



*"Please Feel Free to View
My Success"*

Fostering Engagement in FYC




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Overview:

- Reality Check
 - Situation
 - Foundations and Inspirations
 - Approaches
 - Student Responses
 - Reflection
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Reality Check


- *Fostering Engagement*
 - = *Caring, Nurturing, Encouraging*
 - ≠ *Forcing or Mandating*
- “*Rebellion Culture*”
 - *Nurtured and sustained by sites like RMP and Pick-A-Prof*
 - *Perceived business model*
 - *Paper product (diploma) “bought and paid for” (not education)*




Reality Check II: Polyanna or Practical?

Yet some may discover—despite their best efforts—that the benefits of college are more than social. Some may surprise themselves by working hard in a class, actually *enjoying* the struggle and savoring the reward...and realizing that reward does not come in the form of a letter grade.






We, as teachers, may not know who they will be, for they, as students, may not as yet know who they are.





Situation

- Most FYC students entering see themselves as writing to assignment criteria, not live readers
 - Though teacher is reader, since teacher sets criteria and evaluates writing, author/audience dynamic experiences an unnatural shift.
 - Most “real world” writing assumes that the author brings expertise, knowledge, or insight to the discussion and therefore the audience is enriched or entertained by reading.
 - FYC writers often do not consider the texts they craft to be educational or important beyond proving to teacher that they can do the assignment (skills) or have done the readings (honesty).
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Hypothesis

- Drawing from Paulo Freire's observations and applying his concepts specifically to the composition classroom, for both writer and audience, the text becomes "a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity."
- Key to student engagement—and more vibrant and engaging academic writing—lies in creating Freire's community of the "teacher-student" and "student-teachers."




How?

Two specific approaches:


- a family history course theme
- semester-long individual course theme

to foster an environment in which FYC writers recognize and realize the educational enrichment that their texts can offer to a reflective and inquisitive audience.






Foundations and Inspirations

- Freire's influence: Issue is not simply one of skills, but of being able to critically engage with life.
 - Personal recognition 1: not *another* euthanasia essay...
 - Personal recognition 2: history became meaningful when I found a “place” within it
 - Cross-generation communication, composing oral histories, interviewing skills, research methods, primary sources
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Approaches: Common Threads

- Writers urged to develop their “author-ity” in field
 - Assignments scaffolded to build a research “core”
 - Reenforcement of audience—why would audience want to read? How will one be enriched, educated, enlightened? The harsh truth: *why would we care?*
 - Writers always referred to as such (not as “students”)
 - I, as most vocal member of their audience, established that I quested to learn, to understand, to be “enriched, educated, enlightened,” in essence, challenging writers to do so in ways that would be enjoyable.
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Approaches: Scholarship/Specialization

- Writers asked to consider area of interest—from motorcross to fitness—and develop their semester curriculum
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Approaches: Scholarship/Specialization

Assignments:

- Profile: Part diagnostic, part exploration into possible topical interests, part writer's bio
 - Course Theme (proposal): explore viability of proposed topic in light of the types of writing (genres) expected
 - Report: Just the facts, ma'am...but how will it be interesting? And what is a report supposed to do, anyway?
 - Position Paper: Every topic has a controversy, and all have an opinion. Let you, the expert, weigh in.
 - Proposal: Is there a problem? Well, what are you going to do about it?
 - Video Essay: Media shift a previous assignment or branch out, but say something that needs to be heard... and why will we want to watch, listen, and learn?
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Approaches: Writing History

- Writers pick a relative (grandparents' generation or before) to learn more about
 - Identify both zones of curiosity and knowledge gaps
 - Hypothesize relative's "place" in history (intentionally vague, though possible interpretations provided)
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Approaches: Writing History


Assignments:

- Curriculum Theme (Proposal): Hypothesis and process
 - Interview: Transcript and article
 - Report
 - Artifact
 - Final Analysis
 - Video (Media Shift)
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Student Responses

“In my future, I would like to continue with the style of writing. I want to make improvements, because I enjoy writing and feel as though...if I could write effectively I could allow people [to] know my opinion. If you write well, people [will] understand you are caring of what you write. Even though this is my last semester in a composition course, I hope that I am able to write in one of these styles again, because I really do enjoy this.” –Kellee Beachy



A Yellow Dog Liberal Who Always Questions Authority

Video: Overview

Beachy, Kellee. (English 112 Video). [The Activist](#). Windows Media Video. New Haven, CT: Southern Connecticut State University, 3 May 2008.

Annotation:

The video has been created by Kellee Beachy. The reason is to describe the activist as individuals with a common purpose, to help the human race.

This video is to show the activist. There are many different activists in the world, but the video will show you all activists strive for the same common concept, to change the way a group of people are viewed, to become a flawless human race.


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Student Responses


“As the year was coming to an end I looked over my papers and reflected back on English class. I actually liked English 112 for the simple fact that we got to chose what we wanted to write about. Giving the students that power is good because you know that the students will never become bored with their topic. The research that I did for all of my papers kept me wanting to know more, and I can only hope that the papers I wrote kept the audience interested, same goes for my movie.” –Lauren LaPorta





Student Responses

“All my previous knowledge about history and research was that of monotonously reading textbook after textbook and spitting the words onto paper; but truth be told, it is so much more. I learned through the past four months that research not only exists in text, but in pictures and documents and stories and objects with each holding a different meaning. But with this wealth of information at my fingertips also came a wealth of *problems*, so to speak. I ran into many bumps along the road...”



Student Responses

“I enjoyed creating the movie and seeing Michael come to life (or so I care to think) through Russian songs, maps, images, information and interview segments from an interview with my father.

“The work never got easier, but never really seemed to become harder; it only became more...*exciting*. Each new document brought new information and each paper unfolded more of the past.


“ I was challenged to my ability in looking at new vocabulary and expressing my ideas not only through text but through media, I investigated thoroughly a topic that never had been touched upon before...

“Coming out of this class at the end of May, I feel that I am a much more accomplished writer.” –Alison Regan



Student Responses

“Before engaging in this English course, my view on the subject was simple and narrow; English is simply writing about something we previously read, writing a reflection on what we read. It is because of this image that I would have preferred to creatively write, or write about something that interests me. I learned, with this class however, that researching a family ancestor is interesting, and it becomes more interesting when sharing our writing about a specific person of our choice with a classroom community.” –Cara Manzari



Reflection


- Data availability (privileged to US)
- Issues to be negotiated that are more ones of trust and definitions of “family” (adoptive parents, parentage questions, resistance).
- Discomfort and at times anger– “freedom” not easier, but can be frustrating
- Sad that few conceive of writing done within college setting to be part of “curriculum of life” (McMahon and Portelli 61)

Reflection

- Surprised to find many references in student self-evaluative statements to the individualized or “genealogy” theme classes being unlike the assumed English class. Writers discussed genre, audience, persuasion. They identified themselves *as writers*.



Reflection

- The opportunity to be creative through multimedia creations was not a distraction from the work of writing, but a complement to it, encouraging the types of writer's "risks" necessary to developing voice and style.
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Reflection

- Question of impact of instructor's engagement on student engagement. bell hooks stresses necessity of “reciprocity” (11) and “self-actualization” (22).
- Reinforce roles as writing specialists with voracious learning appetites, asking to be taught by the so-called “student.”

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