

TEACHING FOR VARIOUS LITERACIES

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Functional Literacy

In the United States, functional literacy has traditionally been defined in terms of education level. As Mike Rose explains:

In the 1930s "functional literacy" was defined by the Civilian Conservation Corps as a state of having three or more years of schooling; during World War II the army set the fourth grade as a standard; in 1947 the Census Bureau defined functional illiterates as those having fewer than five years of schooling; in 1952 the bureau raised the criterion to the sixth grade; by 1960 the Office of Education was setting the eighth grade as a benchmark; and by the late 1970s some authorities were suggesting that completion of high school should be the defining criterion of functional literacy. (6)

During the 1970s, demographic studies using high school graduation as the criterion to determine the number of functionally illiterate adults arrived at essentially the same figure as did studies relying on competency level as the criterion. In 1976, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that of the 152.5 million people who were then sixteen years or older, around 57.6 million had not completed and were not enrolled in high school (Hunter and Harman 28). And in 1975, a University of Texas study, which focused on literacy tasks such as writing checks and addressing envelopes, suggested that approximately 23 million Americans lacked the skills to function in society and that another 34 million lacked the skills to function proficiently (Parker 3).

More recent demographic studies reveal disturbing relationships among high school completion, poverty, and race. According to the United States Bureau of the Census, in 1990 the mean income for all men in the United States was \$27,164, but \$14,337 for those who did not attend high school, and \$15,384 for those who attended one to three years (156). In the same year, the mean income for all women in the United States was \$15,493, but \$8,354 for those who did not attend high school, and \$9,008 for those who attended one to three years (158). Also in 1990 the median family income for all adults in the United States was \$35,353, but \$36,915 for whites, and \$21,423 for African-Americans (454). Put very simply, high school completion is connected to poverty and race because poor people are less likely to finish high school and because racial minority groups constitute a disproportionate number of the poor.

National studies of high school completion, competency level, and annual income help to determine the dimensions of functional illiteracy, but lost in all the statistics are real men and women working to claim written language—and a place in the world—as their own. Cathy, a twenty-two-year-old single parent, explains that she dropped out of high school because teachers ignored her after she was labeled "remedial." Now, Cathy works as a janitor at a large state university from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and at a nearby convenience store from 6:00 to 11:00 p.m. to help pay the costs of raising her two children. Hoping to earn more money so she can support her family without relying on her parents, Cathy wants to earn a General Education Degree. Larry, a fifty-year-old man who reads at the first-grade level and drives a bus for the university, attributes his lack of education to racism, asserting that he dropped out of school because his teachers did not believe an African-American was worth their time and effort. Larry no longer seriously considers pursuing a formal education, but he regrets not being able to read street and highway signs. Kevin, who was born with brain damage and a severe hearing impairment, washes dishes at the campus hotel. Because he recently moved out of his mother's house and into his own apartment, Kevin needs to learn how to accomplish literacy tasks such as writing a grocery list and reading warning labels.

Cathy, Larry, and Kevin are among the men and women who participated in a literacy-enhancement program for undereducated university staff members. Tutors worked with the participants for two hours a week during the staff members' regular shifts, the university paying the staff normal wages for the time they spent being tutored. The program differed from most adult literacy programs in that the tutors were not paid employees or community volunteers but college students taking a composition course on literacy. Offering the course as an independent study—an elective available to sophomores, juniors, and seniors—I interviewed students, screened them for academic suitability, and invited five or six to enroll each semester. Early in the semester, the students took a twelve-hour tutor-training workshop at a local literacy organization and, after completing the workshop, started working with the staff members at the adult education center on campus. One purpose of the composition course was to help university staff members achieve their goals for functional literacy.

Academic Literacy

In "A Relationship between Reading and Writing: The Conversational Model," Charles Bazerman explains that academic writing

. . . occurs within the context of previous writing and advances the total sum of the discourse. Earlier comments provide subjects at issue, factual content, ideas to work with, and models of discourse appropriate to the subject. Later comments also define themselves against the earlier even as they dispute particulars, redefine issues, add new material, or otherwise shift the discussion. (658)

Therefore, according to Bazerman, "If as teachers of writing we want to prepare our students to enter into the written interchanges of their chosen disciplines . . . we must cultivate various techniques of absorbing, reformulating, commenting on, and using reading" (658). In "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae adds that to engage in academic discourse:

The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy, or an historian or an anthropologist or an economist; he has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language (135)

To begin "assembling and mimicking" the language of the academy, students must, according to Bartholomae, experiment with the specialized codes of various disciplines, "try[ing] on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (134).

