

ENGL 471A: THE COMPOSING PROCESS
AUTUMN 2007

Theory and Practice of Teaching Writing

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Denny 211

3:30-5:20 pm

TEXTS:

Tate, Gary, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick. *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*.

Gere, Anne Ruggles, Leila Christenbury, and Kelly Sassi. *Writing on Demand: Best Practices and Strategies for Success*

Gere, et al. *A Student Guide to Writing on Demand*

Coursepack, Professional Copy on the Ave

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will introduce you to the theory and practice of teaching writing in secondary schools. Unlike the English methods courses you will take in the College of Education, the readings and practices we'll discuss are based in the discipline of English. We'll begin by working through "best practices" in teaching writing, especially writing process approaches. That means we'll attend to invention and drafting, peer and teacher responses, revision, and editing. We will enact in class many of these activities, as I, and many others, believe that teachers of writing should write themselves. These activities, however well established as best practices, are not always what a particular district, principal, or department chair or even the textbooks require. So as a teacher, you'll sometimes be faced with conflicting demands, between what you know to be best practice and what your local site expects. Moreover, the current climate of assessment means that the exuberance of process approaches has now been reduced to statewide rubrics for assessing writing and the writing process (there's only one?) now being written in stone, with students having to demonstrate knowledge of the process. We'll talk about designing assignments and curriculum for writing as well.

Twenty years ago, most teaching of writing in secondary schools was all of the "current traditional" model, with a focus on imitating "great" writing, formal patterns, and mechanical correctness. Research in the teaching of writing has demonstrated that the current traditional approach does not teach students **how** to write and sometimes may actually make writing more difficult. Many of you have chosen to become English

teachers because writing and reading come easily to you. You may, in fact, have been taught through a current traditional approach. Most of your students will not have had the same comfortable or pleasant experience as you have had and that should always be in your mind as you approach designing curriculum and assignments in writing. Nonetheless, we all have an obligation to teach all our students, not just the ones who learn easily under traditional curricula. Some of our students are speakers of non-prestige dialects of American English, some do not speak English as their first language, and others, nearly 10% by some estimates, will have learning disabilities that affect their writing performance. We need to teach all these students.

At the same time, we'll be examining documents describing school districts and schools within districts for what they tell us about the student population. We'll look at ways to adjust assignments and curriculum to be more inclusive of a broader student population. After focusing in on process approaches, we'll turn to a critical examination of process and attention to issues of teaching a diverse student population. The term that best ties together these readings is social constructivism. Much of the process approach is based on the individuality of the student writer. In social constructivism the writer is envisioned as being part of a number of communities using language, only one of which is the classroom. One important criticism of process approaches has to do with the imagined student population. In some works on process approaches, the imagined student is typically white and middle-class, with educated parents who are engaged in their student's literacy learning. In the Puget Sound region, where most of you will be teaching, this prototypical student is relatively rare, clustered into particular school districts or schools within districts.

Finally, we'll take up topics in the public sphere: the assessment of and response to writing and then testing. We'll look at commenting and ways of assessing writing classes. Our testing topics will be the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning), the AP English exams and what colleges actually expect. Drawing on our discussion of the AP English exams, we'll examine how distant AP writing is from what both community and four-year colleges require.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Class Participation:

20%

This category includes your participation in group activities both in and out of class as well as your contribution to discussion. It also includes your completion of all the exercises and writing practice that the class does as a whole. If your attendance is sporadic, you cannot fully participate in the class activities and without that participation, you are affecting your final grade.

Journals:

20%

Though we will discuss the assigned readings in class, I will expect and collect your two-page evaluation and reactions to the assigned readings every Wednesday. I expect that

you will be able to use your journals to participate fully in class and small-group activities, so bring them to class every day we meet. These journal entries should first fully summarize the main points of the readings assigned, evaluate the author's conclusions based on your own experience in classrooms (you've been students for a long time and that's credible experience for this assignment) and react to your classmates' commentaries and class activities. Each entry must contain these elements. The journals will be evaluated on a ✓ system with pluses and minuses, which I'll convert to the numerical version for your final grade.

Collaborative Curriculum/Assignment/Specific School Project: 30%

In this project, you will work with others to investigate a particular school and its student population and design one unit plan on writing that speaks to teaching all the students. That can mean either non-tracked or tracked classes, mixed ability or classes with diverse student populations. In the final written report and oral presentation that the group produces the group will need to make use of ERIC and other research and provide an annotated bibliography, as well as using the course materials, to justify the unit plans.

Research Project and Paper 30%

You will also conduct an independent, empirical research project on writing. Your research project can be an empirical study of the value of a particular writing activity, an observational or ethnographic study of the social contexts of writing, a case study of a particular writer, an analysis of teachers' written commentary on papers or an analysis of a particular school's memos to its instructional staff, or an analysis of non-literary texts. This is not a library report, so your focus needs to be on the analysis of the materials, drawing as you need from the course materials. This assignment is due the last day of class, BUT you will need to have a completed draft two class days prior to the last day for peer review.