

Writing in the Twenty-First Century The Importance of Pedagogy in Higher Education

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Abstract- Writing is one of the most important courses to take within higher education in the twenty-first century, especially when aligning education that will meet individual career goals. According to the Nation's Report Card on Writing, in 2011 alone, only about a quarter of young people can write proficiently. There is a need to institute change to developing and increasing the amount and quality of writing students are expected to produce. There is a need for greater collaboration for student learning by using innovative pedagogies that maintain the complexity and importance of pioneering work while showing that it is, in some cases, negotiable with traditional classroom practices. There are three specific examples: teaching point of view with multicultural studies, incorporating language awareness/critical theory into the composing process, and considering prescriptive suggestions in the workshop. Discussions of large-scale structural change should and will continue, but this article—which reviews how some theorists situate and enact innovation, include narratives of student resistance, and discuss practices that reframe more traditional activities—invites instructors to reflect on recent scholarship and consider larger educational goals for their classrooms.

Keywords- Writing; Pedagogy; Higher Education; Teaching

Writing is one of the most important courses to take within higher education and the twenty-first century. However, the importance of writing means much more than being an analysis of dollars and cents. Writing makes us better

readers, better thinkers, better speakers, and better listeners. Through writing, we can inform, explain, argue, entertain, and inspire the world around us.

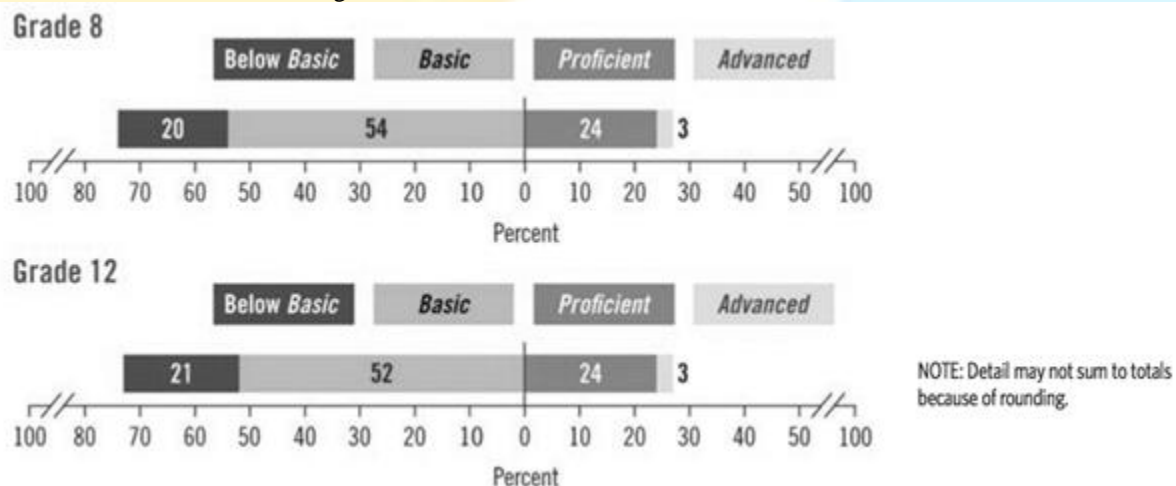


Figure 1: NAEP's executive summary of the 2011 report card on writing.

According to the Nation's Report Card on Writing, in 2011 alone, only about a quarter of young people can write proficiently. There is eminent importance for learning to write since it becomes an important, and essential need for pedagogy for students as they enter higher education, and later the workforce. When a person is proficient in writing, then it does what it is supposed to do, and that is to communicate a message to the reader. However, the issue is that more than a quarter of students still need to be able to learn how to write well after graduating high school and before entering college. There is a need to institute change

by developing and increasing the amount and quality of writing that students are expected to produce. However, to align students to develop writing skills there is a need for a two-step process to exist. This two-step process is as follows:

- Step One: Increase the quantity of writing students are expected to produce; and
- Step Two: Increase the quality of writing students are expected to produce.

In most public school districts throughout the United States, the development of writing skills has dramatically

decreased to being practically underground in school curriculums.

As instructors, there is a need to rethink the way we approach the teaching of writing. Many higher education institutions utilize a workshop model for teaching writing. The workshop method of teaching writing arose in the states, in Iowa in the 1930s–the 1950s, reaching the height of its influence in the late 20th century, in relatively unique circumstances. It was developed and implemented at the University of Iowa through the vision of Norman Forester and later Paul Engle, whose primary intention was to provide young writers a way to have feedback on their work. However, in education classrooms today, some limits are being placed on the craft of writing to a single content area. This alters the way that students think about writing, whereas instead, students have become accustomed to understanding writing in broken fragment sentences, and curating through other people’s ideas, and not having to take on the responsibility of crafting compelling arguments that synthesize by using multiple perspectives on a topic. There is an erosion of the ability to write that makes teaching writing in higher education as becoming necessary for students’ success in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Student learning through the use of collaboration is needed, especially among literature, writers, and composition specialists, which remains resolute. Theorists such as Mayers has called for structural and programmatic changes that would redefine writing and align it with composition studies. In rethinking how higher education writing programs are being delivered, there is a call for developing a full-scale transformation at both the graduate and undergraduate levels; by creating programs that offer more thoughtful, outcomes-oriented curricula that include teaching skills that apply to life. Then we can build programs within education that are more resilient, environmentally responsive space[s] for the development and sustenance of young writers and literary culture.