Only a few of my students seem to have trouble "absorbing" information; in fact, most of them can summarize complex information fairly accurately. Because so many college teachers rely on lectures, multiple-choice exams, and research papers, students typically learn how to absorb and restate information early in their college years. On the other hand, many of my students do have difficulty with "reformulating, commenting on, and using reading," especially in advanced classes in which teachers assume students can write by "selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing" according to the discourse conventions of specific academic disciplines. A second purpose of the composition course, therefore, was to help undergraduates achieve academic literacy. With this purpose in mind, I designed a sequence of writing assignments that I hoped would ease students into the practice of situating their own thoughts within a context of previous writing and introduce them to the mysterious codes that govern this practice in their chosen majors. The assignments moved students from analyzing the goals of functional literacy, through comparing the goals of functional and academic literacy, to researching and writing about a literacy issue relevant to their specific academic disciplines. To illustrate how this sequence fostered the reading and writing processes to which Bazerman and Bartholomae refer, I would like to focus on the essays of one student, Heidi, a sophomore business major who tutored Cathy, Larry, and Kevin.

One Student's Writing

I wanted the first assignment to provide students with an opportunity to relate their own ideas about literacy to the thoughts of an expert in the field of literacy studies, but I hoped the assignment could engage them in more than simply summarizing an article and then agreeing or disagreeing with it. I wanted students to analyze their own experiences in terms of the expert's ideas and to advance the discourse about literacy. For this assignment, I asked students to analyze their experiences with tutoring according to what Sylvia Scribner, in "Literacy in Three Metaphors," refers to as "literacy as adaption" (a strategy for survival), "literacy as power" (a pathway to advancement), and "literacy as a state of grace" (access to the virtues associated with intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual knowledge).¹

In response to this assignment, Heidi composed an essay titled "Teaching Illiterate Adults." Writing first about Kevin, the man who recently rented his own apartment, she explains, "Kevin most likely views literacy as adaption to the world around him":

In coping with the trials of everyday life, especially now that he's on his own, Kevin faces many difficult challenges to which most of us cannot relate. Therefore, Kevin derives much benefit from using the power of literacy as a tool to adapt to the big, complicated, and frightening world he sees out there. For example, Kevin and I have been . . . comparing different prices and advertisements in the newspaper.

Thinking about literacy as adaption, Heidi begins to understand the pragmatic value of Kevin's goals and to focus on skills that will help him with shopping. After analyzing Kevin's objectives, she suggests that Larry, the man who drives a bus, "would like to use literacy as a power to advance himself":

Larry currently . . . works daily on a memorized route. Because of his limited reading ability, he cannot read road

signs and therefore cannot earn extra money by driving on special road trips aside from his daily route. Thus, literacy for Larry would mean more money, as well as prestige and self satisfaction within his social circle. Since Larry is a beginner, he needs to start with basic phonics in working toward his goal.

Writing about literacy as power, Heidi recognizes that Larry is interested in economic and social advancement. Eager to aid him in achieving these goals, she emphasizes phonics as the first step toward helping Larry read signs, a skill that will allow him to earn more money and respect—and thus to gain more power. However, Heidi claims that literacy as a state of grace "is not applicable" to her tutoring, noting that the men and women whom she teaches are not interested in reading "cultured" texts. Finally, she concludes that "a tutor must understand the student and what he/she hopes to gain and then use that knowledge to choose specific exercises which will lead towards that goal."

Because the metaphors in Scribner's model emphasize abstractions—"power," "adaption," and "grace"—Heidi's first challenge is to absorb a difficult text. Accepting the challenge, she not only understands Scribner's model but relies on it to classify her tutees' diverse goals for reading and writing. However, she does not try to pigeonhole these goals into the model, rejecting one of Scribner's categories, "literacy as a state of grace," because it "is not applicable" to her tutees. In other words, she uses the model to interpret her experiences but does not allow it to distort them or to monopolize her essay.

