

Ways of Writing I and II: A Literacy Synthesis for College Composition
by Karen Pressley
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Possibly the most noticeable change in college composition classrooms in the last few years has been the presence of students who come to class with a greater sophistication level than their professors when it comes to computer hardware and software technology and access to information through the Internet and social networking vehicles (Miller, 1467). Students now have wide access to information, making them less dependent on the instructor who has traditionally held the role as “purveyor of knowledge.” While instructors have traditionally focused on rhetoric in the academic essay, students instead have a different literacy savvy, and are interested in, and prepared to produce in other genres of expression—particularly “reality lit”—from journal writing and blogs to Facebook postings and non-linear computer website content. Whether their interest is strictly personal, or is influenced by the awaiting job opportunity that demands literacy skills beyond the traditional essay, this creates a student-driven demand for literacy skills from college programs that may not be prepared to give them what they need.

With students entering college who are more sophisticated visually, technologically, and more adept in desktop publishing than many English composition instructors, the academic weathervane is spinning with the winds of change. Perhaps a need for a paradigm shift is in the air that calls for academia’s agile response to this rapidly-changing student profile. Could this be satisfied by a transformation of “composition studies” which we restructure and rename “literacy studies?” This article is perhaps a manifesto but it explores the idea of such a transformation.

Challenges posed by shifting to a literacy synthesis

This thought of transforming traditional composition studies through a literacy synthesis poses significant challenges to the composition instructor. As the traditional authority of the classroom, the instructor is tasked with finding ways of engaging students in such a manner that surpasses their multi-tasking on their laptops and cell phones with their eyes on texting, emailing, surfing the Internet, and doing Facebook and Twitter while keeping their ears open to their instructor's lecture during class time. More importantly, the instructor is tasked with ensuring that students write quality essays that not only get them through college, but enable them to write for employment requirements or more advanced education.

Advanced technologies have arrived and passed and newer ones continue to emerge in a fast-moving stream of change. We already know that students are technologically more savvy than many adults including writing instructors who have not been trained in the newest hand-held equipment, computer software or social networking technologies. Nevertheless, in the middle of what may seem like a rather chaotic yet steady stream of advancement and change, the writing instructor must ask himself/herself the question, *In the midst of all this, how do I teach today's student how to write a good sentence by exercising critical thinking skills that can creatively express new ideas and effectively win arguments?*

I'll explore why we should make this transformation and some ways of how to go about doing it.

Exploring the need for a transformation

Writing instructors today have the benefit of rear-view mirrors that reflect the roads already travelled by composition scholars who have carved out what have become "composition

studies” over the decades. While it is *essential* to know the development and use of the methodologies and pedagogies that have emerged, it’s equally essential to recognize that writing teachers may need to become extremely agile with pedagogy and not restrict themselves to one methodology when it comes to responding to the changing profile of the students filling their classrooms now and in upcoming years.

Do the interests of students and the writing instructors need to clash, or can they be integrated? The academic essay and composing rhetoric in various forms remains a *vital* form of writing in college and should never be labeled an outdated genre. The essay provides a foundational framework for other writing that is done outside of college in the professional world. However, just as needed are “reality lit” skills such as applied, technical writing skills for professions, such as website content—in other words, various “ways of writing.”

For a student to get out of college and then be expected to write on the job, when the only writing they’ve ever known how to do is the academic essay, this experience could serve to diminish the practicality of their college education especially when the employer says, “I need someone who can think and write—you know, blog, write reports, reviews, and correspondence...” How well can the college graduate respond to that question as a potential employee? And if they don’t have various “stored representations” of various ways of writing to draw from (Flower and Hayes 1980) in their college experience, what value will they attribute to their education? With composition studies restructured to become a literacy synthesis, instructors can help the students to learn various ways of writing and thus build up various ways of writing that students can store in their “writing skills belt” and draw from as the need arises. Flower and Hayes’ idea about stored representations, developed in the context of determining the

characteristics of good and bad writers through their cognitivist process, may have been mechanistic in nature (storing ideas into bins and the like), relegating people to function like a computer. But the concept of stored representations is nevertheless a valuable one when viewed as an accumulation of useable writing skills.

With a shift to a literacy synthesis, the traditional composition classroom would be reshaped by the need for a critical, interdisciplinary, collaborative investigation into the nature of literacy, inclusive of the most modern technologies. Literacy studies would bring together modes of understanding through ways of writing, from social networking and contemporary digital texts, to texts in the social and natural sciences, arts, humanities, education and science. The writing instructor would not teach content from any of those subjects, but would teach how to write in those fields—not just write as if an English major only. Thus, a synthesis of literacy studies would put the student's emphasis on critical thinking skills and using discourse communities to develop *content*, while the instructor teaches *form*—not solely the intro-body-conclusion form, but a synthesis of the forms that now comprise reality lit.

