

Chapter 7. Introduction

Renée Love

LANDER UNIVERSITY

Writing processes are as unique and varied as we are as writers. I have been practicing as a writing teacher for over 23 years, (and as a writer longer), but every semester I learn more about how we write and how to teach others to write, and so I revise my *lines* so that in the next class, I can better motivate the *whole writer* and perhaps the writing *dance* might be more soulful. We likely all have favorite *best practices* in writing instruction, but the next time you are planning a writing course or revising an assignment, I hope you will also consider some of the interdisciplinary approaches shared in this chapter. The writing process, the space for learning, and the students we teach, defy easy categorizations that suggest “one type fits all,” a lesson my students taught me many semesters ago.

I was teaching at a large agriculture and engineering school, an environment with few liberal arts majors, and it seemed more likely that I would win the Powerball jackpot than encounter an English major in any of my classes. I was deep into grading a batch of essays about stereotypes. Many of the papers seemed reminiscent of the movie *The Breakfast Club*—in the sense that students were asked to reflect on the misconceptions of stereotypes. Some students approached the assignment by examining and then deconstructing labels that had been applied to them over the years, labels that reduced a person to a single word like “jock,” “nerd,” “prep,” “geek,” and so on. I remember reading a paper that sounded something like this: “There are many types of stereotypes: Sony, Yamaha, Bose.” I initially despaired, thinking *How could this student get the assignment so wrong?* Thankfully, I continued reading and discovered that the young writer had developed an insightful metaphor about stereotypes and some of the associations that we have with various brands of electronics, and then he went on to apply those concepts to human beings and how we may construct identities based on the *exterior*, shallow experiences rather than on true understanding. The essay was the best one in the class, and the student must have been like the one described in Mina Shaughnessy’s essay, “Diving In,” when she quotes Leo Strauss. Shaughnessy writes that we should “Always assume that there is one silent student in your class who is by far superior to you in head and in heart” (98-99). I have met this student many times, in many different classrooms over the years, someone who, as Shaughnessy puts it, is far superior in head and heart than I am.

I will never forget that paper or that student. I think he was an engineering major, too. In reflecting on how we write, I am reading the “Stereotype” essay as a metaphor about the uniqueness and wonder of our students, as well as the processes related to writing instruction. For veteran writing teachers, we may some-

times have knee-jerk reactions about how we *should* teach writing, thinking that one approach *fits most*, just as I did when I almost dismissed my student's "stereo" paper, thinking it was completely off base. But there are many "right" methods for writing instruction, many *writing pathways* that create opportunities for student success. How we teach writing is a question that spans across majors and touches many disciplines; we must adapt our approaches to meet these diverse contexts and purposes, as well as the diverse needs of our student populations. In this section, writers share several pedagogical methods for teaching writing, suggesting how we can enrich students' learning experiences by using a holistic, affective pedagogy in writing classes; how writing instruction methods might borrow from other disciplines, including theatre and dance; and even how team teaching and mentoring strategies can benefit not only our students but new teachers.

The chapter begins with Rachel Anya Dearie Fomalhaut's discussion of affective pedagogies, entitled "Holistic Learning for Real-Life Writers: A Call for Affective Pedagogy in First-Year Composition." Fomalhaut's "propose[s] that we, as teachers, more intentionally engage the affective spheres of our classrooms, whether traditional brick-and-mortar or online." By affective, Fomalhaut is referring to "what our students bring into our classes, from their attitudes, moods, and emotions to their motivations, instincts, and habits. All of these factors play into what students need individually and collectively in order to learn." Because I teach many first-generation college students, I find this a fascinating perspective, as well as Fomalhaut's argument that "the way we learn a craft is a holistic process of continual development." Fomalhaut's essay suggests that writing teachers consider the "whole writer" and develop a learning, "practice space wherein students can develop better work habits and rituals around writing." Fomalhaut notes that studio methods might have applications for writing instructors, allowing us to help students acquire "certain work habits, mindsets, and dispositions." As I read Fomalhaut's essay, I consider how I might focus more on "whole-body learning" that would develop not only writing skills but my students' study, work, and life skills.

While Fomalhaut alludes to possible application of studio models in composition classes, similarly, Pamela Henney examines how methods from other disciplines may have application in writing instruction. In "Acting the Author," Henney views the first-year composition course and the process that new students experience in their development as academic writers through the lens of Konstantin Stanislavsky's acting theory. The title of the essay, "Acting the Author," emphasizes some of the parallels between Method Acting and Method Writing. For instance, perhaps, there is a "process a method actor goes through to create and present his character within the context of a play or film," and, likewise, a "process an expository writer (journalist to essayist) goes through to create and present himself as the author of his text." These processes share a theory of mimesis, as defined by Stanislavsky and Aristotle, which may help students empower themselves as they strive to learn new roles and academic language. Our student writers must, just as performers do, visualize, rehearse, practice, and perform

their new roles in the academy, which requires adopting a new discourse style and an academic Self. Henney argues that some of the techniques used by actors may apply to the needs of first-year composition students: “Using similar visualization and other acting techniques, first-year-composition students could more readily envision themselves as academic writers.” First-year composition and the process new writers experience as they try to learn academic writing skills may parallel the method acting process. As a new paradigm, method writing in the composition class could help students visualize, rehearse, perform, improvise, and even believe their roles as academic writers.

Borrowing from another discipline, Casie Fedukovich applies somatic pedagogies and Human Movement Studies (often used in dance instruction) to the composition arena. Fedukovich hopes to “encourage students to be more present . . . both physically and intellectually” so that we can have more space for metaphorical *dance* in the writing classroom. After reviewing scholarship on “the teaching and learning body in composition,” Fedukovich examines how rhetorical instruction has moved away from its classical, more holistic training, which included focus on the body in oratory instruction, to a context that often privileges the exchange of texts and that makes “human bodies virtually absent.” Fedukovich is not trying to “conflate training dancers with teaching writing, but there are similarities,” an argument that she makes quite persuasively. Fedukovich describes what she calls a “move to somatic composition instruction,” a pedagogy that may include methods like moving meditation and mentoring, textural directives, recognizing the influence of text on bodies, or emphasizing face-to-face communication; practices that encourage us to create “pedagogical room to dance” and new spaces for learning.

Finally, the chapter concludes with Christopher Garland’s reflective piece, “Who Decides My Grade? Reflections on Team Teaching and Peer Mentoring in First-Year Composition.” Garland shares the process of how team-teaching works in the writing classroom. He suggests that “the co-taught classroom enables different approaches to teaching first-year composition.” Further, it “challenges students to adjust to a collective pedagogy and fosters a dynamic that [has] application” beyond the classroom. Garland argues that this format may be particularly beneficial for graduate students who lack teaching experience, allowing them to work with veteran writing teachers. For those of us who help other teachers learn to teach writing, team teaching may be the ideal transition for our graduate students and new teachers, helping them navigate the space between being the student and being the teacher, and, in turn, we might help the next generation of writing teachers develop of a love for teaching.

Work Cited

- Shaughnessy, Mina P. “Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing.” *The Writing Teacher’s Sourcebook*, edited by Edward P.J. Corbett, et al. Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 94-99.