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Personal Pedagogy: Care and Encouraging Ownership

Throughout my time in English 6500, I have learned an immense amount. As someone without a background in education, much of the information that I gathered from the assigned reading and personal experimentation in a mock “sandbox” course was completely foreign and unconsidered. Because of this, I greatly enjoyed the learning process: every week was a discovery, and I learned that I feel passionately about the process of teaching. Overall, I was able to explore and develop a personal pedagogy around the idea that teaching writing fundamentally entails teaching communication. I want to be able to teach intentionality in writing choices in order to be understood- students have important things to say. Language is so pervasive that it ultimately has an effect on almost every aspect of our lives. We both think in and communicate with language, and we are limited in how to express ourselves both internally and externally by the words that we have to describe a situation. Learning intentionality with language allows us to not only develop a better understanding of our own experiences but also to connect with all of the people in the world around us. Even if someone isn't analyzing classic literature, it's likely that they're reading (or listening) to news articles, or instruction manuals, or social media posts, or messages from loved ones. The ability to understand language and to choose the correct language to be understood goes well beyond the classroom and has social, personal, and societal benefits. In order to create an ideal environment for this kind of learning, it is also crucial to me that I oversee the classroom using the principles of ethics of care, community building, and

feminist ideology. This is even more relevant today in the time of online classrooms, where connection can be difficult. This paper reflects on research I have done throughout the semester demonstrating how to encourage students to take ownership of their writing while maintaining an positive emotional and ethical atmosphere that allows students to feel safe enough to express themselves.

I began my research by reading "Responding to Student Traumatic Writing: A Psychologist's View" by John MacDevitt. Psychology is a subject that I am interested in, so I was excited to see the intersection between it and teaching writing. The article focuses on how to respond to student writing about personal experiences. There is much debate among professors about whether to encourage or discourage these topics. While studies show that expressive writing is good for health across the board, there is apprehension from professors regarding how to respond when students submit assignments disclosing personal trauma. Additional studies have shown that, when it comes to verbally processing life situations and emotions, it is equally as effective to talk to 'paraprofessionals' like hairdressers, bartenders, and teachers as it is to see a professional psychotherapist. Despite this, some professors may feel unqualified to respond to these traumatic experiences. There are worries about 'trauma olympics,' or students disclosing the most vulnerable experience to obtain a higher grade. There are concerns about how to grade on things like grammar or style when talking about a student's own traumatic experiences. There is also the chance that students may feel uncomfortable about the level of sharing that happens in this environment. However, research demonstrates that there may be value and healing to be had in simply the ability to express these feelings around hard experiences. Empathy is a huge part of this process. Approaching the process from a place of mutual respect and shared humanity tends to create a positive, productive interaction. Writing is vulnerable, and receiving empathy towards

their feelings can allow authors to move forward and make critical improvements in their work. I intend on incorporating personal writing into my courses for a myriad of reasons, including both the personal benefits stated above and the natural interest that comes with being able to write about yourself. Because of that, I will likely encounter this scenario, and I am grateful for the planning and foresight this article offered.

The next week, I continued my exploration of pedagogy with “‘I Could Have Told You That Wouldn't Work’: Cyberfeminist Pedagogy in Action” by Rebecca S. Richards. I enjoyed this exploration into explicitly online instruction, and Feminist ideology is already a topic I’ve studied extensively. Richards begins by acknowledging the differences in her own “pre-teaching ritual” from those of her feminist predecessors. She notes the increased presence of technology and the decreased attention on the physical presence of her students- an aspect of feminist teaching bell hooks emphasizes heavily. She goes on to note that online learning has become all pervasive. There are ideas that online learning is inherently feminist because it can engage diverse populations who may not otherwise be able to attend face to face classes, even if there is an aspect of communication that is lost. Studies have also shown a pervasive belief among professors that online classes are the same or better than face to face interactions. Richards attempts to bridge the gap with cyberfeminist pedagogy. In her words, it “draw(s) on the theories and praxes informed by the diversity and emerging scholarship of cyberfeminism.” It is a “productive and ironic play of cyberfeminist activism and theory,” but “commit(s) to the tenets of feminist pedagogy such as ethics of care, community-based curriculum, collaboration, and embodied praxis” (6). Essentially, it is a look at how to integrate feminist teaching into an online environment with each of its unique aspects. Feminist pedagogy covers a wide range of ideas, but at its base seeks to expose and address the imbalances and injustices present in a current