And in the process of interpreting and classifying the adults' goals, Heidi adopts a definition of literacy similar to that of Kenneth Levine and that of Carman St. John Hunter and David Harman. Levine writes, "Functional literacy can be defined as the possession of, or access to, the competencies and information required to accomplish transactions entailing reading and writing which an individual wishes—or is compelled—to engage" (43); and Hunter and Harman suggest, "Functional literacy" involves the "possession of skills perceived as necessary by particular persons and groups to fulfill their self-determined objectives" (7). What Levine, Hunter and

Harman, and Heidi imply, of course, is that literacy is personal—that it cannot be defined, as government officials seem to believe, in terms of a hypothetical level of education, such as graduation from high school. Moreover, Heidi advances the ideas presented in Scribner's article, using them to argue that tutors should base their teaching strategies on an understanding, and valuing, of their tutees' varied literacy objectives.

With the second essay, I wanted to challenge students to coordinate an academic conversation—that is, to synthesize and analyze the ideas presented in seemingly disparate sources—but I also wanted to support students by allowing them to build on the knowledge about literacy they acquired in writing their first papers. For this essay, I assigned a multiple-source paper in which students were to compare the goals of functional and academic literacy, asking them to incorporate at least two readings from a list of articles that address literacy in the academy and/or outer community: David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University," Frederick Erickson's "School Literacy, Reasoning, and Civility: An Anthropologist's Perspective," Carman St. John Hunter and David Harman's "Who are the Adult Illiterates?" (Chapter Two of *Adult Illiteracy in the United States*), Jay L. Robinson's "The Social Context of Literacy," and John F. Szwed's "The Ethnography of Literacy."

In a paper titled "Differing Literacies," Heidi argues that "literacy in the community aims to advance the welfare and success of the society as a whole" but that academic literacy functions "to recreate through continuous generations the elite academic community of readers and writers who then go on to become the next generation of the upper-middle and upper class." "Through focusing almost all of its attention on 'cultured' readings and writing," she explains, "the academy recreates and emphasizes distinctions between the upper and lower classes." To support this assertion, Heidi quotes Robinson as writing that schools tend "to equate 'literacy' with knowledge of a special kind of literature, without recognizing that such an equation is a socially privileged and economically self-serving one." And to further substantiate her point, she names the literary works assigned in two literature classes she had taken in college, pointing out that "these courses will not serve a

functional purpose outside of the academy." In contrast, Heidi explains, "Everyday literature in the community," as Szwed describes it, "includes texts such as signs, graffiti, junk mail, cereal boxes, and gambling slips." "We see many upper-middle and upper class persons forming literacy in the academy and many lower class, disadvantaged persons forming literacy in the community," she suggests, because "well-off citizens are, for the most part, the only ones able to send their children to such elite academies in the nation where tuition alone can reach over \$12,000 per year." After reiterating her main point that "each literacy is separate and distinct from the other," Heidi concludes, "If this ongoing cycle of separation does not cease, the differences between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' will only continue to grow larger."

To compare the goals of functional and academic literacy, Heidi reformulates two of her assigned readings, synthesizing what Robinson and Szwed write about the texts associated with academic and functional literacy, and, within the synthesis, contextualizes her own experience with reading for college courses. This process of comparison opens the way for her to discover a disturbing relationship between literacy and class disparity, and Heidi's selection and analysis of source material reflect a socio-political orientation to literacy, Robinson's article probably serving as a model of such an approach.

However, the closing of Heidi's paper—"If this ongoing cycle of separation does not cease, the differences between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' will only continue to grow larger"—sounds more like a homily than an academic conclusion, and even though her words are inspiring, they are too vague and banal to advance the sum of discourse effectively. Robinson's academic conclusion, for example, calls for rethinking our fundamental assumptions about "literature" and the role of English departments:

If departments of English continue to define themselves as departments of literature and mean by that term imaginative works only, and if English teachers restrict themselves to reading only such works and commentaries on them, then there is need for new kinds of departments just as there is for differently prepared teachers. (15)

Heidi's varied awareness of the codes for forming an academic argument, however, is not unusual or necessarily problematic, for as Bartholomae explains:

To speak with authority [students] have to speak not only in another's voice but through another's "code"; and they not only have to do this, they have to speak in the voice and through the codes of those of us with power and wisdom; and they not only have to do this, they have to do it before they know what they are doing, before they have a project to participate in and before, at least in terms of our disciplines, they have anything to say. (156)

"The student," he sums up, "in effect, has to assume privilege without having any" (143).

