

Jennifer L. Groman, PhD  
**Year Five Application for Promotion and Tenure**  
**Teaching, Scholarship, and Service Reflection for 2017-2021**

**III. A. & IV. H. Reflection on Teaching**

In my first three years at the University, I concentrated my energies mostly within three themes: improving the **applicability** of the coursework; adding richness to the **interactions** within the course and with me; and aligning the courses with applicable local, state, and national **standards**. The simple act (all right, it wasn't all *that* simple) of pulling together all of my teaching and curriculum work for the Three Year Review invigorated me and gave me a feeling of being *rooted* at Ashland University as more than a faculty member. I felt impactful – the program, student lives, collegial relationships – all of the parts of my working life felt *right*. I am right where I belong.

Just as I began recovering from my Year Three Review, COVID entered and impacted everything – from work life to home life, from family interactions to social interactions, and from how my learners taught their students to how I did everything in *my* virtual classroom. The themes of the teaching portion of this Year Five Review are directly related to how COVID has impacted and continues to impact my teaching and curriculum work. The three themes that drive my teaching these days include the lasting changes **COVID** has brought to the teaching and learning process. As a result of COVID's influence, **differentiation** of content and products is necessary so students not only see this concept modeled in their gifted coursework but so they experience specific content they need in personally meaningful ways. And because these two themes can make online coursework muddled and confusing, a third theme of **improved clarity** is a constant focus in all aspects of my teaching life.

COVID made immediate and long-lasting changes in this program and how I teach. The immediate shift it inspired was that the deeply rooted rigidity of our lives seemed antithetical to this new world. That said, initially it appeared as though the COVID lockdowns in March, 2020, would not impact my teaching life in the least. The Talent Development program had moved online, so I felt prepared and protected. That is, until I suddenly realized that it was impossible for the courses to continue as stated in my syllabi. I had just completely overhauled the courses to improve applicability of the content to students' teaching lives, and this meant that all major culminating assignments were deeply embedded into their classrooms and interactions – traditional interactions – with their students and colleagues. For example, the Curriculum Methods (EDIS 651) course had a Curriculum Project implemented into their classroom, the Guidance and Counseling (EDIS 653) course had a face-to-face dialogue with students as its culminating project, the Internship (EDIS 796) and Practicum (EDUC 710) courses involved teaching new lessons in traditional classroom settings.

My immediate response was that I needed time and mental space to come to terms with the rapid changes occurring in the educational world so I could make good decisions about how to move forward. But I also knew that any immediate and major changes to course syllabi would compound the stress my students were already feeling. My students needed time and mental space to come to terms with the quick and vastly different adaptations they were being asked to make in their own classrooms. I made a drastic and, as it turned out, regenerative decision.

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I made a Blackboard announcement to all of my classes: Stop working on coursework immediately for one week. Just set it aside. Stop everything and concentrate on their home lives and adapting their teaching lives to COVID's changes. This felt strange – time is so precious in these courses. My syllabi are thick and I use every week to my advantage, but I just couldn't think straight about what changes to make, and I knew students felt the same way.

COVID gave me permission to be flexible. Flexibility is what opens our mental capacity for innovation. Giving students time to focus on their own lives and adaptations gave *me* time to do the same. After searching my professional books and my past experience for ideas, my response turned out to implement a concept I preached to students throughout their program, but did not always practice myself in higher education – differentiation. **Differentiation**, the second theme of my teaching reflection, is an obvious choice, based on my area of expertise. It is the accommodation of content, process, and product to the needs of the learner, and it is the staple of gifted education. Throughout the program we teach students various ways to accommodate for the gifted students in their classrooms, but I was not differentiating the content of my graduate courses very much myself.

I realized as I began planning the rest of the semester that each and every student on my roster is not only unique in *what* they teach (something I always knew and tried to accommodate), but *who* they taught (age level, diversity, students of rural, urban, suburban areas, factors that we now know made an considerable difference in their capacity to adapt to a virtual learning environment), and especially *where* they taught (and every district in Ohio was responding to this crisis in vastly different ways and to different extremes). Suddenly *how* students were going to be doing their jobs became a major factor not only in their lives, but in mine, at least if I was going to accommodate for their needs.