One anthology of composition studies--*Norton's Book of Composition Studies*--provides a wide-angle lens that reveals the birth and development of various theories that emphasize *form* of the composing process, whereas other theories emphasize that *content* is essential in the composition classroom as a laboratory for students to learn to think and make meaning through written ideas. In the 1960s, Neil Postman was already writing about how much of the social content that informs people's ideas, which need to be included in this discussion, stems from television, films and other media (Postman 1961):

To the extent that their responses to television are *informed, discriminating, and creative*, we may be assured that our language and literature, as well as the lives of our students,

will be enriched by contact with television. *But taste and critical judgment are learned habits of mind.*”

In response to Postman’s report, educator Diana George asserted, “The English teacher’s job is to foster ‘taste and critical judgment’, two qualities that lift the schooled from the unschooled (2002). Just as Neil Postman argued for attention to be paid to the influence of television in the lives of students, and that writing instruction should use the content and form of television in the teaching process, George, Carolyn Miller and other educators argue that the need for assimilation of form and content inherent in new technologies should be incorporated into our writing classrooms. Writing instructors of the 1960s were likely as challenged and even intimidated by the influence of new media just as writing instructors of 2009 are challenged by new technologies. In the face of technological influences, instructors of both eras have been tasked with teaching students to think with taste and critical judgment and learn to write well in the English classroom. I mention this because of the consensus that this role has long been thought of as assigned to the *English* teacher—not the Communications Department, or the First-Year Programs department, or the Information Technology Department, but the English Department.

While we could ask ourselves the question, is it the English Department’s job to teach students how to write text for websites and blogs, or does that belong to the Information Technology department? We instead should ask the question, how can we help the English department to robustly embrace the challenge of teaching students to gain a command of the English language in “whatever” literacy form, and not limit writing instruction to the traditional essay? I would argue that the answer to this question is what underscores the need for a transformation from “composition studies” to a “literacy synthesis.”

A similar argument posed in 1982 may help us learn from that issue and apply it to today's situation: In 1982, writing educator Patricia Bizzell critiqued Linda Flower and John Hayes' new writing methodology and said that their cognitivist model cannot be viewed as the absolute answer to the need for a teaching method (as she felt it was being viewed at the time). However, her more important point was that writing educators should consider that no particular process can go on without the primary emphasis placed on *content*, which is the knowledge of discourse communities, with conventions that shape the goals that drive the writing process (491). While she called for the need of a "humanistic synthesis" of composition methods that combines English with philosophy, psychology and other social sciences taught through a blend of methodologies (497), her synthesis may be the very blend that underscores—not through ideology but through practical application—a synthesis of literacy studies that incorporates the newest technologies and arising genres (digital fiction, web writing, etc.) and also focuses on her acknowledgement of the student's need to explore and acquire human freedom, dignity, and potential where people act with intentionality and values—which they can learn through the writing process.

Writing instructors need to shape a literacy synthesis to sufficiently respond to the time and place within which students enter our classrooms. Without a synthesis, we'd be as likely to vigorously engage millennial students as a preacher who is out of touch with the issues of the times yet has a chapel flooding with people who've come in for inspiration or direction, or as a farmer unequipped on a field whose crop is overflowing and demands harvest before the crops go to waste.

From Bizzell's argument, I'm seeing how essential it is that we not lock any classroom or university into just one methodical form under a locally or nationally agreed-upon pedagogical movement but that writing educators, instead, view this new class, Ways of Writing I and II, as a lab for interdisciplinary discourse communities that responds to the rapidly-changing college student profile.

Principles of Ways of Writing I and II

While this essay continues an idea started in my earlier paper, "What Else Do We Need to Know About Writing?" that began to consider Bizzell's call for a "humanistic synthesis," I expressed that a synthesis of composition methods would best reside together forming an interdisciplinary method that was highly responsive to the needs of the ever-changing classroom environment, though I didn't explain "humanistic synthesis," nor did I define any principles of the literacy synthesis I'm discussing here. While this synthesis could become the art and science of blended pedagogy in a composition classroom lab comprised of cognitivist, expressivist and social constructionist methodologies, developing this idea fully would warrant an in-depth research project and would require a far more extensive treatment than the constraints of this paper allows.