For their final paper, however, I wanted students to try to coordinate and advance an academic conversation authoritatively, so I assigned them to select, research, and analyze a literacy issue that was relevant to their chosen disciplines. In making this assignment, my hope was that students would rely not only on the skills of reformulating and commenting (on reading) that were emphasized in the first two essays, but also on the specialized language and philosophical assumptions emphasized in the courses they had taken in their major. In response to the assignment, a communications major decided to study newspaper articles on literacy and, observing that "the press almost exclusively chooses to give space to 'success stories,'" argued that "one of the reasons most people remain oblivious to the illiteracy crisis in our society is that the press does not adequately or accurately cover the issue." A psychology major who planned to do clinical work after graduation researched Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and theories of reading, described his tutoring sessions with an adult basic reader diagnosed as having GAD, and wrote about the ways in which anxiety can influence reading comprehension. A sociology major working towards certification to teach high school read case studies of juvenile delinquents, analyzing the relationship between functional

illiteracy and delinquency, and concluded with several pedagogical implications for secondary education.

In "The Economic Effects of Illiteracy," Heidi focuses on "the strong interrelation . . . between illiteracy and economic standing." Suggesting that "to fully view the detrimental economic consequences which result from illiteracy, it is necessary to focus on both [the] national and personal level," she describes the financial situation of Cathy, the woman who works as a janitor: "She does not have the good reading skills or high school diploma necessary to get a better, higher paying job," explains Heidi, and "therefore her economic struggle, like countless other undereducated and illiterate Americans, continues as a part of everyday life." About the national consequences, Heidi writes, "Illiteracy is contributing to our nation's declining economic health" by "slowing worker productivity and therefore decreasing U.S. competitiveness in world markets." According to her research, "The country incurs \$20 billion annually in direct costs alone as a result of illiteracy, which includes moneys such as forfeited profits and costs of large mistakes made by illiterate workers." She also notes, however, that "75 percent of American corporations offer literacy-enhancement programs for their workers," arguing that "these programs are economically advantageous since a higher skilled workforce will almost always lead to higher productivity and profits for the business as a whole." "Though they are not 'cure-alls,'" she concludes, "efforts by business are . . . helping to reduce the negative economic consequences which go along with illiteracy."

In referring to Cathy, Heidi places her personal contact with undereducated adults within the context of her research on the economic consequences of illiteracy, but in assuming that Cathy's poverty is the direct result of poor language skills, Heidi oversimplifies the complex relationship between literacy and economic standing. As Hunter and Harman remind us:

Poverty and the power structures of society are more responsible for low levels of literacy than the reverse For most persons who lack literacy skills, illiteracy is simply one factor interacting with many others—class, race and sex discrimination, welfare dependency,

unemployment, poor housing, and a general sense of powerlessness. (9-12)

Nonetheless, in analyzing Cathy's situation in economic terms, Heidi illustrates her understanding that, as Rose explains, there is "a kind of implied directive to the request to analyze": "analytic investigation is always carried out with a set of assumptions, and these assumptions are crucial determinants of how you proceed in your examination, what you find, and how you explain your discovery to others" (140).

Furthermore, her discussion of the national consequences of illiteracy appropriates the specialized language of the business world, statements such as "The country incurs \$20 billion annually in direct costs alone as a result of illiteracy, which includes moneys such as forfeited profits and costs of large mistakes made by illiterate workers" extending, in Bartholomae's words:

. . . into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals, gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions, and necessary connections that determine the "what might be said" and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community. (146)

In particular, Heidi's conclusion—"Though they are not 'cure-alls,' efforts by business are . . . helping to reduce the negative economic consequences which go along with illiteracy"—relies more fully on the special vocabulary of the academy than did the closing comment of her previous paper. But what I find especially gratifying about this last essay is the potential for Heidi to use its research and analysis in the future: having researched business-sponsored literacy programs and justified them economically, she is more likely to defend, perhaps even to start, such a program during her career.

