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Show Why You Want to Teach Composition

Writing improves due to meaningful interaction with text. Therefore I organize my course to facilitate students' engagement in reading and writing. In fact, the most important skill my students practice is not writing but engagement with writing. As in Elbow's teacherless writing groups, students do this by creating and seeking audiences and communities—including their preferred academic discourse community—which pull them to develop their own voice, the skill to get their voice heard, and their ability to understand others. Within the limits I establish in my syllabus and the requirement that the course focus on argument, critical inquiry, and rhetorical technique, the structure of the course will emerge based on what most helps students become engaged in the writing they are doing for class.

My course also asks students to improve the systems we compose, compose with, and are composed of. I help students recognize writing as a technology that can block or aid vitality, and we will discover ways to benefit from writing while mitigating harm it can cause. Overall, students will practice ways of writing, reading, evaluating, and interacting that help them to inspire others and live well. So apparent will be the benefits they receive thereby that they will continue to develop these powers outside of the course and beyond academics.

I am qualified to do this for several reasons.

(1) I have created and sought environments which draw me to write. An example of this is my website for people who do not use cars, carfreeuniverse.org. Carfreeuniverse is descended from a personal archive I developed, experienceart.org. To balance the self-focus of that archive, I created a site where I would write with others in mind and where others could do the same. This was Dream Site Ø, for "the sharing of dreams, visions, and questions for self and society." That prompt did not work for me. On the other hand, I had plenty to say on the carfree theme, which has room for sadness and anger along with the dreams, and a clearer audience whose

problems I shared. My focus in the past has been not so much to get my writing read, but to encourage others by my example to share as I was sharing, or to “inspire others to find their voice” (Covey 102). Those who find voice by listening help earth benefit from consciousness.

(2) For two years I have designed and facilitated programs that foster teambuilding and personal development. Several skills from that position transfer to the composition classroom.

I am sensitive to individual and group energy and can modulate that energy meaningfully. I design my programs based on what I learn about the group’s needs in advance, but modifications are often necessary, and I am able to change the activity or substitute another to be more effective. In addition, each activity has a frame and a debrief, and the program itself has an opening and a closing. A good program, a good dance class, and the best courses have deliberate elements of ceremony and variation.

I also help participants connect the surface meaning of an activity to more important aspects of their life. For example, I ask a participant to consider how all that goes into being able to jump off the top of a telephone pole symbolizes all that goes into being able to graduate from high school; I use group jump rope—where each team member must jump the rope in sequence without a beat being missed—to highlight the need to work with teammates’ differing abilities; and I ask preteens in a *Fear Factor*-themed summer camp to consider, “What is the greatest challenge I will face in life and how can I prepare for it?” and to share their responses the following day. I will find similar ways of adding meaning to the composition course.

(3) An instructor should enhance students’ intrinsic motivation. As part of RWS 609, I have developed a draft of an Elbow-inspired evaluation system to emphasize engagement and to help students make evaluation a tool they use rather than ignore or fear or have imposed upon them. Details are at <<http://j9k.org/back/rws609/responsetoessay.pdf>> and <http://j9k.org/back/rws609/responsetoessay_discussion.pdf>, and the grid I developed follows.

<i>Weak</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Strong</i>	
			Your engagement with your subject (a self-rating). How much did this mean to you? Emotional engagement leads to intellectual engagement and to passion you can share = why you are here.
			Sharing your engagement; art and craft
			Tone, emotion, in service of purpose
			Ideas, insights, thinking, logic; show of skills assignment requested
			Organization, structure, helping the reader; rhetorical technique
			Language, sentences, wording
			Mechanics: spelling, grammar, punctuation, proofreading
			MLA or APA style and correct citations
			Growth due to writing process: where did this take you in terms of content and form that you have never been before? (another self-rating)
			[Suggest other criteria for evaluation when you submit your work]

(4) The last thing I want to mention is that I had an interview last week to be a teaching assistant for Writing the Expository Essay for Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth. In three weeks I will know if I have that position. If so, I will spend six weeks this summer assisting and learning the teaching of writing with excellent students and instructors. If not, I at least have been made aware of the sample syllabi for that course which may help me when I write my syllabus for the fall.

The following pages contain a meditation I wrote for this statement while trying to understand the concept of growth.

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Lay down, or sit or stand carefully. Take a deep breath (ö). Close your eyes. Exhale (İ).

ö, İ. ö, İ ≈ Ö. Listen, Ö, by speaking, Ö, acting, Ö, thinking, Ö, pacing, Ö, feeling, Ö, breathing, Ö, and changing, Ö, these, words, Ö, Ö, Ö. Put, Ö, a point, in space, Ö, Ö, Ö, Ö, Ö. Words, Ö, dis-appear, Ö, Ö, Ö, Ö, Ö. Use, Ö, form, Ö, to create, Ö, space, Ö.

Writing, Ö, is, Ö, like, Ö, a particle, Ö, in a void, Ö, a line, Ö, on a plain, Ö, or a song, Ö, that moves through us, Ö, as we sing, Ö.

Growing, Ö, is improving, Ö, abilit y, Ö, to bring space, Ö, into form, Ö. Those, Ö, who, Ö, cannot, Ö, write, Ö, are less likely, Ö, to agree, Ö, you could call the sun, Ö, the moon, Ö, (Hartwell 122), Ö. Gröwİng, enÖter inÖto, Ö, forms, Ö, —possibilities and distinctions—, Ö, once unknown, Ö, or felt solid, Ö, or vacant, Ö.

Eckhart, Ö, Tolle, Ö, creates space, Ö, between consciousness, Ö, and the thoughts, Ö, and emotions, Ö, of which consciousness, Ö, is aware, Ö. If, ö, İ act in anger, ö, İ lack that space, Ö. Stephen, Ö, Covey, ö creates space ö, İ, Ö, between response, Ö, and stimulus, Ö. ö Is that space ö, İ want to enter? Ö.

To love, Ö, may, Ö, be, Ö, to create, Ö, space, Ö, for eachother, Ö, space, Ö, in which, Ö, we can move, Ö, in all the ways, Ö, we can move, Ö, and in which, Ö, we, Ö, ö can create ö, İ new ways

Using form, create space.

Writing is like a particle in a void, a line on a plain, or a song that moves through us as we sing.

Growing is improving ability to bring space into form. Those who cannot write are less likely to agree you could call the sun the moon (Hartwell 122). Growing, enter into forms—possibilities and distinctions—once unknown or thought solid or vacant.

Eckhart Tolle creates space between consciousness and the thoughts and emotions of which consciousness is aware. If I act in anger, I lack that space. Stephen Covey creates space between response and stimulus. Is that space I want to enter?

To love may be to create space for each other, space in which we can move in all the ways we can move, and in which we can create new ways.

Works Cited

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