Thus, this essay ventures into a profile of a literacy synthesis and suggests six principles that shape it.

1. Ways of Writing I and II are viewed as college gateway classes.

Instead of calling first-year writing "English Composition 1101 and 1102," with a traditional English department orientation to literature and the academic essay, this would shift to Ways of Writing (WOW) I and II as gateway classes to the university experience. WOW would

still be taught from the English department where students are oriented to acquire a command of the English language, but it would be an interdisciplinary writing lab called Ways of Writing. This would be comparable to the Philosophy Department's entry level philosophy class, "Ways of Knowing," a synthesis of a broad spectrum of philosophers' works. This idea is partially informed by Diana George's (2002) translation of John Berger's "Ways of Seeing" that connects understanding the visual arts through the social world of language, and David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's (1987) "Ways of Reading," who were interested in connecting cultural theory into the composition classroom.

WOW would help to shape students into taking deeper, wider command of the English language through a variety of genres, inclusive of what has been compartmented into Communication departments' writing classes. Reality lit, blogs, Facebook, visual rhetoric, opinion editorials, feature stories, development of research questions, academic essays, literature reviews, etc.—nothing would ever be considered dated or obsolete. They would each be considered a specialty of the writer, as Flower and Hayes called the many "stored representations of good writers" (471). We could view this classroom as if it was on a continuum of moving novice writers toward becoming good writers as they acquire ways of writing (genres) that become stored representations for them to draw from throughout college and once graduated and growing in their professional work.

Students have never gained command of the English language solely through 1101 and 1102. This command is acquired throughout the entire college experience as they wade through different orientations in their core classes and classes of their major. For example, I felt completely inadequate as a student writer in my junior year when one of my classes required me

to write a literature review, which I had never heard of. Once I learned how to do this, I reflected that had I known how to a lit review in my first year of college, that would have opened up a world to me of how to do research and write on things I was really interested in. Until then, the academic essay had been the only form I knew, so my content had always been limited by my access to ways of gaining information and expressing ideas.

2. This literacy synthesis depends on discourse communities to fully engage students as partners in learning.

Ways of Writing I would be organized around topics common to the students of the class, with students grouped in knowledge communities doing writing exercises through normal discourse and then abnormal discourse groups. The instructor assesses the students for interests and knowledge. For example, if students have canoed or kayaked, or danced to hip-hop, love jazz, been to New York, seen a race riot, experienced death of a loved one, etc., then they would check those and other similar KCs on an assessment sheet. The teacher collects all the assessments and determines all the various KCs in the class. In subsequent classes, the teacher will call groups of students together by different KCs, for example, by music groups: hip-hop, rock, country, jazz, R&B, and has the students in each KC decide on a musician or band and write a paper describing the meaning of this music/musician. The teacher should inform the students that this first draft is a means of mapping out ideas to exchange with others through normal discourse (within their KC). They peer review each other's first draft within their KC. Next the teacher pairs up students from different KCs i.e. jazz with hip-hop, R&B with country, etc. These KC students will exchange abnormal discourse as they workshop their papers with

each other, giving the views of someone who is not a typical audience for their first choice in music. (More on this in upcoming Exercise I).

New York City University distinguished professor of English bell hooks (she does not capitalize her name) theorized (1998) about students engaging in classroom discussions supports

the idea of the value and importance of knowledge communities:

“All students, not just those from marginalized groups, seem more eager to enter energetically into classroom discussion when they perceive it as pertaining directly to them (when non-white students talk in class only when they feel connected via experience it is not aberrant behavior). Students may be well versed in a particular subject and yet be more included to speak confidently if that subject directly relates to their experience. Again, it must be remembered that there are students who may not feel the need to acknowledge that their enthusiastic participation is sparked by the connection of that discussion to personal experience” (88).

Of course, the instructor needs to be clear about what determines “experience,” otherwise, the students and professor would get engaged in a struggle for authority that can be mediated if the professor defers. There should be no devaluation of experience.

Patricia Bizzell argued for a synthesis where we agree that discourse communities are all we have to rely upon in our quest for truth as knowledge—not in pursuit of an absolute, but in pursuit of knowledge that addresses answers to questions raised as our culture changes—and where composition studies focus upon practice within interpretive communities, or exactly how conventions work in the world and how they are transmitted (497). Discourse analysis is where world views would become more clearly a matter of conscious commitment, instead of unconscious conformity.