In addition to completing the three formal essays, students kept a journal in which they informally evaluated the successes and failures of their past tutoring sessions, planned future ones, and made observations about the adults' progress. For example, after Larry told Heidi he would be unable to continue with their tutoring sessions, she wrote:

Overall, my tutoring experience this week was quite depressing. Today was Larry's last day of class. His wife is ill so he is going to be spending much time taking care of her. Whether he'll return to class again next year depends on his wife's health. I guess I realized just how closely attached to Larry I was. It was very sad to see him go and I will miss him very much. I really hope he decides to come back again because I am starting to see substantial progress with his reading ability. I noticed Larry, more than ever, is recognizing words that are standing alone (not written in context.) He is starting to really *know* the word, which was very rare a month ago.

Heidi hopes Larry will return to the tutoring program because, growing fond of him, she would like to see Larry again, but also because she recognizes his progress and finds it rewarding.

The other adults also closed in on their literacy goals: Kevin learned to skim advertisements for sales, to understand the abbreviations and to compare the prices in ads, and to use coupons while shopping. Although he still understands only the literal meaning of words, Kevin also improved his reading comprehension, progressing from children's stories to the daily newspaper, a step that increased his self esteem but also led him to ask, "Why do bad things happen?" Cathy passed the social studies and natural science sections of the GED exam and has started preparing for the math section of the test, the last part she needs to pass before receiving her high school equivalency diploma. The adults' progress provides evidence that the course helped university employees achieve their goals for functional literacy, but, in concluding, I want to focus again on the course's second purpose—to assist undergraduate students in reaching their goals for academic literacy.

Conclusions

Throughout this essay, I have defined academic literacy in terms of Bazerman's emphasis on "strategies for absorbing, reformulating, commenting on, and using reading" and of Bartholomae's emphasis on "the peculiar ways of knowing,

selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community." And as Heidi's essays illustrate, the sequence of assignments for the composition course on literacy engaged students in the reading and writing processes to which Bazerman and Bartholomae refer. We can attribute this engagement in part, I think, to several features of the sequence that promoted critical thinking.

In *How We Think*, John Dewey explains, "Unless there is a fusion of the intellectual and the emotional . . . problems and questions, which are the only true instigators of reflective activity, will be more or less externally imposed and only half-heartedly felt and dealt with" (341). Focusing on the importance of this "fusion" for college writing, Robert Baden, in "Pre-writing: The Relation between Thinking and Feeling," suggests that "before valid thought can take place and certainly before meaningful writing can occur the feelings of the writer must be stimulated to the extent that he is willing and able to make an emotional, sensuous commitment to his task" (368). And writing specifically about academic discourse in "Applying Intellectual Development Theory to Composition," I argue that the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions with which students approach the divergent points of view reflected in multiple sources depend in part on whether they believe their topics affect other people's lives (59, 63). However, the fullest examination I have seen of the role that emotion plays in college students' thinking appears in Barry Kroll's *Teaching Hearts and Minds: College Students Reflect on the Vietnam War in Literature*, in which Kroll asserts, "Because inquiry is an affair of the heart as well as the mind, students must feel connected to a topic if they are going to inquire deeply and honestly into it" (11). In designing a course on Vietnam literature, Kroll devised a number of student activities to foster what he calls "connected inquiry," including interviewing Vietnam veterans (34) and discussing the war with family members who participated in it (35).

Through its focus on tutoring undereducated adults, the composition course I have described also emphasized personal involvement. The course's assignments, especially the first writing task, encouraged students to draw on their contact with the adults, stimulating an emotional connection to the subject of

literacy, a connection that, as we have seen in Heidi's writing, motivated them to inquire earnestly into the questions and problems associated with the subject.

Dewey further explains that thinking critically demands "turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration" (113), and Heidi's writing seems to illustrate this tendency as well. At the end of her first paper, she mentions that the adults whom she tutored were not interested in reading "cultured" texts, and in her second essay, she returns to this idea, comparing the texts associated with academic literacy to those associated with functional literacy; as Heidi compares these texts in the second paper, she considers the problematic relationship between literacy and economic status, a relationship she revisits and probes much more deeply in her third essay. This "serious and consecutive consideration," which culminated in an essay that, as we have seen, more or less succeeds at using the specialized codes of her own discipline, was possible because the sequence of assignments engaged students in a sustained exploration of a single subject.

