was interesting [for illustrating Maus] involved using this Eastern European children's book wood engraving style that I'd seen in some books of illustrations. But I found myself thoroughly dissatisfied with these wood-cut illustrations after a day or so."

—Art Spiegelman

In "Teaching Our Failures to Benefit Students," I argue that "We provide students with valuable insights about the writing process and help them gain critical thinking skills when we share our drafts with them." However, sharing work in progress—not just failed work—is important to help students learn about the revision process. Too often, our students begin writing and, once they stop writing, they consider themselves finished.

The strategies listed below are meant to supplement—not replace—more traditional strategies for teaching drafting, getting feedback on a manuscript, and making revisions. They will also help faculty members help students to avoid writing "The Technically Perfect 'C' Paper."

Strategies for Teaching Drafting and Revision with Comics

Strategy #1: Studying Nick Sousanis' Process

Individually or as part of a team, ask students to randomly review content in Sousanis' Spin, Weave, and Cut. Ask them to pay special attention to his thought processes.

If student's don't locate this information on their own, you might want to point out that Sousanis discusses scenes that were deleted from his dissertation before Unflattening was published. The dissertation—which was a finished document—needed further revision before it could become a publishable book. The two relevant blog entries are "Deleted Scenes and Reviews" and "Deleted Scenes 2 Sketching in Rhizo MI."

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http://scholarlyvoices.org/unflattening/mini/drafting-revision.html
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Photo Credit: Art Spiegelman initially drafted Mause in the style of block prints (top). He later revised the artwork (bottom). The images are © by Art Spiegelman and are not covered under the Creative Commons license.
Strategy #2: Maps for *Unflattening*

Nick Sousanis shares his first idea map for *Unflattening* from 14 April 2011 (p. 194). On the following pages, he includes his maps from 20 January 2012, 19 March 2012, and 21 January 2014. Drafts also appear in Sousanis' "PrintMag Ruts Rain Sketches" and throughout *Spin, Weave, and Cut*.

After students have discussed Sousanis' maps, ask them to draw a map for their next paper. This could be taught in conjunction with other strategies such as creating an outline or developing a thesis map.

Strategy #3: Draw Your Understanding

As I wrote in "Living Up to Our Expectations," I explained the teaching strategy I used for teaching my introductory composition students.

I won't ask students to tell me what Freire means [in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*] when he talks about the student as container or the banking concept of education. Nor will I give them a reading quiz. Instead, they will work together utilizing the technology of crayons and large sheets of blank paper to show these concepts. Continuing to work as teams, they will then draw their own concepts of the teacher/student relationship.

By asking students to draw concepts, they will think about them in a different way than when they do more formal outlines.
Strategy #4: Comic as First Draft

Ask students to create a comic for the first draft of their paper. This strategy can work especially well for teaching narrative.

One of the issues that we encounter when we ask students to draw is that they say that they cannot draw. When I first ask students to draw in class, I demonstrate my own lack of abilities. I even tell them that I am so lazy when I sketch that I use 人, the Chinese character for human, because it takes less time to write than a stick figure.

You might want to share the following Facebook conversation with your students where Bertha Blessed Wilson confesses that when she saw Sousanis' initial sketches that she thought he was drawing stick figures. Sousanis' response gets to the theme of this lesson.

Strategy #5: Construct a Star Diagram

This exercise is similar to brainstorming because students are expected to generate a list of ideas—not one single idea—about which they could write. Later, students can assess whether or not the potential topics fit the course requirements and if they interest them enough to spend the time necessary to pursue.

Detailed directions for "Construct a Star Diagram" can be found at Resources for Researchers.
Strategy #6: Mapping Your Outline

There is a value for formal outlines such as those described in "The Five Paragraph Essay" and "Developing a Thesis Map," using drawings to visualize the structure of a piece of writing can be a valuable tool for many students. Often called "Mind Mapping," these visualizations can show relationships in ways that formal outlines cannot. Even for students who prefer formal outlines, might benefit from doing a map of their topic as a pre-writing exercise.

Maps can be very simple, such as the one created by Charles Cave. But, as Kalle Westerling demonstrates, maps can become very complex.

URLs for Citations

"Teaching Our Failures to Benefit Students”
http://www.stevenlberg.info/blog/a-148/

teaching drafting
http://writing.stevenlberg.info/research/step06.html

feedback on a manuscript
http://writing.stevenberg.info/research/step07.html

making revisions
http://writing.stevenberg.info/research/step08.html

"The Technically Perfect 'C' Paper"
http://writing.stevenberg.info/mini/m004.html

Spin, Weave, and Cut
http://spinweaveandcut.com/

"Deleted Scenes and Reviews”
http://spinweaveandcut.com/deletedscenes1/

“Deleted Scenes 2 Sketching in Rhizo MI”
http://spinweaveandcut.com/deletedscenes2/

"PrintMag Ruts Rain Sketches”
http://spinweaveandcut.com/printmag-ruts-rain-sketches/
developing a thesis map
http://scholarlyvoices.org/unflattening/mini/drafting-revision.html

"Living Up to Our Expectations"
http://www.stevenberg.info/blog/a-144/

"Construct a Star Diagram"
http://writing.stevenberg.info/tutorials/star-diagram/

Resources for Researchers
http://writing.stevenberg.info/

“The Five Paragraph Essay”
http://writing.stevenberg.info/mini/m005.html

“Developing a Thesis Map”
http://writing.stevenberg.info/mini/m008.html

“Mind Mapping”
http://writing.stevenberg.info/mini/m006.html

Charles Cave [mind map]
http://writing.stevenberg.info/mini/m006.html

maps can become very complex [such as Kalle Westerling’s]
http://www.boylesque.info/2015/08/14/the-roots-and-routes-of-burlesque-visualization/