Discourse communities and discussion of personal experience as part of the learning process is supported by numerous philosophies: Kenneth Bruffee’s discussion about

“Conversation and the nature of thought as knowledge” in *Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind* explores the work of Michael Oakeshott, Lev Vygotsky, Richard Rorty and others who have shown that reflective thought is public and social conversation internalized. Oakeshott argues that the human conversation takes place within us as well as among us, and that conversation as it takes place within us is what we call reflective thought. In making this argument, he assumes that conversation and reflective thought are related in two ways: causally and functionally (Bruffee, 1984). He points to Oakeshott’s 1962 essay, “The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind” that discusses the place of literature in education. Oakeshott argues that what distinguishes human beings from other animals is our ability to participate in unending conversation. “As civilized human beings,” Oakeshott writes,

We are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, not of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves....Education, properly speaking, is an initiation in the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation which, in the end, gives place and character, to every human activity and utterance.”

I believe that the composition classroom as an interpretive community of discourse should give place and character to students who, through conversations, learn to recognize voices of the world and interpret their meanings through Ways of Writing. If we accept Richard Rorty’s argument in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that knowledge is the product of human beings in a state of continual negotiation or conversation, and Kenneth Bruffee’s idea that education, then, is not the process of assimilating “the truth” but, as Rorty has put it, a process of learning to “take a hand in what is going on“ by joining “the conversation of mankind,” we can gain insight

into the value of and place in education for classrooms as discourse communities, and look at students as partners in our classrooms as knowledge communities.

Learning communities engage in “socially justifying beliefs” where peers establish knowledge or justify belief collaboratively by challenging each other’s biases and presuppositions, by negotiating collectively toward new paradigms of perception, thought, feeling, and expression; and by joining larger, more experienced communities of knowledgeable peers through assenting to those communities’ interests, values, language, and paradigms of perception and thought. I wonder, *has the current-traditional method used in composition classrooms operated in such a way as to invite students into their knowledge community, and then enforce a truth about what is learned as an absolute, the one and only right way to think, to live, to behave, to write?* In composition classrooms, have students been encouraged to critique the writings of literature freely, or are they really expected to provide the answer the instructor wants to hear? Have writing students lacked the freedom to engage in serious dialogue that may challenge or threaten their instructor’s paradigms of beliefs?

3. *This literacy synthesis draws from interdisciplinary studies for content.*

A literacy synthesis in a composition classroom would interweave genres, ideas, discussions, and themes from materials from interdisciplinary fields (such as English literature, significant writings from or fiction with a specific philosophy, psychology, or sociology, etc.) that address the human condition, where human interests and values and personal experiences are the focus of the classroom discourse, where discussions and writing topics are not limited to the objective, or neutral ideology, and do not avoid argument and dissent.

Ways of Writing II would study texts, but not only the literature of classic English. It would study other texts considered interdisciplinary, such as Robert Jensen's *Writing Dissent*, where students would learn how to express opinions about current events, and learn how to write an opinion editorial (op/ed) that they could publish in the school paper, send to the local paper, or post in a blog. An op/ed requires good command of language. Jensen writes,

“It is impossible to write a successful op/ed without being able to make a clear argument backed up with evidence. But sometimes all the evidence and clear reasoning in the world doesn't move editors to run a piece or readers to accept the argument. Telling stories, especially personal stories, can sometimes be effective in a way that straightforward arguments are not. So, whenever possible I look for anecdotes from my life to make more real the political points I want to advance. Most of the time such stories are difficult to fit in an essay for a public forum, but sometimes a conversation from my life or an observation about my world can crystallize a political point and convey more than traditional arguments” (103).

Using various genres focused on personalized content such as the above is another example of putting Stanley Fish's ideas about interpretive communities to work. To help orient students how to interpret texts, this classroom will need to rely on the instructor's knowledge of the texts, but not solely. In Ways of Writing II, the instructor will introduce literary theory to this class so that students can gain ways of understanding early on in their college career, instead of waiting until their 4000-level classes when they finally take Literary Theory. Fulwiler and Stephany's anthology, *English Studies: Reading, Writing and Interpreting Texts*, carries an essay that addresses writers as cultural anthropologists who must know literary theory to help them “speak the language” (99) of English. Different models of theory are viewed as languages for students to learn to help them engage with the texts they're reading. Without some literary theory, student readers can relate the texts to themselves but not as easily to cultural messages. Composition instructor Lisa Schnell wrote about her personal experience as a first-year college student when

she learned some literary theory (Marxist critical theory) which she now uses in her writing classes:

“What I felt was *intellectual excitement*, a marvelous feeling that comes from approaching a text or a problem armed with knowledge that, though it might not come directly out of our own limited personal experiences, does indeed *matter* in our lives and in our engagement with the larger world around us. It was literary theory that opened up Alexander Pope’s poem to me—without the vocabulary of Marxism and post-colonial theory, this marvelous poem would have stayed ‘locked’ to me” (p. 101).