Reader, I adapted. I allowed students choices in how they applied the course readings and assignments, especially the culminating assignments for each course. I offered assignments that gave students ways they could use course learning to improve the immediate challenges of teaching in a virtual setting, or even a non-existent classroom environment, for many schools and households did not have the technology capacity to teach or learn virtually. I eliminated synchronous Zoom sessions, as teachers became more and more Zoom-exhausted at the end of the day. I increased my online office hours and expanded the course videos I posted each week to include self-care ideas, meditations or a “breathing minute” before starting on the week's work to give students a sense of calm before shifting gears to their own learning. I shared Ashland University's mental health offerings with students, and I extended more than a few assignment dropbox deadlines, implementing a three-day “grace period” for the dropbox, something that I continue to offer students to this day. New accommodations also include giving various readings for a few focus questions and allowing students to choose a topic of interest to them or needed in their teaching situation. In addition, they are also given a choice of how they respond to the readings, using video, powerpoint presentation, lesson plan or application idea, in addition to the traditional written focus question essay choice. The rubrics for assignments allow for the variety of content and styles, and students get the benefit of learning a wider variety of content through Padlet posts in a jigsaw style.

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With all of these new shifts and accommodations, I was aware of the perfectionistic nature of graduate students, especially those taking gifted coursework. They fretted every new adaptation, they worried they weren't "doing it right," and they doubted their own interpretations of any loosely detailed assignment. Thus emerged the third theme of the past two years, that of **clarity**, in this instance, **clarity of expectations**. I use all organizational, structural, and explanation-al (I made that up just now) tools I can to support students as they take intellectual risks with the course materials and assignment products. Syllabi have more details, more checklists and charts, and the Blackboard site has an improved structure with weekly folders. The addition of Padlet to most courses gives students a stronger sense of connection to one another, making it safer to take risks. The most significant change has manifested in my weekly videos. My recording and editing skills have improved over time, and the weekly videos are more detailed in explaining the work, but also distinctly telling students to trust their abilities in connecting to and applying the material to their lives. In addition, I continue to tell students I am a mastery teacher, which means they have more than one opportunity to get the grade they want for any given assignment. They can rewrite and resubmit assignments to get the grade they want, and the content and structural knowledge I know they need. They feel safer taking an intellectual risk with these structures in place.

**COVID** brought on many powerful changes in the way we teach and learn. **Differentiation**, as I tell students, is a shift in mindset toward providing strong content and powerful ways of interacting with content, and then allowing students to gain personal meaning from that content and showing it in ways that are applicable to them. One more piece of **clarity** I have realized is that my existential teaching style has students producing work that takes more time to assess, to grade, and to comment on, but it is immensely personal to each student and makes them feel as though the accent truly *is* on them as an individual.

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**III. A. & V. L. Reflection on Scholarship**

The continued growth of this scholar is a merging of the discipline of her mind and time, the culture of her passions and experiences, and the hopefulness of new works in the field. My research agenda includes creativity studies, transpersonal psychology, teacher identity, and giftedness.

**Discipline**

In their youth, musicians are taught the value of daily practice sessions. Scales, arpeggios, and etudes make up the repertoire of mastery – as does the effective use of the time spent, as a musician would say, “in the woodshed” practicing. Joining the Ashland Research and Writing Community AURWC in my second semester at Ashland, I found structure to my scholarship role. The group’s mantra is that the use of Brief Daily Sessions rather than binge writing moves a researcher and writer along using time as a partner, not an enemy. From that semester I have dedicated myself to at least 30 minutes a day of time in the woodshed – reading, gathering information, writing, editing, and being made accountable to my small group for how I use the time and organize my writing projects. This is the discipline of my scholarship. I make time for it daily.

