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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I have a family history of teaching. My mother is a teacher, both of my sisters are teachers, and I have been a teacher of many different subjects in more than one country. As a person with a history of teaching, I realize that it is important to reflect on my own practices in order to present a consistent and engaging teaching philosophy. As a result of my time as a writing instructor in different contexts, I have come to believe in a teaching philosophy for the writing classroom that focuses on three key principles: (1) heightening rhetorical awareness for metacognition, critical thinking, and transfer in writing; (2) encouraging students to become co-constructors of knowledge; and (3) recognizing and responding to diversity in the classroom.

Rhetorical Awareness

I can't teach my students how to write in every one of the many genres that they will encounter, but I can teach them to be aware that approaches to writing vary in response to specific rhetorical situations. I believe that writing is a social tool that is used to respond to a specific situation, and the standard and style of writing should reflect the particular social situation at hand. With this notion, my classroom seeks to improve students' understanding of language, writing, and literacies, utilizing a writing curriculum that is centered on writing about writing, literacies, and discourse communities. For example, in one of my first-year writing courses, the students read, discussed, and reflected on texts from a variety of genres with a variety of rhetorical purposes, yet all of these texts grappled with issues related to writing and language. By focusing the content of the class on issues of writing and language, I hoped to broaden my students' understanding of how writing actually functions as a social tool in the real world. If I can make explicit for my students the idea that writing is socially embedded and that each writing task emerges from a social discourse and responds to a particular purpose for a particular audience, students will have a greater chance of effectively responding to a variety of rhetorical situations. By encouraging students to be meta-aware and reflective of their communication tasks, they will have a rhetorical view of language that will help them use critical thinking to see the similarities and differences of each writing task. As a result, they can grow to become more effective communicators in the variety of situations in which they are and will be placed.

Co-Constructors of Knowledge

Reorienting the presentation of writing as a way to communicate effectively within a particular style of discourse employed in a particular community demystifies writing and changes the nature of the relation between student and teacher. In his work, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Paulo Freire suggests that "[t]o teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge." Within this learning environment, student preparation informs discussion, with the instructor serving as a mentor or coach. Classroom discussion features student voices, and I encourage them to bounce their ideas off of each other in true discussion, not just question and answer with the teacher. However, student-oriented classrooms do not lack academic rigor. Specific teaching strategies enact this inclusive, student-oriented learning. Hands-on activities complement student discussion. Consistent feedback and reflection are fundamental for students to develop a self-awareness of their writing. Formal written assignments such as rhetorical analyses, literacy narratives, and exploratory research writing provide structured ways through which students can develop and present complex ideas as well as develop meta-awareness of various writing practices. Informal assessments such as minute papers, main take-aways, and lingering questions create space for unthreatening evaluation of learning outcomes on a consistent basis. Conferences with students allow the instructor to get to know the student and participate in the conversation about the student's writing process and development of ideas. Within my teaching philosophy, writing courses are workshops in which students receive feedback through a variety of sources and voices such as teacher feedback, peer review, and self-assessment.

Diversity in the Classroom

As a writing instructor at Florida International University, designing a classroom that allows for multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds is essential to the success of my students. When I think about the realization of my teaching philosophy, I imagine a diverse group of students who feel comfortable to draw on their own experiences and literacies to enrich the conversation about writing and critical thinking. Recognizing and responding to linguistic diversity is particularly important in the modern composition classroom. I agree with Paul Kei Matsuda that believing in “the myth of linguistic homogeneity” is no longer an option for instructors, and I strive to integrate unique combinations of best practices for L2 students. Furthermore, not all L2 students will face the same exact set of challenges. To assume that all Chinese students, for example, will approach a text in the same way just because they are Chinese is as ludicrous as someone making the same assumption about American writers. In order to effectively address the linguistic diversity of the class as a whole, I approach each student as an individual, create a relationship, and build trust in order to properly assess what his/her particular strengths and challenges might be. By recognizing and building on what students already bring with them into the class, I can more effectively facilitate the student’s growth of meta-awareness of rhetorical situations and different writing approaches.

As a writing instructor in the modern composition classroom, I feel that it is my responsibility to help each student gain confidence and authority as a writer. I believe equipping students with heightened rhetorical awareness, encouraging them to become co-constructors of knowledge, and respecting the diverse approaches they bring with them into the classroom are the key ways that I can help my students develop as effective writers and communicators.