

ENG/EDU 501: SPECIAL TOPICS IN TEACHING WRITING

Teaching Writing through Literature

June 2008

Missouri Western State University

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Department of English, Foreign Languages, and Journalism

Department of Education

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

ENG/EDU 501 Topics in Teaching Writing (1-2 credits each; may be repeated for a total of four credits)

Writing seminar for teachers or pre-service teachers with senior standing at MWSU which addresses a particular issue related to literacy teaching.

Prerequisite: Senior standing at MWSU with successful completion of EDU Junior Experience or BS or BA degree.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

I love to read.

That simple activity led me to teaching English. Yet, as a teacher, I have often struggled to instill the same passion for reading in my students. This conflict has plagued my teaching life. In June, at Prairie Lands' "Teaching Writing through Literature," I will have the opportunity to once again experience the joys of reading while wrestling with the complexities of teaching. Once again I will have time to read and to write about my reading and to plan about how my love of reading can inspire my students to becoming readers and writers. I wish to invite you to join me

We will study Jeffrey Wilhelm's *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry* and examine ways to challenge students into becoming independent readers and methods to engage students in conversations both verbal and written. We will practice Wilhelm's ideas with our own reading from *The Best American Non-Required Reading 2007*. Finally, we will focus our attention on our own classrooms by creating or revising a literature-based unit, a unit that we are willing to share with other teachers by posting it on the Prairie Lands Writing Project's Teacher Resources page.

Specifically, we will

1. We will examine how we teach literature, which must include how we teach reading.
2. We will examine the connections between the study of literature (reading) and writing.
3. We will study and practice several of Wilhelm's inquiry methods.
4. We will write or revise a literature unit that includes major writing expectations.

MATERIALS

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry*. New York: Scholastic, 2007.

The Best American Non-Required Reading, 2007. Ed: Dave Eggers and Sufjan Stevens. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Keep a reading log. Respond to both chapters from *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry* and from the selection from *The Best Non-Required American Writing, 2007*.
2. Publish a reading log audit during on June 17.
3. Participate in class activities which will include leading a discussion of an inquiry practice suggested by Wilhelm or leading a discussion over a selection from the anthology.
4. Revise a current literature unit or create a new literature unit using previously untaught texts. Either unit would include

the following sections:

- A rationale for the unit and the selection of literature. This should also include how the unit meets state, district and school goals.
- A range of activities or individual plans of how you will teach the unit.
- A description of writing expectations including the assignments and your method of evaluation.
- A personal reflection.

The unit will be presented in two ways. First, it will be presented to the teachers of English 501. The professional presentation would include time for us to read and complete at least one of the proposed activities. Time for conversation should also be allowed. Second, it will be posted on the Prairie Lands Writing Project's Teacher Resource page.

GRADING POLICY

No individual grades will be assigned for any activity, writing or inquiry demonstration; however, each activity, writing, and inquiry demonstration will receive critical responses from the instructor and from the workshop teachers. The purpose of this Prairie Lands Writing Project course is to bring teachers together to improve the teaching of literacy; those who have joined this institute demonstrate a commitment to a reflective inquiry of their own teaching. Frequent grades—an outside assessment of quality or effort—may damage the reflective inquiry community that Prairie Lands hopes to establish.

We plan, therefore, to assign only the grade of A. An "A" represents the following characteristics have been achieved:

- **Community:** The teacher has participated fully in the activities of the course. The teacher has shared writings, ideas, thoughts, and reactions, and has raised questions to enhance the learning and understanding of the other participants in this course. The teacher has contributed to the creation of a strong and memorable course.
- **Expectations:** The teacher has met all course requirements or expectations published in this syllabus.
- **Reflection:** The teacher's writing and conversation explore connections between this course and the teacher's classroom and between this course and the art of teaching.

If the instructor feels that a teacher is not achieving the characteristics of Community, Expectations, and Reflection as described above due to absences, late or missing work, inconsistent effort, or disruptive actions, the instructor will meet with the workshop participant to discuss his concerns. A failing grade will only be assigned to a teacher who fails to meet or refuses to meet the characteristics of Community, Expectations and Reflection.

POLICIES

Academic Honesty Policy and Due Process:

Academic honesty is required in all academic endeavors. Violations of academic honesty include any instance of plagiarism, cheating, seeking credit for another's work, falsifying documents or academic records, or any other fraudulent activity. Violations of academic honesty may result in a failing grade on the assignment, failure in the course, or expulsion from the University. When a student's grade has been affected, violations of academic honesty will be reported to the Provost or designated representative on the Academic Honesty Violation Report forms. Please see the Western Student Handbook and Calendar for specific activities identified as violations of this policy and the student due process procedure. This handbook is also available online at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/handbook/index.pdf>

Attendance:

We expect you to participate fully in every session. If you cannot make a session, please call the instructor so he will know not to expect you. See Grading Policy above.

Student Disability:

Any workshop participant who has a disability that prevents the fullest expressions of abilities should contact the directors as soon as possible so that we can work to provide assistance as needed.

Dear English 501 Participant:

Welcome to “Teaching Writing through Literature.” I am looking forward to our conversation this June as we study ways to engage our students to become stronger readers, writers, and thinkers.

I have made one major change to the course. I changed our major text from Sheridan Blau’s *The Literature Workshop* to Jeffrey Wilhelm’s *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry*. In many ways, both texts cover the same ground of building student motivation, of creating independent readers and writers, and of stressing the importance of discussion and self-expression. Blau’s discussion and examples come from the upper years of high school and the first two years of college; Wilhelm’s discussion and examples are rooted in middle school and the early years of high school. I thought that Wilhelm’s book would be a better text for our conversation.

I also wish to share three important pieces of information.

- “Teaching Writing through Literature” begins on Monday, June 2, in Murphy Hall, Room 106. Each afternoon session will be from 2:00 to 4:40. We will meet Monday through Thursday for three weeks with the final session on June 19.
- I have attached a copy of the English 501 syllabus with this message as well as pasting a copy at the end of this message. Please email me if you have any questions.
- Prairie Lands will provide the two texts for the course. If you wish to keep your copy, you may purchase it from PLWP. The cost for the Wilhelm book is around \$15; the cost for the anthology is approximately \$12.

I will see you on Monday afternoon, June 2.

Tom Pankiewicz
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