Thus, the WOW instructor would teach perhaps two or three theories and select texts for students to read and interpret through these theories. With a wider variety of lens’ to use, a student can better focus on assignments in different ways of writing, such as writing critical and interpretative papers, personal essays, imaginative writing, writing with research, and writing electronic texts (p. 155). As students move through college classes that demand critical essays, one of the most challenging to write, students will at least be more equipped to approach the topic with some tools on their belt to get them through.

4. *The writing instructor mediates discussion on content and purveys knowledge about form.*

The composition teacher should have an excellent knowledge of the art and science of writing with access to multifarious conventions, methodologies and a clear view of pedagogies to draw from that respond to the *kairos* of the classroom. The instructor’s role retains the traditional one as purveyor of knowledge, but shifts that role from one of authoritarian/domination to one of lecturer and mediator whose main thrust is primarily to orient students into new knowledge communities of topics and pose research questions that engage students in both normal and abnormal discourse.

Stanley Fish's discussion of interpretive communities and Richard Rorty's view of educators becoming "mediators" versus "arbiters" of disciplines (Bizzell 496) both point to discourse communities as being the essential framework for the composition classroom. What better choice do composition teachers have but to offer students ethically- and politically-conscious education, with multifarious ways to understand issues and "problems in their lives like the problems of a traveler to an unfamiliar country, a country in which it is possible to learn the language and the manners and even 'go native' while still remembering the land from which one has come" (Bizzell 496).

The instructor mediates (not arbitrates) discourse about human interest topics. Students respond as developing individuals forming opinions and acquiring a worldview, and partners in learning. The synthesis is also inclusive of methodologies where *content* is produced through the art of critical thinking and creative idea-forming; where *form* is the vehicle, or the science of writing conventions, including grammar and structure; where the composition instructor serves as specialist of composition art and science, and serves as mediator of discussion and mentor of form; where students are knowledge community partners in the learning process that occurs in the interpretive discourse community of the classroom. I believe this classroom structure would engage the students through so much personal involvement that it would nearly eliminate the underlife that Robert Brookes (1984) brought to our attention. His discussion about institutional underlife raises our awareness of students' roles as "actors in an institution who develop behaviors which assert an identity different from the one assigned to them" (723) in a traditionally hegemonic classroom.

Hierarchies and hegemony can serve as the topic of rich discussion in classrooms where educators desire to not only teach writing as form, but to use writing as a means of teaching the arts of argument and critical thinking about content. Diana George (2002) stresses some significant points about the training levels of English teachers which underscore that a synthesized classroom with emphasis on more than literature and the academic essay would be challenging and even intimidating. George says, “English teachers have not been trained in visual thinking beyond the level of *ut pictora poesis* or of media criticism” (1444). She says that visual studies (which can include usages of mobile and social networking technologies) have been perceived as a threat to language and literature instruction. Yet, we know that literacy means more than words, and visual literacy means more than play. This could suggest that English teachers need to do training updates to keep up with changes in technologies, versus resenting the synthesis of the visual and technology with traditional literature and writing conventions. Hopefully this would diffuse the urge to pit poetics against the popular and words against pictures. It would be a mistake to refuse to change teaching methodology because of preference to do the familiar instead of updating their skills to get ahead of (or equal to) the students technologically.

Bringing cultural, political, or experiential discussions into the composition classroom that has traditionally been neutralized, with a focus on objectivity, would not be without challenge to the instructor. In his book, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, Paulo Freire (1998) addresses this matter with particularly adept sensitivity:

“But I would like to emphasize that even the loving commitment to one’s task does not dispense with the political struggle in favor of one’s rights as a teacher, the dignity of one’s profession, and the care due to the students and to the teaching space that both teacher and student share. Have said this, it’s necessary to insist that educative practice

carried out with feeling and joy does not prelude serious, scientific education and a clear-sighted political consciousness on the part of teachers. Educative practice is all of the following: affectivity, joy, scientific seriousness, technical expertise at the service of change, and, unfortunately, the preservation of the status quo. It is exactly this static, neoliberal ideology, proposing as it does ‘the death of history,’ that converts tomorrow into today by insisting that everything is under control, everything has already been worked out and taken care of. Whence the hopeless, fatalistic and utopian character of this ideology, which proposes a purely technical kind of education in which the teacher distinguishes himself or herself not by a desire to change the world but to accept it as it is. Such a teacher possesses very little capacity for critical education but quite a lot for ‘training,’ for transferring contents. An expert in ‘know-how.’ The kind of knowledge this ‘pragmatic’ teacher needs for his or her work is not the kind I speak of in this book. It is not for me to judge, of course, regarding the value of this knowledge in itself, but it is my duty to denounce the anti-humanist character of this neoliberal pragmatism” (p. 126-127).

