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Teaching and Learning Philosophy

In Fall 2012, I inadvertently created a teaching assignment for myself that opened my eyes to the challenges of vertical curriculum in academic research and writing. I was teaching 11th grade language arts and 12th grade dual credit composition at a public high school in central Florida while also teaching first-year writing at a nearby two-year college. Every Wednesday, I taught classes through which I could literally trace the trajectory of my students, many of whom had begun in high school classrooms like mine and were heading to two-year college classrooms like mine. That year of my teaching career complicated for me commonplace teacher tendencies to "blame down," or assume or expect "up." More importantly, I saw how much of my own teaching practices privileged a specific kind of discourse and genre—the print-based, page-based academic essay—in ways that not only presented academic discourse as stable and superior, but also left other kinds of discourses just as uninterrogated and perhaps even more occluded.

As a college writing teacher today, I take it as my charge to make visible and explicit the many available tools and strategies for learning any unfamiliar discourse or genre—whether academic, public, or professional, in print or on screen. One of my greatest strengths as a feminist literacy educator is how I welcome and support students in finding multiple ways into thinking, reading, writing, and researching that will be useful to them in and beyond the university—based on my understanding that we are all constrained and enabled by the stories we have internalized and that we are often bound by our own imaginations. This is especially vital considering that many students have been told limiting stories about what discourses are meant for them and what practices they are capable of, whether they are women or young girls, first generation college students, men and women of color, or English language learners. In my teaching—regardless of course (writing or literature), grade level (tenth graders through college seniors), or institution (public high school, two-year college, or four-year metropolitan university)—I think it is my job to encourage and authorize students to occupy positions from which they may develop confidence in co-constructing knowledge and actively participate in creating and delivering texts for a variety of situations, as they will be asked to do in and across personal and professional domains. Though there are many ways to achieve this goal, I do so by structuring in early experimentation and frequent collaboration, both of which help us *all* to use and push beyond our own knowledge and imaginations and to learn from and with others whose viewpoints and practices are different from our own.

To demystify writing practices, my courses provide multiple low stakes opportunities for students to experiment across media, genres, and modes. During class, students engage early on in activities with unfamiliar digital tools, from Google Drive to Pik-to-chart, from WordPress to WeVideo. In writing assignments, students alter texts from one draft to the next, self-selecting an appropriate medium, genre, and audience depending on their focus and purpose. For instance, in a recent introductory writing course, students read literacy narratives as they were writing drafts of their own; in class, they collected and discussed an archive of images, which they then used to transform their literacy narrative drafts into blog posts, infographics, or digital letters. One student, for example, only "unlocked" her key takeaway by remediating her essay into a letter to send home to her sister, who was a college-bound high school senior. This early assignment gave students opportunities to practice multiple methods for invention and delivery. It also encouraged them to reflect on—in writing, on our class blog—the relationships between texts, audience, genres, and modalities from the beginning of the semester without immediately privileging one specific genre in its polished, revised form. For first-year college writers, this particular assignment also opened up conversations about literacy-in-progress, making explicit how

students might practice rhetorical dexterity across genres, media, and modes at the college level. In this way, students in my courses experience multiple ways into experimenting with otherwise opaque, often unarticulated affordances of writing across new media and unfamiliar genres that will be useful to them in academic and other professional domains.

All of my courses also rely on collaborative activities—including researching, writing, and presenting—to make explicit how knowledge is constructed from specific viewpoints, using certain kinds of evidence for targeted audiences. In a recent research-intensive writing course, students participated in a semester-long sequence that built in collaboration throughout the term, not just on peer review days. Students began by conducting research for individual presentations on a cultural myth using self-selected media (e.g., images, infographics); and their first writing assignment synthesized viewpoints from multiple classmates' presentations. In small groups, students then chose one myth to explore in-depth and led a class discussion using a group-selected article and video. For instance, one group juxtaposed ad campaigns and a newspaper article to show different created relationships between the working poor and healthy living; another group shared a montage of video clips and a women and gender studies article to illustrate damaging misrepresentations of black women in contemporary media. By the end of the term, students' synthesis essays and final digital statements engaged multiple viewpoints from academic and popular research, as well as from peer research and thinking. Just as importantly, this assignment sequence provided students with peer support and multiple ways into writing, speaking, and using research as a set of fluid knowledge-making practices. By collaborating in researching and writing as constructed practices, students in my courses learn to write and speak publicly about two things: the social assumptions and motivations that reproduce commonplace thinking *and* the research and representation practices that undergird such thinking in popular, professional, and academic discourses.

Recently, I experienced gratifying success in reconfiguring these strategies for experimentation and collaboration in an upper level American literature course. Students worked together in small groups each day, led discussion in pairs on a core course text, and shared individual presentations on Pulitzer-Prize winning poets of their choosing. For their final projects, students engaged in a three-part "choose your own adventure" project that included a literary analysis essay and one other genre/media creation to "teach the class." For example, one student created a graphic memoir of a childhood story with a nested urban legend; one shared an infographic on, and poem from, the black feminist arts movement in the 1960s; and several created blogs (e.g., from the point-of-view of minor characters, or as a contemporary version of *Sula*). Based on the creativity of these projects, I look forward to transforming similar pedagogical practices for writing, literature, or creative writing courses. For instance, during my doctoral literature exam on women writers grieving across genres, I sketched out a course on life writing across genres using narrative and feminist theories of autobiography, which I would be excited to teach as an undergraduate writing or literature course or a graduate theory course.

As a feminist writing teacher, I encourage students to aim for what is possible, not just what is preferred. To develop confidence performing the roles of speaker, knowledge maker, and discussion facilitator in addition to writer and listener (historically, more typical student roles in the university classroom). To actively participate in creating and delivering texts for a variety of audiences across genres, media, and domains of activity. And to learn from and with others what we otherwise would not know on our own.

My recent course syllabi and assignments can be found at https://rgramer.wordpress.com/teaching/.