

# Close Reading and Observation Exercises

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The following exercises excerpt individual and small sets of photographs, together with in-depth questions aimed at close reading and observation, from the book, *What Teaching Looks Like: Higher Education through Photographs* by Cassandra Volpe Horii and Martin Springborg.

These prompts and photographs are intended to be used in faculty and educational development settings, to draw instructors, teaching assistants, and/or future faculty into reflective discussions about the practice of teaching in postsecondary education. They could also be used in settings where faculty, staff, and administrators are engaging in planning or change efforts and seek to ground their work in careful observation, as well as to surface implicit beliefs and values that may be important to their work together. Finally, these prompts and photographs may be helpful to instructors teaching courses about higher education and facets thereof, including pedagogy and classroom practice, instructional technology, academic space planning, student affairs administration, community-based learning, and organization change theory and practice.

We hope that the structure and format of these examples will also inspire you to create close reading and observation experiences of your own, perhaps drawing upon photographs and media representing and relevant to your postsecondary educational contexts, institutions, goals, and projects.



*What Teaching Looks Like*, Figure 0.21

From *What Teaching Looks Like: Higher Education through Photographs* by Cassandra Volpe Horii and Martin Springborg. Elon University Center for Engaged Learning, 2022.

<https://doi.org/10.36284/celelon.oa4>



*What Teaching Looks Like*, Figure 2.01

# Introduction

## *Close Reading Exercise*

What do you notice first in this image? Why do you think those aspects are most important?

As you continue to examine this photograph closely, what do you notice about the following aspects of the photograph:

- How are students working together and/or collaborating?
- Who seems focused? On what? How can you tell?
- In what ways does this seem like a typical moment in today's educational settings? In what ways does it stand out as something unique or special?
- What do you notice about the professor in the foreground, gesturing to the students' work on their shared screen?
- Looking beyond the group in the foreground, what do you notice about the people in the background?
- Thinking about what might be beyond the frame of this photo, what do you guess or wonder about the rest of the room?

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# Emotion and Learning

## *Close Reading Exercise*







*What Teaching Looks Like*, Figures 2.08–2.14

- Take some time to look closely at each photograph, and at the group of photographs together. What do you see? What stands out to you?
- In this collection of photographs, do you gravitate toward some more than others, based on the apparent enjoyment, pride, or intensity of emotion they capture? If so, why do you think that is the case?
- Do some of these moments seem more collegiate or more academic than others—more in line with what you expect college to look like? Why and how?
- How alike or dissimilar are these images from what you have encountered in university and college brochures, advertisements, and websites?

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# Teaching and Learning Spaces

## *Close Reading Exercise*





*What Teaching Looks Like*, Figures 4.09–4.12

These photographs are all from the same teaching space and class meeting. First, take a look at each image and at the set of them together. What do you see initially? What aspects of these photographs catch your attention? Why do you think those elements are important to you? As you look more closely, consider:

- What do you notice about how teachers and students work within and around the fixed aspects of the seating and room?
- Do you think they are conforming their activities to the format they find in the room? Why and how?
- Do you think they are rebelling against the constraints of the space? Why and how?
- Do you think they are adjusting or adapting? How can you tell?
- What do you notice, think, and feel about the photographs where the professor is far away and students are passive? When she is close by and engaged? When she is somewhere else, and students' peer-to-peer interactions are in focus?

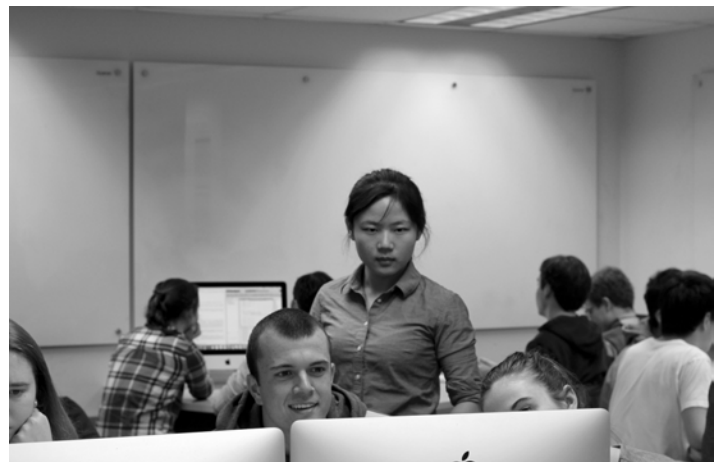
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# Instructor/Student Roles and Engagement

## *Close Reading Exercise*





*What Teaching Looks Like*, Figures 0.17, 0.21, 1.08, 2.04, 3.08

- Examining each photograph, and the group of photographs together, what do you see? What do you notice first, and what emerges as you continue to look closely?
- In which photograph(s) is it easiest to identify the instructor(s) and student(s)? How can you tell?
- How would you describe the roles of the students in these environments? What about the roles of the instructors?
- Which of the photographs seems like they come from more comfortable or less comfortable environments? For whom? Why?
- Which (if any) of these photographs comes closest to showing the kind of engagement you are aiming for in your own classes? Why?