The discipline of my scholarship has grown significantly. I have gained skills in organization and project planning, which have helped me as I co-direct the Essex School @ Ashland University, and take on a stronger leadership role in the College and University. These skills have emerged from the AURWC readings and work, but also from my own exploration into the work of David Allen (*Getting Things Done*) and Julie Morgenstern (*Time Management*). Each Fall I skim over these works with an eye toward new gleanings that will help me make the most of my time, and allow me the mental calm to close the computer after a tough day’s work and enjoy personal time without worrying I’ve let something lag or procrastinated. I still procrastinate, don’t get me wrong, but I am better able to keep priorities in order and complete many projects – large and small – while maintaining a mindful way of working, one task at a time.

**Creativity studies**

My research agenda has emerged from my passions, my observations and experiences, my need to become a better teacher and person, and a sense of openness to see what all of this has to teach me. From my early endorsement work at Ashland University, I discovered the fascinating breadth of creativity, specifically how certain overarching ways of being that are exemplified in creative individuals have the capacity to enhance our lives and our work. The desire to study creativity was born.

The inclusion of Creative Thinking Ability as an area of giftedness in Ohio and the confusion of how students identified as such are served has led me to learn more about creativity with an eye toward improving gifted education here at home. I also strongly believe that teachers who are creative risk-takers and see themselves as creative individual are more sensitive in

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seeing creativity in the micromoments of the teaching day and in seamlessly integrating true creative thinking the way creative individuals do it. My belief in the power of creativity training for teachers drives a great deal of my scholarly writing and presentation work.

As I move into my fifth year of scholarly work in creativity studies, I feel ready to take the research work I have been doing to the “streets” - and collaborate with teachers and other individuals who are passionate about creativity to create something powerful for all teachers who want to integrate creativity in a deeper way into their classrooms.

**Transpersonal psychology**

As part of my early graduate work as a student at Ashland University, I began reading works in transpersonal (or depth) psychology, which embraces transcendent experiences like those experienced when in the midst of creative work (such as a sense of flow, intuition, imagination, openness to experience, and naiveté). I appreciate transpersonal ways of looking at the world because they assume that interacting with the inner and outer world is continually transformative. It takes research and scholarly work beyond the objective and respects its deep impact on us as humans, as teachers, and as researchers, indeed, on our very identity.

I also see that creativity work with teachers would merge beautifully with my transpersonal scholarly life to create opportunities for teachers to help students identify, talk about, and resolve many of the social and emotional issues that gifted children deal with – underachievement, depression, isolation, perfectionism, social relationships, and empathy are only a few of these.

Now that I have one established work in the field of transpersonal psychology, and have joined the Association for Transpersonal Psychology (ATP), I have a peer group that gives me a unique perspective and voice in the fields of education and gifted education. I am excited for the future – where this research and writing will take me.

**Teacher identity**

My personal experiences in and out of teaching have brought certain topics to the forefront of my research interests. My own personal experience with teacher burnout and crisis, even leaving the profession for a time, led me to look into the transformative aspects of everyday challenges on our teaching identity, and the impact of ongoing reflection and self-knowledge on our efficacy. I find that there are aspects of creativity theory and transpersonal psychology that improve our ability to cope with stress in this profession. I have a history of using creativity in many forms to process events in my life (drawing mandalas, journaling, and songwriting), which lead me to learn more about how aspects of the creative process enhance our teaching, our interactions with students and colleagues, and our sense of calm in a challenging profession.

**Giftedness**

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My teaching history - interacting with gifted children and adults who have such a unique way of being - leads me to learn more about this population. My research in the field of intelligence, giftedness, and creative individuals serve my goal of improving the Gifted Intervention Specialist endorsement program here at Ashland University, but it also frames the work I do with teachers, soothes my own feeling of alienation in teaching a misunderstood and under-served population of student, and experiencing the joys and challenges of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Why do we create? Because it is hopeful.**

I still view my scholarly and creative work as hope-full – full of hope. It is still vital in these challenging days. It is an act of creation: researching and writing an article on the ways creativity work improves teaching and teachers is hopeful; researching and involving teachers in creative teaching that honors the individual, and provides a sense of mindfulness is hopeful; holding conversations about how to improve the social and emotional well-being of gifted students with an eye toward improving it is hopeful; and showing the way toward transformation is hopeful. Teaching itself is hopeful, when we are eldering individual human souls into finding their own way, their own purpose, and their own voice.

