

ENGL586: TEACHING WRITING AND THE BASIC WRITER

SPRING 2009

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OFFICE HRS: MONDAYS 11-12; 3-4; WEDNESDAYS 4 - 5

AND BY APPT.

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DICKSON 460

W: X7502

Course Overview

Welcome to “Teaching Writing and the Basic Writer.” This course is an introduction to teaching writing generally, and also to more specific concerns of the basic writer. “The “basic writer” is one in a long series of terms used to describe those students who are, depending on how you look at it, either “behind” their peers in writing or have been identified as so (rightly or wrongly) by a “high-stakes” assessment. Frequently these students are from historically marginalized populations—people of color, immigrants, second-language speakers, nontraditional students, and learning disabled. There is much controversy and discussion in both the mainstream press and among teachers over what “to do” with such students, and most of the discussion is ill-informed, and it’s occasionally xenophobic or racist. For that matter, much of what is said about teaching students how to write and the “literacy crisis” is similarly bad and uninformed by research and theory of how it is that people learn to write.

So why are we—English majors, teacher-types--able to write? That’s a good question, and one I want to pursue. Did we learn to write because of or despite what we were taught? And how do we assume others will learn to write? What are our operating assumptions? These are important to know because our assumptions guide our practice, inevitably, and the extent to which our assumptions are valid is central to our abilities to teach writing.

Most teachers teach from their own experience as students. This is a tendency I want to question, and ultimately persuade you to resist. You, by virtue of being in a literacy graduate program, are not representative of most students. You are a word-nerd. You like words, books, expression, and analysis. You’re good at it, I bet, or someone told you as much. That is certainly the case for me. That’s good for you and me, but if we want to be effective teachers for most of our students, and if we really want to be good teachers for those students who are least like us—the basic writers in your class—then we need to forget about ourselves and our own love for writing and teachers and all those positive experiences. We need to figure out how people different from ourselves might best learn to develop as writers.

To begin this class I want you to suspend your beliefs for a bit, and listen to others—primarily those writers and teachers we will be reading. You will be reading a lot this semester (about 150 pages a week). Most students who have taken this class with me before end up saying that teaching writing is a lot more complicated than they thought.

For three reasons you will also be writing frequently:

1) I want you to “experience” the process-writing approach to teaching writing that I am advocating. I am striving to give you a new set of writing experiences to add to your current portfolio of writing methodologies. I want to prove to you that there’s more than one good method for developing your ideas in writing.

2) Writing is a really good way to process and internalize a lot of ideas. I want you to try on ideas, wrestle with them, until you own them.

3) My classes are always a lot of work. That’s just me. 95 percent of my students appreciate it in the end; 5 percent think it was unnecessary and, in fact, some kind of problem of mine. If you’re

concerned about the work, I suggest you talk to those who have taken classes from me before; they can tell you what it's like better than I can.

I love teaching this class. I had a blast – learned tons, taught tons, too – when I taught it last two years ago. I look forward to your engaged writing and discussion. Despite all of what I've said about what's bad about teaching writing, all the answers are not in as to what methods are good and effective. That's tricky. We'll be working to figure some of this out together. Welcome!

Required Texts:

Dickson, Marcia. *It's Not like that Here: Teaching Academic Writing and Reading to Novice Writers*. Heinemann/Boynton-Cook 1997.

Connors, Robert. *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh Press, 1997.

Gallagher, Chris and Amy Lee. *Teaching Writing that Matters*. New York: Scholastic, 2008.

Glenn and Goldthwaite. *St Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*. Boston: Bedford/StMartin, 2008.
Readings on Bb.

Requirements:

10% Discussion Leading: On the day you are a discussion leader you will want to plan on having about 20-30 minutes to engage us meaningfully in the questions raised by the text we have read. Design a lesson plan that will push us forward in our thinking. After 30 minutes you are cut off—absolutely. You are not expected to “cover” the entire reading, to go through every point. You are to make sure the class:

- gets the writer's main argument
- sees the evidence or theory or other support for the writer's main argument
- has a chance to wrestle with these ideas a bit – try them out, argue them out, weigh them against others' ideas, experiences, other pieces of knowledge of theory.

