

# **Rewrite, revise, refine, reflect, rethink: the long and short of teaching journalism at Rhodes**



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**Vice-Chancellor's 2011 Senior Distinguished Teaching Award  
lecture**

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# A starting place

*Knowing is inhabited; we cannot step outside of it.*

*But it is also transformative – it can change who we are. Dall’Alba and Barnacle 2007: 679.*

## I teach because:

- I love learning
- new ideas and new ways of thinking excite me
- the classroom is not a place of transfer of knowledge but a space in which knowledge is created
- I love the impact, effect and affect new knowledge has on the students I work with
- after years of knowing something, a single question or comment from a student can upset, alter or enhance that knowledge
- I keep on learning, and I have made a commitment to keep on learning and asking questions even if at points that makes me look stupid and unknowing at a stage in my life and career where I should have dignity and gravitas.

# The shift under our feet

**1994:** SA becomes a democracy

**1997:** The Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings into the media asked the question whether journalists had created an enabling climate for apartheid

**2000:** The Human Rights Commission inquiry into racism in the media

**2002:** the South African National Editors' Forum investigates the state of journalism and education of journalists

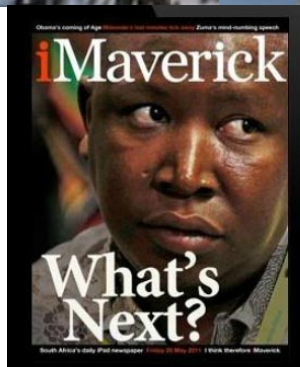
**2010:** The ANC proposes a media tribunal and a media charter

**2012:** The Press Freedom Commission investigates regulation

**2012:** The Print and Digital Media Transformation Task Team is formed

+ the economics of media in the world

+ the digital revolution



# We aim...

“to produce **self-reflexive**, **critical**, **analytical** graduates and media workers, whose practice is **probing**, **imaginative**, **civic minded**, and **outspoken**. Such graduates are equipped to act as **thoughtful**, **creative** and **skilled** journalists and media practitioners able to make **meaningful** and **technically proficient** media productions. Moreover, [we] seek to make **valuable intellectual contributions** to the broad African media environment, to research, and to the integrated and ongoing education of media practitioners”

# My starting points:

- The skills and competencies we are trying to teach are complex and difficult
- Our students do not come to us as blank slates!
- We are not just transferring skills and knowledge and we teach both practice and theory
- We are relating to a profession that devalues the intellectual



# My touchstones

- G Stuart Adam: “ambitious forms of journalism”
- Barbie Zelizer: “interpretation” and “interpretive community”
- Lee Bollinger: journalism “mediates” between the world and the public
- Betty Medsger: “the life of the mind”





And of course a little Biko...



goes a long way

“I  
write  
what  
I  
like”



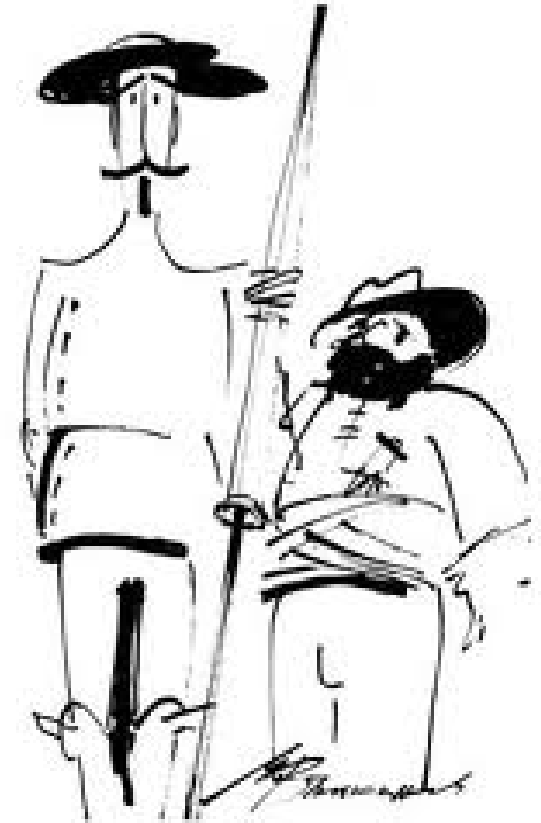
## Heidegger questions:

... the way in which we which we  
'increasingly instrumentalise,  
professionalise, vocationalise, corporatise  
and ultimately *technologise* education'  
(quoted by Dall'Alba and Barnacle 2007: 679)



