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Philosophy of Teaching

In teaching English Composition I believe there is an intimate connection between the acts of reading and writing. My ultimate, overarching, goal of the composition class is to increase students' abilities to argue effectively in a variety of genres and media which can include written and visual texts. I believe students who have the ability to read and analyze a text learn how to become better writers. Through reading of texts, whether written, visual, or verbal, students are exposed to a variety of forms, genres, styles, and mechanics. As they read students notice different patterns of writing and can then use those patterns in their own writing. As an instructor and mentor I ask students to look for the following: what is the main argument of the text? What type of support is used for the argument: personal testimony, primary and secondary sources, analogies, allusions? How does the writer move to the conclusion? What type of sentence structure is used in the argument? Does the writer appeal to values, logic, or emotions? When students begin to understand how rhetorical and compositional elements work together in a text they can bring that knowledge into their own writing. By asking students these questions, and guiding them to become better readers, I believe I can guide them to becoming better writers.

As a teacher of composition it is my job to explain the ties between reading and writing to the student. Lectures that employ Friere's Banking Concept of Education, simply transferring information from teacher to student, will not suffice for teaching these practices to students. I believe that students need to be active in the classroom and engaged with the subject matter they are studying. The lesson designs that are most valuable for this instruction ask students to examine a text together, whether in small groups or in a class.

Falling back on the relationship of reading and writing, I believe a key to success in a composition class is having students write everyday. Students become better writers through practice and, therefore, this particular activity could ask students to write individually prior to discussion. This allows students to write, gather their thoughts, and is a break off point for discussion. In this situation students are not only building connections from their reading and writing, but they are also building knowledge together as a group. I believe the shared experiences of reading, writing, and discussion help create a community of learners in the classroom where knowledge can be built and constructed together.

Through focus on the intimate relationship between reading and writing, I find that an emphasis on process comes naturally. I value the concept of writing as a process that requires time and growth. My own pedagogy employs the use of a writing portfolio to display the value of process to students. Building a writing portfolio throughout a semester, including both formal and informal writing pieces, and giving students the opportunity to revise some of the pieces in their portfolio, shows students that their writing is never complete. I find it is important to also not grade individual writing pieces but rather grade the portfolio as a whole twice a semester. This allows students to focus on revising, redrafting, and rethinking just as real writers do. In the end students understand the recursive process of writing. Although students need to be able to produce products in the composition classroom, it is through process that they will develop superior skills. Process can truly be valued when students look past writing their essays for a grade, and stop seeing their writing as complete when a grade is on it. I believe that in order for students to reach their fullest potential in the composition classroom, they need to view themselves as real writers in the world.

I know that the students who enter my classroom are getting an education for a reason. They are aiming to acquire professional skills in a specialized area that will allow them to go out into the world and build a successful career and life. I believe it is my duty to prepare them for the world they will enter. Today the world is increasingly focused on technological and visual literacies. My students need to be prepared for those current rhetorical situations when they leave the university. As a result, my assignments, in both reading and writing, provide students the opportunity to both evaluate and create arguments in a variety of media and modes using multiple literacies. I believe reading and composing in multiple genres, for multiple audiences, and multiple purposes reinforce the idea of students moving beyond the classroom and interacting with the world they exist in. The world demands that students be versed in multiple literacies and my teaching practices allow for the development of those literacies.