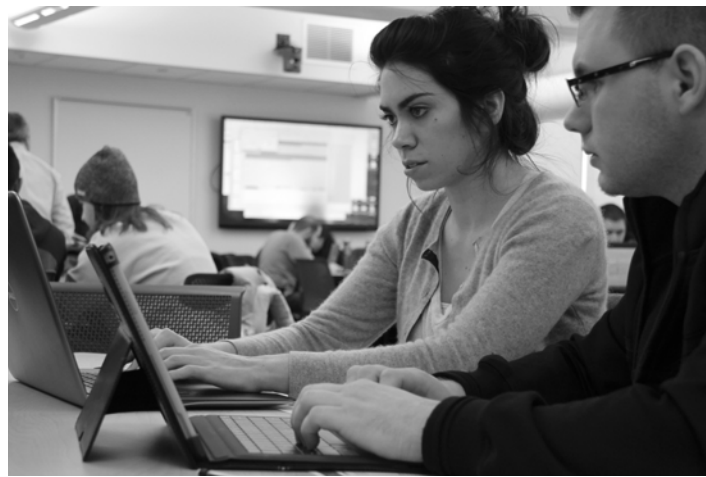
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# Technology

## *Close Reading Exercise*



*What Teaching Looks Like*, Figures 4.17–4.20

As you interact with these photographs, take special note of the technologies that you find in the foreground and background.

- How are various technologies employed by students and teachers?
- What kinds of connections between and among learners and instructors do you observe?
- In what ways do technologies seem to be getting in the way of teaching and learning? How can you tell?
- In what ways do technologies seem to be supporting teaching and learning? How can you tell?
- What do you notice about the apparent attention and focus of the people in these images?

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# Service and Community-based Learning

## *Close Reading Exercise*





*What Teaching Looks Like*, Figures 5.04 – 5.08 and 5.10

These images are all from service or community-based learning courses and settings, in which postsecondary students and teachers interact with members of the community through various projects, tasks, and work experiences.

- As you spend time with these images, consider how the service part of these experiences is reflected in the photographs. What does service mean, and how does it appear, in these images?
- What signals in these photographs identify people as professionals? As students? What symbols of professional identity are present, and in what ways do those symbols seem to matter?
- Not all of these images show interactions with members of the community; some capture interactions between faculty members and students only. How are these images similar to or different from other teacher-student interactions?
- What kinds of work do you find represented in these photographs? Are there other forms of work that are not represented that might be important in supporting service and community-based learning experiences?

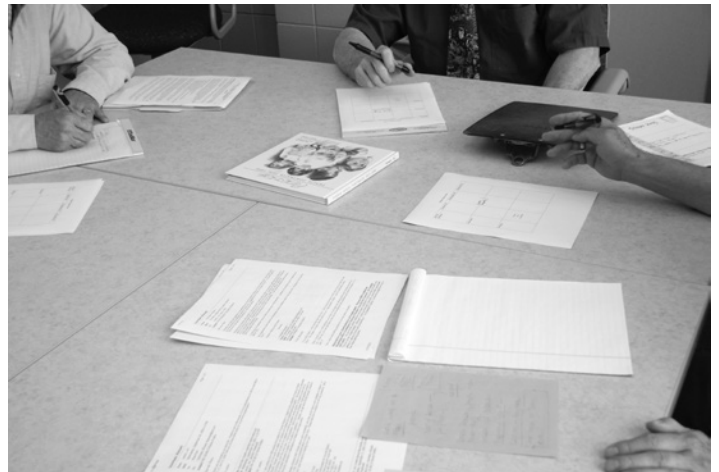
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# Hidden Work

## *Close Reading Exercise*





*What Teaching Looks Like*, Figures 0.09, 0.10, 0.11, and 6.03 – 6.07

These photographs all relate to behind-the-scenes views of the work of faculty and administrators in higher education. Try observing these images with curiosity about how these normally obscured views might bring to the surface important dimensions of teaching.

- Have you seen photographs similar to these before? Why do you think you have or have not?
- These photographs represent certain kinds of work necessary for the teaching and learning endeavors of postsecondary instructors and students to continue. What kinds of work are included here? What kinds of work are excluded here?
- What do you notice about the people, physical spaces, and locations in these photographs? What might your observations reveal about hidden work involved in postsecondary teaching?

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