5. *This method involves a student-centered classroom that values experience.*

The dynamics of this classroom would support the sense that the classroom belongs to the students without marginalization that stems from economic circumstances or previous education level. This classroom attempts to provide a safe space with a level playing field based not only past experiences and learning but present ideas and potentiality. This should help diffuse the problem for students who have otherwise been marginalized and their voices have neither been heard nor welcomed. bell hooks explains:

“My pedagogy has been shaped to respond to this reality. If I do not wish to see these students use the ‘authority of experience’ as a means of asserting voice, I can circumvent this possible misuse of power by bringing to the classroom pedagogical strategies that affirm their presence, their right to speak, in multiple ways on diverse topics. This pedagogical strategy is rooted in the assumption that we all bring to the classroom experiential knowledge, that this knowledge can indeed enhance our learning experience. If experience is already invoked in the classroom as a way of knowing that coexists in a nonhierarchical way with other ways of knowing, then it lessens the possibility that it can be used to silence. When I teach Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* in introductory courses on black women writers, I assign students to write an autobiographical paragraph about an early racial memory. Each person reads that paragraph aloud to the class. Our collective listening to one another affirms the value and uniqueness of each voice. This

exercise highlights experience without privileging the voices of students from any particular group. It helps create a communal awareness of the diversity of our experiences and provides a limited sense of the experiences that may inform how we think and what we say. Since this exercise makes the classroom a space where experience is valued, not negated or deemed meaningless, students seem less included to make the telling of experience that site where they compete for voice, if indeed such a competition is taking place. In our classroom, students do not usually feel the need to compete because the concept of a privileged voice of authority is deconstructed by our collective critical practice” (p. 84).

Students are not customized to being addressed as learning partners. They are used to a more domination-subordination model where the teacher is the authority and keeper of knowledge; that students don't know much, though some have great potentiality. Students have been shaped to enter college classrooms believing they need to learn how to produce what the teacher wants, in the way the teacher wants it, in order to get a high grade. This behavior, however, circumvents the student's autonomy and critical thinking skills to some extent, where their objective in college should be to acquire the knowledge they need in order to advance into their chosen profession.

Becoming part of a highly engaged classroom in one's first year of college would be challenging, as students may not have experienced this level of engagement in high school, and may not expect this much discourse and work until higher years in school. A highly engaged class will help to eliminate the student's tendency to develop an underlife where they separate themselves out as people who can do more things than be a student in that teacher's classroom.

6. Intercultural communication principles play an important role in the writing classroom's discourse communities.

In addition to the class syllabus including basic guidelines about such things as plagiarism, students with special needs, the instructor's position on attendance and meeting deadlines, etc. the syllabus will include a statement such as, "All discussions occurring in this class will be done by students in a manner that is respectful of students' diverse cultural, religious, ethnic, age, gender, economic, and other personal orientations. Honest and open discussion is encouraged, but students will be responsible for explaining their views, including accusations or disagreements, as a significant part of the discourse on which this class is based. The goal of this class is to engage in discourse in such a way that protects the sustainability of all individuals' wellness and ability to achieve their goals."

bell hooks (1994) emphasizes that multiculturalism compels educators to recognize the narrow boundaries that have shaped the way knowledge has been shared:

"It forces us all to recognize our complicity in accepting and perpetuating biases of any kind. Students are eager to break through barriers to knowing. They are willing to surrender to the wonder of re-learning and learning ways of knowing that go against the grain. When we, as educators, allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve. We can teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of a truly liberatory liberal arts education" (44).

bell hook's pedagogy is informed by her experiences teaching at various schools where she observed that Black, Asian, and Hispanic students have not usually been taught by Black, Asian, or Hispanic teachers (respectively). She says the unfamiliarity of experiences expressed by white teachers to minority students can "over-determine what takes place in the classroom" (86). Knowing from personal experience as a student in predominantly white institutions how easy it is to feel shut out or closed down, she is eager to help create a learning process in the classroom that engages everyone. Therefore, her ideas would inform the classroom

dynamics of this Ways of Writing classroom, where biases imposed by identity politics, alongside those perspectives that insist that experience has no place in the classroom (which can create an atmosphere of coercion and exclusion) must be interrogated by pedagogical practices. These strategies can determine the extent to which all students learn to engage more fully the ideas and issues that seem to have no direct relation to their experience.