power structure. A foundational belief in most feminist pedagogy is an ethics of care. This idea is based on the importance of relationships and the belief that communication solves conflicts. A classroom is a web of relationships, and must be managed in a way as to uphold these principles. The goal of a feminist teacher when teaching online is to “engage students in controversial, difficult dialogues... in a fully online course” (11) while still using an ethics of care and a feminist teaching ethos, even in a space where neither she nor her students can be physically present. To accomplish this, Richards developed various strategies for how to resolve this problem, such as ensuring that students create “deliberate online identities” that are kept “playful and ironic in their technology usage so that they do not assume RL hierarchies that feminist pedagogies seek to unsettle” (14). She had students answer reflective questions to create this online identity in order to have them consider who they are and what they wish to communicate, as having an online identity allows students to be selective with what they wish to convey. I found this article extremely beneficial, as I began designing my assignments and considering how to keep discussions respectful and safe for all students.

Moving forward and knowing the ethics that I wanted to center in my classroom, I began to focus on how to best teach some of the specific material. I decided to explore specific assignments and strategies that would encourage students to take ownership of their writing. I began with an idea for the research paper assignment. We all know that research is how we obtain enough knowledge to write about a topic and how we offer readers credibility. However, it's long, it can be tedious, and the formatting can be daunting to students. How do we get students comfortable with (or, in the best-case scenario, enthusiastic about) this necessary aspect of writing? One of the ideas that I loved was “Coping with the Research Paper” by Richard Profozich. To promote viewing research in a more engaging way, Profozich incorporated

research into his assignments earlier in the semester in order to integrate it into aspects of other types of papers and demonstrate how critical it is to all projects. This also allowed the students to develop familiarity with the research process. He also places an emphasis on choosing a topic that the students can relate to and feel confident discussing. Once the students have become familiar with the process, the research itself is formulated to be both "purposeful and directed" (306). The research that they use should be specific to the understanding of the topic they have chosen to write about. This creates diversity in papers as students delve into the topics that they are passionate about, increasing the likelihood that they will commit to the broader view of research. I think that these are excellent ideas to implement that demystify the process and break it down into manageable steps. Carlton Clark also suggests strategies for students writing research papers in "The Mock Research Paper." In his exercise, students create fake citations for a fake paper- the more off-the-wall, the better. He gives examples of papers about "video game addiction among dogs" and "shopping therapy" (47) and argues that as parodies, they frequently contain important commentary on serious issues. These papers are both funny and insightful, and allow students to learn the importance of reading critically and become familiar with format and the importance of credible sources. Learning to research well is fundamental to writing, and I believe that these techniques have significant promise in helping to teach students to use other sources to better communicate.

Continuing my investigation, I chose to review "Negotiating Languages and Cultures: Enacting Translingualism through a Translation Assignment" by Julia Kiernan, Joyce Meier, and Xiqiao Wang. I was drawn to this piece because I am particularly interested in translated literature and the way that translated works in themselves are based so heavily on the experience of the person doing the translating. For many reasons, there may not be the exact equivalent of a

word available in the target language, and when that happens it is the job of the translator to choose a replacement word that conveys the intended meaning. This is difficult because language is subjective, and words can have a plethora of connotations based on anything from life experience to geographical location. Thus, when reading a translated work, I try to keep in mind that the translator has had as much of a hand in the piece as the original author. The authors of this article propose a practice where students experience this by translating a scholarly article or culture stories from a different language into their own. It's thought provoking to take a step away from English in order to reflect on the intentionality with which we can make linguistic choices. Reading and writing are so often about expanding viewpoints, and in consuming diverse content, we broaden our horizons. The kind of assignment presented here is likely too complicated for a class that is not already ESL-g geared. However, I think that in a composition class, it might be fun to do an extremely shortened version of this assignment- perhaps where students use various translation services available to translate a single verse of a poem, or a short haiku. This could be especially helpful if a translated work is on the list of required reading, but would regardless be a lesson in tone and word choice. Having students break down sentence structure to such a basic level encourages intentionality and critical thinking.