On the wall of my office hangs my Ashland University Masters of Education in Supervision. I came to AU in 1996 simply to gain my gifted endorsement – four years and a five-figure student loan later I earned a masters and a new sense of purpose. My AU instructors and professors helped me find a teacher, a scholar, a singer/songwriter, and a leader deep inside myself. My Purpose – still – is to continue that legacy.

***Note regarding open-access journal publications:*** No type of payment, monetary or otherwise, has been made by me for any of my publications.

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**III. A. & VI. F. Reflection on Service**

The continued growth of any institution is symbiotically connected with the continued growth of its leaders and members. My record of service to the university, college, department, profession, and community exemplifies my desire to actively serve Ashland University to not only support my own interests and causes, but in a responsive manner to support the organizations in those places of highest need.

My service interests fall within these areas of the University: faculty/colleague support; support of teachers of the gifted and students who are gifted; learning University structures and processes; transparency; and forwarding the good name of Ashland University as an institution. As I strive to be responsive in my teaching, I also wish to be responsive to the needs of the community, University, College, and my department. I choose service opportunities based on my ability to improve my overall knowledge and skill set, add positively to the organization, and my ability to connect deeply with the purpose of the organization.

**Improving my overall knowledge and skill set**

In my Year Three Review service reflection, I spoke a great deal about feeling insecure in my knowledge, skills, and capability to contribute well to service activities. I also spoke about not allowing uncertainty to frighten me away from service opportunities, and not letting challenges and frustrations stemming from those activities cause me to be discouraged or disconnected. I vowed to move forward with strength of commitment, openness of heart, and presence of mind.

Last year I raised my hand to volunteer as Secretary for the Faculty Welfare Committee. I like the work we do in that committee, and I appreciate the interactions I am able to have with administration through the committee. Being part of the University Benefits conversation gave me insights into the benefits offerings, processes, and gave me a chance to interact with AU colleagues I had not met with before. It was a very positive experience.

**Adding positively to the organization**

Taking on Higher Division Chair with the Ohio Association for Gifted Children provides me the opportunity to connect with university colleagues from throughout the state, and establish and maintain a sense of camaraderie with other institutions. I view this position not in a competitive way, but in a way that connects us to make us all stronger. By initiating an updated list of institutions in Ohio that have a Talent Development program, I am offering Ohio schools a place where they can find a program that fits them perfectly. I believe that Ashland University has the best program in the state, but we are most definitely not the only program. This kind of friendly competition and camaraderie inspires me to keep the division collegial and helpful to all.

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**Connecting deeply with the purpose of the organization**

The newest – and my most significant service activity to date – is transitioning the Essex School from Otterbein University to Ashland University. This summer program for gifted high school students echoes the Summer Institute, or the Governor’s Institute, where I was the Assistant Director and Dorm Director to Dr. Jane Piirto’s Directorship and Chief of Everything. I worked with Jane Piirto for many years as the intercessory between her and the University on dorms, catering, and rooms, as well as hiring and overseeing dorm staff, and (as former AU professor Dr. David Kommer called me) “Jane’s Minion.”

Taking on this summer program, even with a wonderfully hard-working co-director (Dr. Pat Farrenkopf), tested my ability to stay organized and lead with confidence. Initially I was not sure I would have the skills and tenacity needed to see this through, especially collaborating so closely with a colleague on such a big project. One of the most important aspects was maintaining good communication with all aspects of the Essex School. Over the course of the year (Fall, 2020 to June, 2021) I slowly gained confidence. Dr. Farrenkopf and I drew in our professional connections on and off campus, we met weekly (with the full Steering Committee or just the two of us – as the Leadership Committee) to plan and communicate with the steering committee, and I adapted and honed my planning and organization skills adapted to the needs of the steering committee and the final Essex virtual week. I feel as if I have moved on from “Jane’s Minion” to leader in my own right, and that is a big step forward.