Reading Analysis: In no more than two pages, on the day you are leading discussion, review for the class the leading points that were made by the authors of the texts we are reading. End your review with one or two questions that really help classmates engage in the issues raised by the reading. Post to Blackboard by Sunday night and also print a copy and submit to me on Wednesday.

10% Blackboard Discussion: For each week's readings the discussion leader(s), will post a reading analysis (see below) by SUNDAY night. The rest of the class, including me, will respond by Tuesday night. We all need to read everything that's written and no, responses don't have to be long. The leader(s) will then come to class with a good idea of where the class is, and will thus be better able to lead our discussion of the assigned texts.

Attendance and Participation: required.

15% Essay: Teaching Writing: In the first weeks you will write an essay, in three drafts, just as I have every student of writing do. On this essay we will practice peer review, drafting, brainstorming, revising from feedback.

Question: What, today, is your theory of how to teach writing?

Guidelines: In paragraph two of this syllabus I ask you to consider your operating assumptions. Essentially in this paper I am asking you to do a meta-analysis of your own operating assumptions, to identify and claim your deeply held beliefs about how people learn to write, and to consider how these beliefs influence your intended or actual practice. Be honest here;

don't tell me what I want to hear – the point is not to articulate the “right” theory but to do a good brain and life scan to figure out what it is that you believe, in your heart I'll dare say (as corny as that is).

Assessment: This paper will be assessed using a rubric that I will share in class.

25% Essay: Making Sense of Theory: At mid-semester you will sift through some of the teaching theories you've been exposed to, weighing them against one another, against your own knowledge, observations and experiences. 5-6 pages. Cite 4-5 of the authors you've read.

Expectations for and Assessment for Making Sense of Theory Assignment:

First and foremost I am looking for a claim or organizing question on some aspect of teaching writing. Well made claims/focused questions are not necessarily made most obviously (i.e., announced as such, in the opening paragraph), but they come through clearly in the entirety of the paper. What is more all of the points made in the paper speak to and come back to that central claim or question; in other words, the paper is focused. These claims or questions are developed and supported through citation and discussion of the theoretical texts and through logical, persuasive discussion of a more general sort.

Secondarily I am looking for sophisticated analyses of the texts and the topic under discussion: is the writer treating the topic with deep understanding of nuance and complexity? More simplistically, has the writer understood the texts under discussion?

Thirdly, I read through these papers rhetorically: for logical organizational structure and style. By style I mean rhetorical effectiveness.

Fourthly, I make sure the paper meets general expectations: appropriate citing practices, on topic, and in keeping with the directions as I assigned them (number of sources, etc.)

35% Term Paper: Your own topic, approved by me. Draw upon what you've read in class and what you've learned to further study a topic that has come up in the readings. Draw on ten or more authors, including some from class. 10 – 15 pages.

Expectations and Evaluation:

This paper is an investigatory paper: you are investigating a topic to learn what others can tell you about it. Therefore it may not be presented as an argument (though it can be), but rather as an evaluative, reflective report on a topic.

5% Me as a Teacher: 1-2 page reflection paper due on the last day we meet, reflecting on what the readings and the course have done for your understanding of teaching writing.

Course Schedule

Please note that the following schedule is subject to some change as I assess our progress and your needs as beginning researchers.

January 21: Introduction to Course and Writing

In-class writing

Shaped by Writing: The Undergraduate Experience. Short documentary film on, you guessed it, writing.

January 28: Process Writing +

Draft of essay, “Teaching Writing” due. 3-4 pages

Peer Review (in class)

Gallagher and Lee, *Teaching Writing that Matters*.

Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric*. Gloss intro and read Chapter One, “Gender Influences.”

February 4: Process Writing

Glenn and Goldthwaite, Chapter Three, “Everyday Activities,” and pp. 161-171.

Emig, Janet, “Writing as a Mode of Learning.” In Glenn and Goldthwaite.

Elbow on Loop writing; from *Writing with Power* (on Bb)

Connors, Chapter Two, “Shaping Tools.”