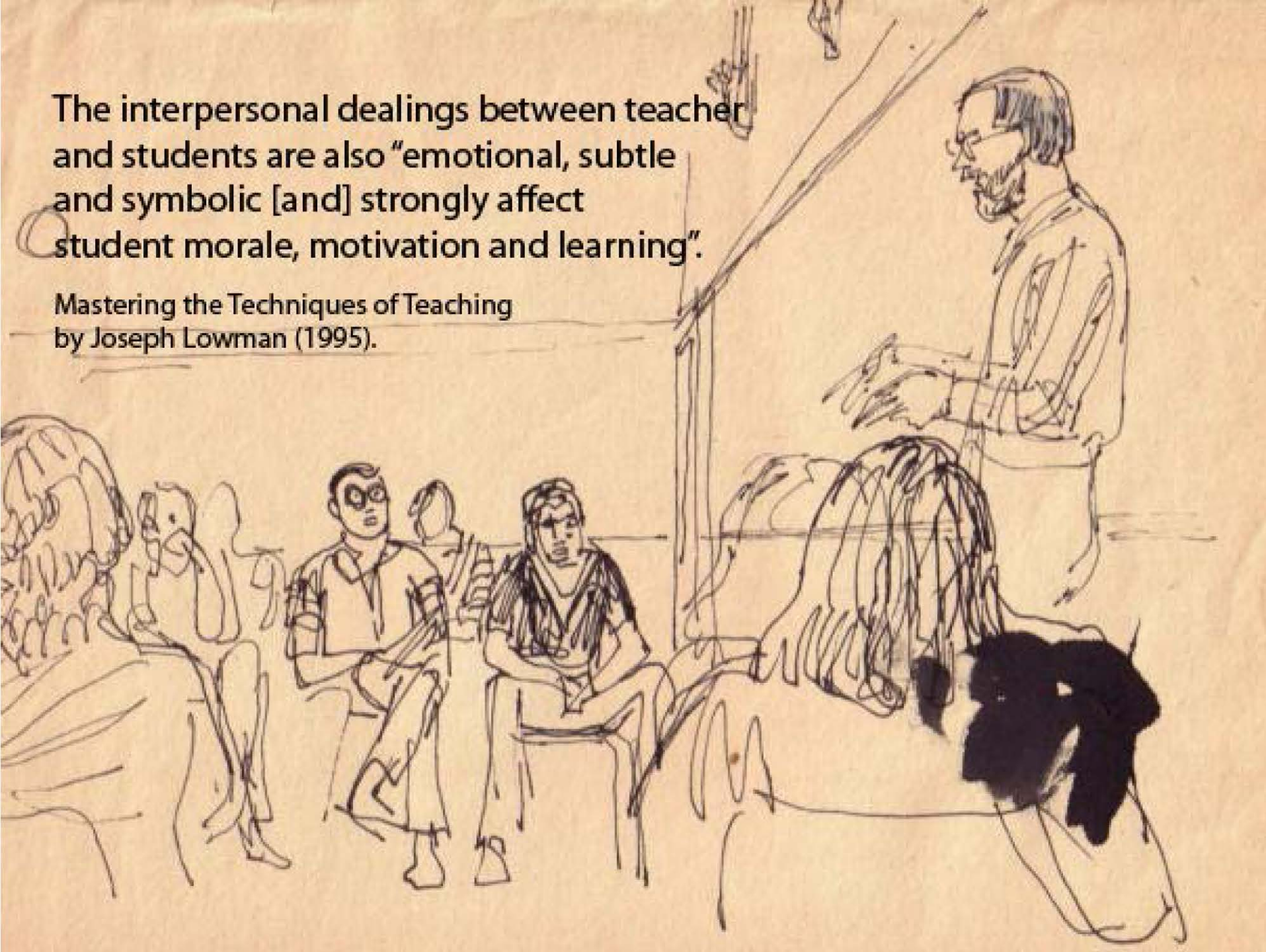
# A framework for teaching

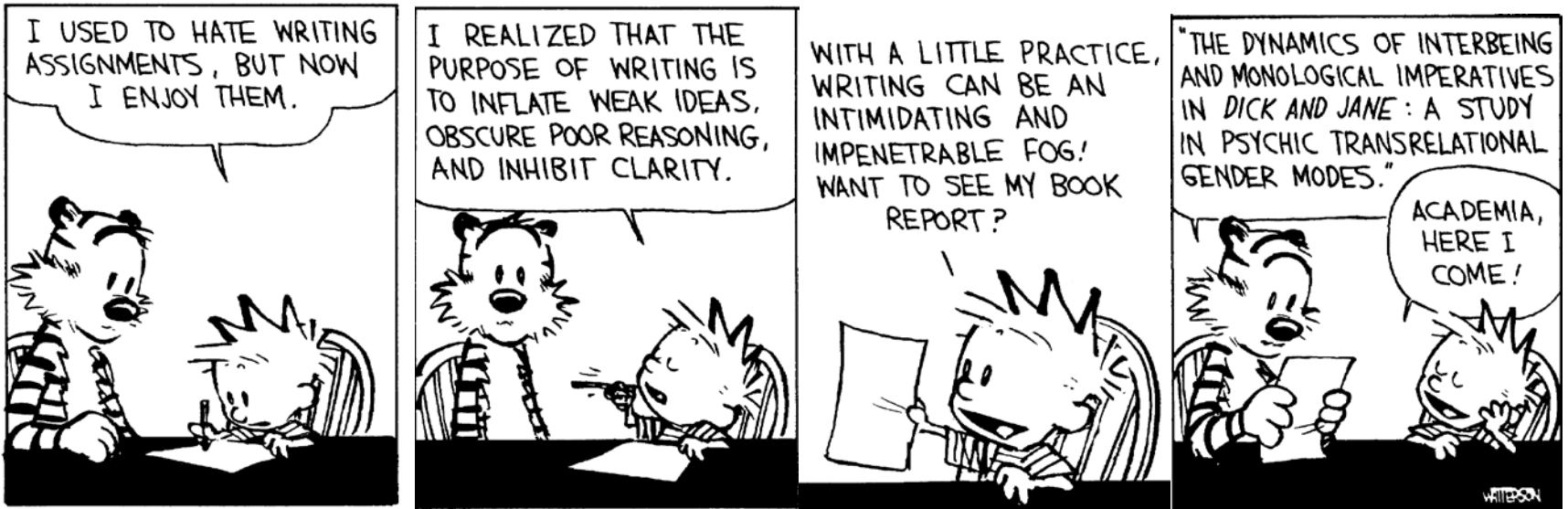
- I embrace journalism in its entirety and to its wider reaches and most “ambitious forms”.
- I think of inducting students into the practice of journalism as “interpreters” of the world.
- I open up the choices around sources story format, medium, audience and information.
- I don’t allow the mainstream news media to dictate what is important politically, publicly, socially and economically.
- I keep on engaging with and considering the impact of new media.



The interpersonal dealings between teacher and students are also “emotional, subtle and symbolic [and] strongly affect student morale, motivation and learning”.

Mastering the Techniques of Teaching  
by Joseph Lowman (1995).





## “She opened up our minds” (1<sup>st</sup> year student)

### At first year:

- Make the connections from the theory back into actual life so that they see the personal value of this intellectual activity.
- Invest the process of writing an essay with meaning and worth.
- Make communicating with precision and clarity core to the work.