Any significant change will come from programmatic reform through reflective instructors looking to open up the study of writing and make its lessons more applicable to other disciplines, as well as to real-world learning beyond the university. By using innovative pedagogies that maintain the complexity and importance of pioneering work while showing that it is, in some cases, negotiable with traditional classroom practices. There are three specific examples: teaching point of view with multicultural studies, incorporating language awareness/critical theory into the composing process, and considering prescriptive suggestions in the workshop. Discussions of large-scale structural change should and will continue, we can enact innovation, include narratives of student resistance, and discuss practices that reframe more traditional activities—invites instructors to reflect on recent scholarship and consider larger educational goals for their classrooms. I offer this article and the practices described within as a means for writers to consider and

join the “changing” for teaching writing in higher education.

Bizzaro suggests that instructors model different critical lenses to teach interpretation beyond New Critical close reading by using critical theory to make beginning writers aware of their processes and relationships with language (244). To empower writers, using critical theory can be instrumental in the democratization of education. Student writers can learn a kind of writing that problematizes and resists institutional, privatized identification by theorizing about basic assumptions that we hold about how to write. It poses the question about what writing can or should be in the twenty-first century. Contemporary instructors are inviting students to discuss larger stakes in terms of the social function of writing curricula and literature.

Writing classrooms in higher education are places to help students produce useful texts for audiences outside of the workshop. Green discusses how his “work can provide paths for students to use the knowledge they have gathered to strengthen their participation in their communities of choice. In this way there is a writing responsibility, that is, ‘the responsibility of creating and maintaining a place where people can bring the immediacy of their lives and language’ ” (168). For instructors of undergraduates looking to keep writing vital, professors must provide frameworks that open up the writing classroom. However, in the face of student expectations, implementation can be challenging, such as in student resistance.

With writing workshop classrooms, assigning reflective and analytical writing to foreground the importance of writers’ critical reading skills, and processes that emphasize the development of writers over their writing as a product. To invite students to consider the larger purposes of literature and writing. One example is through the use of class readings and discussions of works such as Robert McLaughlin’s chapter entitled, “Post-postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World.” Students are asked to consider how literature can preserve historical moments and provide social commentary. They begin by reading the final story in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999), to discuss David Foster Wallace’s intent, as seen in McLaughlin’s article, to write beyond irony about authentic human connection. Students read and discussed Wallace’s story with enthusiasm, but McLaughlin’s article and my questions about how writing moves through the world, what its purposes are, how it’s made, and who has the right to make it were met with silence and confusion. Often the writing classroom is something few theorists have commented on in research. As the workshop is the dominant model, students often expect those class meetings will be devoted entirely to workshopping. When met with courses that incorporate critical and rhetorical pedagogies, students might feel that intellectual work and readings take time away from discussions of their writing. For their part, students want to write, and we should let them, but we must also provide the proper contexts so that they are aware of the conversations they are entering.

Imparting traditions, or lore, did not have to mean we are to wield an authority unfairly or to teach a course that ignored innovations in English studies. Instead, the desire is to connect writing to other disciplines and real-world learning with student expectations. This can be achieved by returning to specific activities associated with the model of writing that infuses ideas from critical theory, multicultural studies, and/or composition. It is about incorporating intellectual work in the writing classroom by emphasizing the development of the writers' processes. By paying tribute to the bringing students to learn about writing and their growth in writing, these activities invite students to consider who they are as writers and reflect on why literature is crucial in the twenty-first century.

By opening the classroom up as a place of drafting, experimenting, and collaborating is worthwhile in terms of creating a productive environment and teaching writers to do the work of writing. In explaining how to begin writing, exercises are a way to get into your unconscious. Stories do not begin with ideas or themes or outlines, so much as with images or obsessions, and they continue to be built by exploring those images and obsessions. Seemingly unrelated prompts can help you break loose that next page. The use of images such as art or music can spark writing. However, more explicitly the question is "how do writers draft, or proceed from word to word?" It is agreed that the use of arguments for generating exercises and in-class writing may help students to explore what to write, but how does one write in the first place? Mayers advances the notion that composition that comes from a writer's "relatedness to language" and that "the writer does not begin with an idea or intention but rather with a phrase, a sentence, a sound, one in which the writer's original intentions about meaning are not as important as the meanings the writing itself might tend to work toward through the process of revision" (87). He advocates providing words and fragments for writers to work from and also resists purpose-driven assignments. Other theorists, such as Derrida provide insight when helping beginning writers by looking at writing as an ongoing process that shifts and is fluid in its developmental stages. The meaning for why we are writing will not stand for long but will continue to be subject to the arbitrary play of the very process that produced it. For instance, writing a story may include that we add sentence four to sentences two and three. Not only do we have the fourth sentence, but the third sentence has changed what one and two mean—maybe slightly, maybe enormously. It is important because this very same principle of shifting that inheres in how we make meaning in language repeats itself in writing, moving forward in an endlessly unfolding process that grows paradoxically, not out of some preexisting ideas in our heads, but the logic of writing itself (185). To "empower students to become better, more interesting

writers," having self-awareness alone is not enough to ultimately sustain them in their writing.

- In the classroom, by adopting exercises that begin with questions, such as: How do we write? Or, how do we get from sentence to sentence or word to word?
- Is academic, argument-driven writing different from other types of writing?
- What is writer's block, and where does it come from? Is it about a poor work ethic, or is it a more serious symptom of lack of confidence?
- What about the experiences of some writers who have been castigated and repeatedly told that they just aren't "good writers" and therefore struggle to get writing done?

We are better able to help develop writers to have explanations, for how writing proceeds. Students can continue to draft and work beyond the course. Whether students confront it or not, the activity is not just about getting words on the page, but rather to understand the tools—either when reading literature, writing essays, or criticism—that will take on equal weight: one is not more primal than the other. What is most important is that students experience writing, discover it, and clarify their relationship to it. Asking students to consider where their writing comes from and investigate various processes of pedagogy for different writing purposes can empower them and give them tools to learn the importance and find enjoyment in writing across the disciplines.

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