In *Lives on the Boundary*, Rose mentions a writing course he taught for Vietnam veterans returning to college, explaining that in order to "let them into the academic club" (141), he emphasized the strategies of "summarizing, classifying, comparing, and analyzing" (138); and in their new textbook, *Critical Strategies for Academic Thinking and Writing*, Rose and Malcolm Kiniry point out that processes such as classifying and defining are "very sophisticated cognitive-rhetorical activities" (vi).

Heidi illustrates Rose and Kiniry's point well, her first two essays relying on classifying, comparing, and defining as flexible heuristics. In the first paper, Heidi, as we have seen, classifies her tutees' goals according to Scribner's metaphors for literacy, the classification process leading her to discover the importance of individualizing instruction. In the second essay, she compares the texts associated with academic and functional literacy, the process of comparison leading her to discover the role that academic literacy plays in perpetuating class distinctions. And these processes of classifying and comparing contribute to an act of defining that, covering both essays, leads Heidi to view literacy in gradually more relativistic terms.

Writing assignments that include carefully selected sources can help teachers cultivate strategies such as classification, comparison, and definition without reducing them to formulaic patterns that distort the writing process. For example, Scribner's article does not present a blueprint for classification but a theory that encourages students to experiment with analyzing their tutees' literacy goals by grouping them into broad categories. Similarly, the readings for the second assignment do not illustrate static "point-by-point" models of comparison but reflect divergent perspectives that challenge students to find common issues around which they can synthesize information from several articles.

If connecting to a topic emotionally, exploring it for a prolonged period of time, and doing so with strategies such as classifying and comparing do indeed promote critical thought, we may need to rethink the types of writing tasks that are typically assigned in courses designed to introduce college students to academic literacy—that is, in courses on research writing, argumentative writing, and writing across the curriculum.

Assignments in research writing courses usually focus on finding sources in the library, taking notes on these sources, integrating information from them into essays, and documenting this information. Assignments in argumentative writing courses usually focus on evaluating authors' arguments in terms of their evidence and reasoning. These tasks can help students learn how to coordinate an academic discussion, but they can also overemphasize the accumulation and logical analysis of information, neglecting the significant role that students' feelings play in thinking reflectively about complex issues.

Courses in writing across the curriculum often require students to read articles and to write multiple-source essays on a broad spectrum of topics in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The rich anthologies on writing across the curriculum include readings, for example, on topics in history, fine arts, English, psychology, economics, political science, ecology, folklore, sociology, health science, media studies, biology, and business. Perhaps reading and writing about these diverse topics can introduce students to the differing ways in

which academic disciplines make knowledge, but how can we reasonably expect students to move beyond a superficial consideration of their subject matter—that is, to turn it over in their minds repeatedly—if we assign them to write about genetic engineering one week and "Stopping by Woods" the next? Courses in research writing, argumentative writing, and writing across the curriculum are rarely organized around forms of discourse; in fact, one of the most dramatic changes brought about by the paradigm shift from product- to process-centered teaching was the virtual abandonment of assignments that emphasized specific forms of exposition. Although writing tasks that misrepresented strategies such as classification, comparison, and definition as forms and an end in themselves distorted the writing process, we should not categorically reject assignments that call for such strategies, because students can use them very naturally as a means to reformulate and discover ideas.

One implication of my analysis of Heidi's essays, then, is that to engage students in the reading and writing skills associated with academic literacy, we can rely in part on specific types of assignments that tend to foster critical thinking—that is, on assignments that encourage emotional involvement, engage students in a sustained exploration of a single topic, and elicit cognitive activities such as defining and comparing. Our dilemma is that the institutionalized courses in which academic writing is typically taught are not very conducive to the use of these assignments. I am not implying that a class like the one I have described in this essay should replace the established courses in academic discourse. I am suggesting, however, that we need to question some of the fundamental assumptions that inform our teaching of these courses.

NOTES

¹ This article and all the assigned readings are collected in *Perspectives on Literacy*, the textbook I used for the course.

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