For the next week's article, I read "Narrating the Moviegoing Experience: Reframing Film for First-Year Composition" by Beth Sara Swanson and Ray Dademo. At the end of the first paragraph, the question of how best to teach students semiotics is introduced. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. In writing, this can be demonstrated by words themselves. For example, one could think about a cow. Even though there is likely not an actual cow in front of the person doing the thought experiment, and no image is attached to this paper, the combination of sounds and symbols used to create the word "cow" easily conjures an image of a four-legged

mammal that goes "moo." So the word "cow" is the signifier, and the actual animal itself is the signified. However, even with a word as simple as "cow," the specific image called to mind by each individual was likely different. Our goal as writers is to identify our audience and choose the signifiers, or the words, that will allow them to most clearly understand what we are trying to signify. Our goal as teachers is to find a way to teach our students the best way to implement this practice. The authors argue that to engage with Millennial students, instead of selecting a variety of pop-culture pieces as course readings, the experience of movie watching is an excellent way to introduce students to semiotics. I do think that contemporary film has the potential to be extremely helpful in imparting the steps to a successful critical analysis. The visual and auditory aspect of movies may make it easier for a student who is unfamiliar with the process of consuming content through a critical lens to understand what they are analyzing. I also liked that group discussion was incorporated into the film-watching, and think that it could be an extremely valuable activity in demonstrating audience interpretation of work in a beginning composition class. However, I believe that a full-semester focus with emphasis on semiotic theory, like the one this article suggests, may be better saved for a higher-level classroom.

The last article I reviewed was a chapter from *Learning and Teaching Writing Online: Strategies for Success* titled "The Experience for an Online University Course for Learning Written Communication Skills in ICT Studies." I thought that this was an excellent chapter to end on, as I felt that it encompassed many of my prior thoughts. The authors chose to base a writing-centered course on the concept of "Text Linguistics and Discourse Analysis, which take the text as a point of departure and focus on the study of the use of language and communication needs... [t]he goal is not to learn grammar, but rather to use linguistic knowledge to resolve the difficulties faced in writing texts for specific purposes" (132). The concept was explained best by

the authors- the point of the course is to "[examine] not only the sentence, but also the text as a unit and its determining factors: purpose, audience and, in general, circumstances that make up the communicative situation. According to Text Linguistics, a well-written text respects three properties: context awareness, coherence and cohesion" (132). Throughout this course, I have repeatedly examined what I believe makes writing "good" as I consider the best way to impart that knowledge and skill to potential students. I feel that this description is one of my favorites that I've come across so far. I've considered in many of my prior posts that communication is the point of writing, and I still ultimately believe that the best writing is the kind that resonates with its intended audience. Grammar and rhetoric are logical and agreed upon frameworks that exist to best help us accomplish that, and I can see the benefit of integrating them into practical applications to increase retention. As the chapter itself points out, "texts must comply with a set of rules in order to achieve efficient communication," and there are many different types of texts with their own conventions. While the authors of this chapter focused on ICT students, I believe that the principles they based the course on have some potential to be modified for use in an early composition class. I love the concept of reframing grammar as a way to organize thoughts so that they have the potential to be understood by the widest audience. I also think the emphasis on 'prioritizing' information is an interesting one. It would be difficult to cater to students' majors exactly with writing assignments, but I wonder if there isn't also potential here for collaboration with other departments. An idea that comes to mind is having 'mini-interviews' with professors from other departments explaining some of the ways writing skills play into the various fields and emphasizing some of the most important things to be communicated via writing as a resource. That may be ambitious, but I think that highlighting the importance of writing across

fields and demonstrating the basic skills that make communication effective will establish a solid groundwork for students' future endeavors.

College-level instruction is always a career path that I have been interested in, and I feel like this course has provided excellent insight into the realities of the position. This is especially relevant considering that I have very little background in education. Throughout the experience of mock grading and examining such a variety of pedagogy, I found myself considering problems that I had heretofore not even begun to contemplate. From cultivating a diverse setting that allows for group learning, to imparting the best way to do research, to addressing personal problems going on in the students' lives, I have come to realize that balancing interpersonal connection is of the utmost importance. I also feel like I have also made great strides towards developing my personal pedagogy. Writing is something I feel passionately about, but the best way to convey expertise on the subject is something that requires trial and error. There were many points in my work in the Sandbox where I would come up with an idea for a lesson, and find myself having to revise based on comprehensibility or feasibility. There are a myriad of ways available to encourage students to take ownership of their writing, and I look forward to continuing to develop my own skill in planning and executing lesson plans.

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