The syllabus will include an orientation to multicultural-intercultural communication terms (such as ethnocentrism, ethnocentric negation, ethnocentric affirmation, worldview, perception, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc.) (Klyukanov 2005). Discussion of these concepts will consume one period of discussion on the first or second day of class. This orientation will establish an intercultural paradigm of the classroom. This will help to prevent hurt feelings and heated arguments because it will provide a framework within which the students will be guided to communicate. In the case of a heated discussion in class or in a particular student knowledge community, the instructor as mediator, not arbitrator, can then lift the discussion out of the personal/subjective and into the objective realm and throw the issue up for class discussion, until it is talked out with an outcome that is sustainable for all students involved. Again I refer to Fish's statement that applies here, "Disagreements are not settled by the facts, but are the means by which the facts are settled" (338).

Sample Exercise

Experiences can be the source of discussion in this classroom, but they can also be the source of personal writing, whether within or outside of the KCs. Here is one example of a writing exercise that engages free writing usually connected with the expressivist method, but it

also connects culture and meanings to thought (which is usually connected with the social constructionist method):

Invention Exercise #1--Not Yet Knowing: Writing What You Hear Yourself Think*

Invention exercise #1 for a Ways of Writing class is one of many steps toward a larger assignment of writing an advanced essay that arises out of students' engaged, rigorous, and creative exploration of a problem about which they don't yet know the answer. Students meet in one of their knowledge community groups, and discuss ideas they want to write about. Then, they individually do free-form writing. This will stimulate thinking to create a platform for students to write what they hear themselves think, without regard to grammar or syntax. Attention to form will be the focus in subsequent exercises as students come to see that the form of their thought may start out simple with words and phrases, and become more complex as they move through the uncertainty of "not yet knowing" to the confidence of developing ideas into solutions and conclusions. The goal is to teach writers to write confidently by training themselves to see the forms that create meaning in their minds, in the texts they read, in the world, and in their writing. Students will:

- practice finding difficult thinking problems to work on, rather than theses to support in traditional academic style;
- dwell in the discovery stage of problem-solving, the uncertain "not yet knowing the answer" phase of exploration and observation;
- take their subtle, perhaps unarticulated thoughts and bring them into language, without rushing to an immediate conclusion or judgment;
- transfer their ability to struggle and question in their personal lives to their computers/paper, as thought occurs in the form of words and phrases;
- discover what forms their thought already takes in thinking and in writing;
- develop meaningful, complex ideas that they see will take the form of longer sentences, dependent clauses, and structured paragraphs to accommodate the kind of thinking being done;
- see the shapes and structures of good ideas and create their own.

While developing the ability to write new ideas about their problem authoritatively, students may feel stupid, blank or blocked. Discovering how to linger productively in uncertainty about an outcome will help students move out of their "consumer culture" mentality which wants them to regurgitate information they see in TV shows or hear in ads, and think for themselves with an active investment of thought and an ability to be patient while writing. This will help break the habit of writing and thinking in ways that are too simple to support the kind of engaged, insightful academic essays we want to read. Students will develop a new paradigm for themselves: they will realize that they can participate in an active investment of thought and an ability to be patient through writing as a work in progress—invention of ideas, imagining solutions and ways to transcend

problems. This approach positions students as learners, thinkers, and writers who can formulate ideas, solutions, and approaches to problem-solving and transfer thought to paper.

Steps (time: 10 – 15 minutes)

Tell the students that this is a free-writing exercise, not to worry about grammar or syntax, and to not be critical of their own thoughts as they think them.

