

English 408
Writing for Writing Teachers
Fall 2005

Instructor: Dr. Cathy Fleischer
Class Time/Location: F 11-1:40,
Office hours: T 5:30-7; F 9-11 and 1:45-3:00 (and by appointment)
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English 408 serves as a WI course for the major and minor of Language, Literature, and Writing for Teachers. The course meets the WI outcomes through a range of writing and reading projects. Through immersing themselves in the life of the writer and the writing teacher, students develop research questions, conduct research of various kinds (including teacher-research, collaborative research, and text-based research), and write and read in a wide range of genres.

Course Description:

This course serves two purposes in your education as a teacher: (1) to help you become a better writer yourself and (2) to help you learn how to teach others to write. The two strands are intertwined; as you learn more about your own writing process, you will begin to understand how to help others in their own writing processes. So, begin the course with these expectations: You will be asked to write a lot and you will be asked to reflect on your own writing as a way of thinking through how secondary students come to approach the writing tasks we ask of them.

In this course, we also will be reading a lot. Much of our reading will be into the words of those experts in composition studies who have researched and thought hard about how students learn to write. However, we also will be reading the words of each other. Almost all the writing you do in this class will be shared with your peers, both as a way of learning from each other and as a way of learning how to work with the writing of others, offering the kinds of critique and advice you soon will do with your own students.

I recognize that teaching writing can be one of the most challenging and intimidating parts of becoming an English teacher. For many of you, the thought of teaching writing seems a scary proposition: You may yourself struggle as a writer, and the thought of teaching others seems impossible; you may find the thought of assessing the writing of others an overwhelming notion; you may be worried about your own grasp of the rules and structures of "school writing." This course is designed to help you overcome some of those fears as you become more comfortable with both your own writing and some of the current "best practices" successful teachers use in order to teach students to write. But because writing pedagogy is such a big topic, expect this course to merely scratch the surface. My hope is that you leave this course with a lot of ideas about how to best teach

writing, but with an equal number of questions, questions that will lead you toward a lifetime of reflection about yourself as a teacher and your students as writers.

Course Materials:

Atwell, *In the Middle* (revised edition)

Additional readings, through CoLEARN membership (see explanation below)

Inquiry Project books (see list under “Major Projects”)

Your own writing and the writing of your peers

Writing notebook (for in-class assignments)

Design of the Semester

In this course we will cover three overlapping areas of interest: *Considering Yourself as a Writer*, *Considering Yourself as a Teacher of Writing*, and *Considering Your Students as Writers*. While these three units will in some ways be distinct areas of study, they are also interrelated topics. Thus, although our major emphasis will be on one area at a time, there will be carry over from one to the next.

Readings in each area will come from two sources: Nancie Atwell’s classic text for writing teachers *In the Middle* and the readings available on the CoLEARN website. CoLEARN is an online professional development network for teachers developed for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the major professional organization for English teachers in the United States. As a CoLEARN member you will have access to all the journals published by NCTE, proceedings from conferences and web-based discussions, and chapters from many of their book publications. Additionally, you will be able to participate in online discussions both with the class and with other preservice teachers across the country. As students in this class, you will enroll in CoLEARN in lieu of a coursepack (the cost is \$40); you will have access to the site for a full year, beyond when the course ends in December.

Class Format

In keeping with the three strands of the course (working on your own writing, learning about the teaching of writing, learning from student writers), we generally will divide each class into 3 sections: one part for discussion of issues and concepts, one part for individual and group writing workshops, and one part for responding to student writers.

- *Discussion Time:* Generally in the first part of class, we will spend time discussing the readings for class, trying out and talking through some writing invitations, participating in demonstrations led by class members.
- *Workshop Time:* Generally, the second part of class will be reserved for workshop time. I do this for 2 reasons: to demonstrate for you what a workshop might look like in your own classroom and to give you an opportunity to work on and talk with others about your own writing. During this time you may choose to write, to meet in peer groups to discuss your writing, to confer with me about your writing, to meet in your inquiry groups. This is NOT a time to do your reading for the next class or work on something for another class. I will begin each workshop with “status-of-the-class” in which you commit to one or more of these activities during workshop time; that commitment serves as our contract.
- *Response Time:* The last 20 minutes of each class will be devoted to reading and responding to your high school pen-pals (more on this in a minute). During that

time, you will receive your weekly letter from the pen-pal (and perhaps a piece of writing, as well) and write a letter back.

General Information about the 3 Strands

Strand 1: Considering Yourself as a Writer

In order to be the best teacher of writing that you can be, you need to be thoughtful about your own writing. In this unit, you will look carefully at your own history as a writer as well as doing some of your own writing.

Major projects for this unit:

- “Myself as writer” memoir
- Unfamiliar Genre Project

Strand 2: Considering Yourself as a Teacher of Writing

One thing we know for sure: Writing can be taught. Much research has been conducted in composition studies over the past three decades that indicates there are certain ways of teaching writing that are particularly successful with students. In this unit, you will have the opportunity to learn about some of those strategies and to work with a small group to investigate one strategy in some depth.

Major project for this unit:

- Group Inquiry project and miniportfolio

Strand 3: Considering Your Students as Writers

All the book learning we can do about writing pedagogy only goes so far—we also have to consider how actual students respond to particular ways of teaching. In this unit, you will have the opportunity to work one-on-one with a high school student, corresponding with that student over the course of the semester, responding to that student’s writing, and trying to determine what your high school partner is like as a writer.

Major projects for this unit:

- Portrait of a high school writer
- Overall reflection on high school writers

Assessment:

Assessment in this course will be based in the major projects, plus class participation, broken down as follows:

“Myself as a Writer” Memoir	20%
Unfamiliar Genre Project	20%
Inquiry Project/Miniportfolio	20%
Portrait of a Student Writer	20%
Overall reflection on high school writers	10%
Class Participation	10%

As a class, we will develop rubrics for each project that can be used in the assessment process; the assessment of class participation will come from both your participation in discussions and your completion of short writings. (Important note: I *do* take participation seriously, especially in a class filled with prospective teachers. Please make your best effort to add to the class conversation *at least once every class*.)

Attendance:

Because this is a class, which demands involvement by everyone in order to work, you must attend class *regularly* and *on time*. Failure to attend, or to attend on time, will lower your grade. (Generally, you will have a leeway of one missed day; after that, absences will begin counting against you.) **Remember, the English department policy suggests that if you miss the equivalent of 2 weeks of class (in our case, that's 4 class meetings), you should consider dropping the class.**

English dept policy: Students enrolled in English Department classes are expected to participate in daily interactive activities. They will, for example, routinely discuss reading assignments, write in class on impromptu topics, participate in collaborative activities, or engage in peer review of drafts. Students who miss these activities cannot reasonably make them up. As a result, students who do not participate regularly should expect to receive lower grades in the course, and students who miss more than the equivalent of two weeks of class should consider withdrawing and taking the class in a future semester. Students who know that other commitments will make it impossible to attend at certain times (early mornings, nights, Fridays) should enroll in classes that do not meet at these times.

Late Paper Policy:

If there is an extreme problem with a due date for a paper or a project and if you consult me prior to that due date, we may be able to negotiate a new deadline. Otherwise, LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