# Write, rewrite, refine, focus

## At third year:

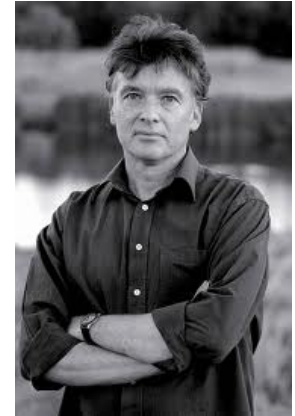
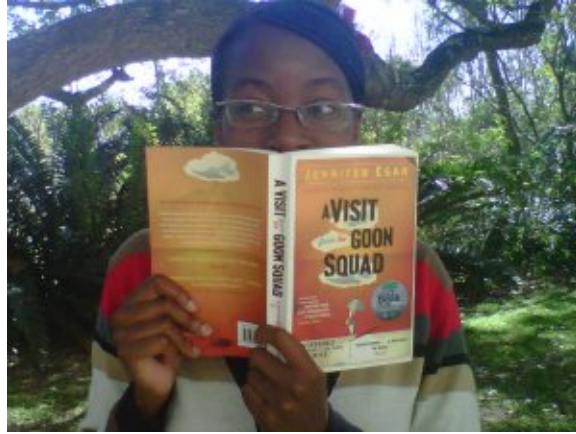
- The very important basics of interviewing,
- writing lucidly and editing integrated into experimentations with different forms, approaches and subjects...
- a great deal of writing and rewriting,
- marking and remarking!



*“...writing the articles was done more as a learning experience than simply getting marks. I could see the improvement in my writing and this only happened because I was given advice about how to rectify my mistakes and then given another chance to do it.” 3<sup>rd</sup> year student.*

# The Long Form Journalism course

(the antidote to short-form hard news)



- The suspension of moral judgement.
- The immersion aspects undercut daily news journalism's parachute practice.
- The use of literary techniques breach the discourse boundaries of journalism.
- The dominance of form requires an engagement with structure and meaning.





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The enigmas of how to provoke inquiry and learning, and then judge the efficacy of our courses and their content, should remain constant questions that accompany teaching.