Second draft of Teaching Writing essay. Submit by email as a word attachment with your last name and “Teaching Writing Draft” in the header. Also bring a hard copy to class. I will be responding to your papers and returning them for you to rewrite. I will also use this assignment to model a few different types of teacher response. (These will be shared later during the semester.) So your paper, with my comments, is likely to be shared with the whole class. The point is not to scrutinize your essays but rather to get a good look at a couple of different approaches to teacher response.

February 11: Finishing Process Writing

Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, and Valdez. “Investigating the Process Approach to Writing Instruction in Urban Middle Schools.” (Blackboard)

Sommers, Nancy. “Responding to Student Writing.” In Glenn and Goldthwaite

Lunsford, Andrea and Karen Lunsford, ‘Mistakes are a Fact of Life.’ (on Blackboard)

Connors, Chapter 7, “Invention and Assignments in Composition-Rhetoric.”

Optional: Bishop, Wendy, ‘Helping Peer Writing Groups Succeed,’ in Glenn and Goldthwaite

February 18: Critiques of (Dominant) Process Writing

Delpit, Lisa. “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children.” (on Blackboard)

Royster, Jacqueline Jones, “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own.” In Glenn and Goldthwaite.

Moss, Beverly and Keith Walters. “Rethinking Diversity: Axes of Difference in the Writing Classroom.” In Glenn and Goldthwaite.

Final draft of Teaching Writing essay.

February 25: Style

Connors, Chapter 3, “Composition-Rhetoric, Grammar, and Mechanical Correctness.”

Connors, Chapter 6, “Style Theory and Static Abstractions.”

Glenn and Goldthwaite, Chapter Eight, “Teaching Style”

Practical essay on teaching style, TBA

Schedule conferences for term papers.

First Draft of Making Sense of Theory due.

March 4: Falling through the Cracks

Shaughnessy, Mina. “Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing.” (on Blackboard)

Bartholomae, David, “Inventing the University.” In Glenn and Goldthwaite.

Term Paper proposals due. To share with classmates and submit.

March 11 – No Class (Conference on College Composition and Communication)

Second (and final) Draft of Making Sense of Theory due. Submit Final and other drafts, in packet, to my mailbox on campus by Monday the 16th, 9 a.m.

Work on term papers

March 18: Spring Break

March 25 –:Basic Writing

Dickson, Marcia. *It's not like that Here: Teaching Academic Writing and Reading to Novice Writers*, 1st half

Special Event: March 30th: John Guillory Lecture. Department-wide special lecture; details forthcoming.

April 1: Basic Writing

Dickson, Marcia. *It's not like that Here: Teaching Academic Writing and Reading to Novice Writers*, 2nd half

Teacher Highlight: Class members who are teachers or tutors bring in one-page “best practice” activities to share with class.

April 8: Literature and Writing: Possibilities and Conflicts

Lindemann, Erica. “Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature.” BB
Tate, Gary. “A Place for Literature in Freshman Composition.” Bb
Bishop, Wendy. “The Literary Text and the Writing Classroom.” Bb
Discussion of Guillory and the relationship between literature and composition.

April 15: Second Language and International Students

Leki, Ilona, “Meaning and Development of Academic Literacy in a Second Language.” In Glenn and Goldthwaite.
Horner, Bruce and John Trimbur, “English Only and U.S. College Composition.” In Glenn and Goldthwaite.
Hareda, Mari. “Contexts for Learning: English Language Learners in a US Middle School.” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 11:1 (2008): 56-74.

First draft of term paper due.

April 22: Assessing and Evaluating Writing -- Practical

Daiker, Donald. “Learning to Praise.” *Writing Response: Theory, Practice and Research*. Ed. Chris Anson. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1989. 103-113. (Blackboard)
Glenn and Goldthwaite, Chapter Five, “Assessment.”
Sample assessment practices

Bring in a reworked draft of term paper.

April 29: Last Class – Assessment –Political

Hillocks, George. from The Testing Trap Chapters One and Twelve.
Short class presentations on term papers.

May 10:

Final Due Date. **Term Paper and Me as a Teacher due.**