

Preliminary Report of WID English Department Creativity Project

But, we often ask them to create without helping them understand how creativity works. We're assigning them tasks and work, but we don't teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea. Some questions come up

- ⌘ How do we teach our students how to be creative? How do we design assignments in way that actually fosters creativity?

This is what we're trying to shed some light on. We don't profess to have all the answers to this. But, we have some ideas. And, judging by the meetings we've had with some members of our department, you have many ideas. Here's a quick summary of some of the attitudes the faculty members we've spoken to have identified as important when it comes to thinking in a creative way:

- ⌘ Paying attention to attitudes and feelings toward the work produced
- ⌘ Being excited by the process of discovery.
- ⌘ Focusing on process, rather than final product.
- ⌘ Being comfortable dwelling in the unknown.
- ⌘ Being willing to take risks, to be wrong (Sullivan, "The Unessay", 14)
- ⌘ Moving beyond the most obvious thoughts to reach deeper truths.
- ⌘ Making expression a personal and meaningful act

The goal of emphasizing

participants will have the opportunity to design new assignments, or further refine the ones they already have.

long way toward motivating students to care about their work. In this way, we're not only thinking about creative genres, but about creative approaches to the use of genres in the writing classroom.

But, we are also interested in talking about creative approaches to literary essays. This type of writing can be as creative as any other type. Can we design our literary essays in a way that fosters more creativity?

In *The Life of Genre, the Life in the Classroom*, Charles Bazerman presents a very illuminating perspective: "Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action. They are environments for learning. Genres are the familiar places we go to create intelligible communicative action with each other and the guideposts we use to explore the unfamiliar." Students read and write in many different genres inside and outside of school every day. They come into our classrooms with a fundamental understanding of what genre is. Let's build from what they already know.

Many in our department feel restricted to a single, strictly defined genre in our courses. Oral tradition tells us that it is department policy to assign the essay or the equivalent. We haven't defined the equivalent and many of us like it that way, because that openness gives us the freedom to explore alternative genres and more creative alternatives to those three essays. We think it's important to discuss this policy and how it is interpreted by different members of our department. It is also important to note that the 101 competency is not only to analyze but to produce various forms of discourse. (emphasis added).

So, are we just trying to dumb things down to make students happier?

We're looking at ways to get work from our students that is more thoughtful, more original, and better written. We're trying to inspire their creative work that is more intellectually substantial, not less. Our goals are very similar to ones that Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick express in *Habits of Mind*: "We are interested in enhancing the ways students use knowledge rather than how they merely produce it" (16). Christian Knoeller has found that "writing imaginatively in response to literary works" requires close and focused rereading and analysis, leading to interpretations that "are often considerably more thoughtful and complex" (43). Our classes are literature classes based on the analysis of short stories, poems, novels, essays, etc. No one's trying to change that. We're trying to get better at what we already do, not do something totally different.

Many teachers in this department have expressed a frustration with the limitations of the lit essay. Yet, we still assign it, time after time. This raised a couple of questions for us:

- ❗ Do students need to suffer in order to grow as thinkers?
- ❗ Is there not more potential for intellectual rigour when students are excited, engaged, and passionate?

We're looking forward to discussing all these ideas on a deeper, more practical level, starting in Fall 2016. Stay tuned.