1. Have the students think about an unresolved problem in some personal relationship—boss, associate at work, parent, loved one, relative, enemy, or friend. Have them wrestle with that problem in their thoughts, until they come up with a good answer or idea on how to solve it.
2. Tell them to write a letter to that person in which they try to get the person to understand the problem, as they see it. In the letter, explore ways to transcend the problem, or see it in another way. Let the students know that their goal is to think and write about the complex world of a problem with which they are struggling and there appears to be no simple solutions
3. Tell them to keep writing as any blocks come along.
4. The instructor should write along with the students to keep the whole room engaged.
5. Halfway through the time, tell students that they should move from trying to describe the problem itself, to imagining and evaluating possible ways to transcend the problem.
6. Observe what takes place in the room – does the room seem more quiet, is there intense thinking in the air?
7. When it's time to stop, decide whether to comment on the change in the room, asking students whether or not they can feel the difference between a thinking silence and the silence of busywork. This helps to work together as a class and to talk about what thinking feels like.
8. Now talk about what has happened, and what it has to do with the work of this class. Remind students that they should not talk about WHAT they have written but rather reflect on what it is like to write in this way, to see their thoughts transferred to paper in words or phrases without concern for grammar or structure.
9. Ask the students to compare and contrast this kind of writing with the academic writing they usually do. In talking about what it's like without referring to content, they are beginning to practice reflecting rather than reporting.
10. Keep track of the responses on the board, in a column for each kind of writing. Jot down a word or two to remind us of their comments.
- 11.

THIS WRITING

ACADEMIC WRITING

* This writing exercise was shaped by the work of two writing professors (Kristin

Dombeck and Scott Herndon) at New York City University, who focus their efforts with students

on generating new ways of thinking so as to narrow the gap between students who are socially positioned to succeed and those positioned to fail. Their book, *Critical Passages: Teaching the Transition to College Composition*, shares ways of working with forms to generate new thinking, and ways of working with new thinking to generate better forms.

In WOW II, the instructor would work with the knowledge communities and may group them to address interdisciplinary themes through selected texts. KC groups would form around different perspectives of the theme, such as a sociology perspective or an English language perspective, interpreted through various interdisciplinary genres chosen by the instructor. The instructor could work with the abnormal discourse there, as a mediator, not an arbitrator.

The formation of these KC groups is informed by Stanley Fish's work in interpretive communications described in his chapter, "What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?":

"There is simply the conviction that the facts exist in their own self-evident shape and that disagreements are to be resolved by referring the respective parties to the facts as they really are. In the view that I have been urging, however, disagreements cannot be resolved by reference to the facts, because the facts emerge only in the context of some point of view. It follows, then, that disagreements must occur between those who hold (or are held by) different points of view, and what is at stake in a disagreement is the right to specify what the facts can hereafter be said to be. Disagreements are not settled by the facts, but are the means by which the facts are settled" (338).

Disagreements, then, would be anticipated in abnormal discourse and would be viewed as productive discussions leading to deeper, wider understanding of the topic at hand, about which the students can write.

Conclusion

I would hope that composition instructors approach the Ways of Writing I and II courses with a desire and courage to engage in a literacy synthesis, willing to do more than transfer

knowledge in a technical manner, desiring to distinguish himself/herself by a desire to improve the human condition rather than accept it as it is.

After all, writing only makes sense when organized by the interpretive conventions of a discourse community. We see through experience that real world writers never complain that they have nothing to say because they have learned how to write for discourse communities where they know their work can matter. Students in classrooms unconnected to real discourse communities see little purpose for their attempts other than getting a grade (Bizzell 492). The material, the social, and the subjective are at once the producers and the products of ideology, and ideology must continually be challenged so as to reveal its economic and political consequences for individuals (Berlin 679). Through synthesized composition classrooms, we stand a better chance to turn out students who can think and write and add value to their place of future employment, instead of turning out students who learn little more than how to satisfy instructor requirements.

It's essential that we hold every other composition or rhetorical model to the standard that none are sovereign to another but instead, support or complement each other through the students' need for the synthesis of them all. Berlin supports this idea in his discussion of Althusser's view that "no position can lay claim to absolute, timeless truth, because finally all formulations are historically specific, arising out of the material conditions of a particular time and place (668).

This profile of a literacy synthesis in a composition classroom calls for more research that develops the idea of how a fully synthesized classroom would be conducted, and raises numerous questions. How would teachers become adequately prepared to conduct such a class?

Many teachers of the English 1101/1102 classes at colleges and universities are adjunct instructors pulled from pools of applicants to fill slots in response to the growing number of students entering colleges. Perhaps the depth and breadth of skills needed to teach “Ways of Writing I and II” would require the specialized professor. Perhaps this would necessitate new teaching assistant programs in universities, in response to the need to expand the skills and abilities of graduate students who want to teach classes such as this. Perhaps this would draw faculty from interdisciplinary fields to teach “Ways of Writing” rather than restricting this to the traditional English faculty member. These are just some of the questions and points to take into account as we consider “Ways of Writing” to replace English 1101 and 1102 as the gateway class to colleges and universities.

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