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Philosophy Statement on the Teaching of Writing

One reason I was drawn to both studying and becoming a teacher of English is that an English education transcends the limits of the classroom. The ability to read critically, think deeply, and write with purpose and proficiency is not merely a means of getting into college or establishing a career, but an ability that greatly enhances the quality of one's intellectual and emotional life. Accordingly, my philosophy on the teaching of writing addresses both practical and creative approaches to writing education. My philosophy is composed of four main ideas. The first is that writing is a skill that can be learned and mastered with time, patience, and commitment. The second idea is that writing is not merely an academic subject, but an invaluable communication tool that can greatly enrich students' lives in other academic areas and beyond high school. The third is that writing, as both a skill and a process, can allow students to grow creatively and emotionally. The fourth idea is that a contemporary writing education must acknowledge the relationship between writing and technology.

The idea that writing is a skill that requires time, patience and commitment hinges upon the perspective that writing is a process. Benefits of the process approach to writing education are widely praised, but Penny Kittle makes one of the strongest arguments for the process approach in her book *Write Beside Them* (Brandvik and McKnight 89; Hobbs and Berlin 262; Roe, Stoodt-Hall, and Burns 269). According to Kittle, "instruction has to come during the process of writing, not in polishing the product, or nothing changes" in the way students write

(Kittle 8). By focusing on the process of writing instead of the final product, this approach emphasizes the importance of treating writing as a craft that requires time, dedication and persistence. My own experience has led me to a similar conclusion that writing is a skill that takes time, patience and commitment to master. In my five years of working as a communications writer, I feel my writing has improved tremendously due to the methodical approach I now take to writing, the amount of writing I do, and the frequency with which I write. I think the growth I have seen in my own writing can be replicated in a classroom if both teacher and students put in sufficient time and effort. As a teacher of writing, I believe that modeling and guiding students through this process can indeed help them to master the skill of writing.

The second belief in my philosophy is that writing is not merely an academic subject learned for its own sake, but an invaluable communication tool that can greatly enrich students' lives in other academic areas and beyond high school. Roe, Stoodt-Hill, and Burns explain how writing can be a tool to help with reading in all content areas: "Writing can help readers explore what they know. Through writing, students come to terms with their own thoughts, solve problems, and discover new ideas; in other words, writing helps them clarify their thinking and leads to an ongoing process of self-knowledge," (Roe, Stoodt-Hill, and Burns 266). Indeed, I believe that writing can and should be utilized in all subject areas as it not only aids in the learning of these subjects, but also emphasizes writing's versatility. Kittle addresses this versatility of writing, suggesting that creative writing be used as a gateway to get students comfortable with writing and interested in other types of writing. She says, "Once students see writing as communicating something valuable to them, our work can begin. And yes, I believe that leading students to immerse themselves in craft leads to better writing in all genres" (Kittle 56-7). I think this is a key concept for a writing philosophy, as many students will presumably

disregard writing as irrelevant to their chosen profession or life after high school. The ability to write and communicate effectively is in fact relevant to many professions, and so I believe that teachers of writing should encourage students to explore the many applications of writing and help students seek out those that do apply to their interests.

Similar to my belief that writing has relevant applications in many professional and non-academic settings is my belief that writing, as both a skill and a process, can allow students to grow creatively and emotionally. My educational experience with creative writing has been quite limited, although I was encouraged to explore creative writing outside of school by my mother, who is an English teacher. Through journaling, writing exercises, and watching my mother write, I learned to value writing as a means of creative expression and therapeutic outlet. This approach to writing became popular during the period between World Wars I and II when proponents of expressionist writing emphasized the “individuality and creative potential of each student,” as well as the intrinsic therapeutic benefits of writing (Hobbs and Berlin 260). Underscoring the importance of the process of writing, Kittle and Donald M. Murray in “Write Before Writing,” both express the importance of uninhibited thinking and writing in the early stages of the writing process. Kittle explains why her class uses writer’s notebooks for this uninhibited thinking: “I need to have a storehouse for ideas, raw thinking, wonder and joy, agony and anger, all the rubble of thought that appears out of nowhere and just might shape a piece of writing” (Kittle 25). Murray similarly discusses how his uninhibited thinking helps him discover writing content and gives significance to his emotions and experiences (Murray 18). I believe this is one of the most valuable components of writing; that it can help students not only share their experiences and viewpoints, but help them understand that their experiences and viewpoints have

significance and validity. The type of uninhibited thinking and writing that Kittle and Murray propose also has relevance to the technology aspect of my philosophy.

I believe that contemporary teaching of writing must acknowledge the relationship between writing and technology. As noted above, Kittle and Murray emphasize the importance of uninhibited writing and thinking in the early stages of the writing process. I think that with the ever-growing presence of technology in young people's lives, this type of writing and thinking offers students a chance to escape from distractions and shallow forms of thinking and embrace more contemplative thought. However, I believe technology can also be a useful tool in the teaching of writing, particularly in the presenting and publishing stages. McKnight and Brandvik emphasize the importance of this stage of the writing process but do not explore the many opportunities technology provides for presenting and publishing (McKnight and Brandvik 90). Through the use of class websites, blogs, social media and more, students can share their writing and receive feedback from a global community. I believe that using technology to present and publish writing can help bolster students' confidence in their abilities and contribute to even better, more refined work, as they are writing for a potentially huge audience.

My philosophy on the teaching of writing contains a variety of ideas, but the overall emphasis is that writing is not merely a subject in school that must be learned in order to get into college or find a job. Writing is an invaluable skill that has intellectual, practical, creative, emotional, and technological applications. Teachers of writing should impart to their students that writing is indeed a skill that takes practice and commitment to master, but the process of writing can be just as rewarding as the product. I hope that as I begin my teaching career I can instill passion for writing in my students and implement the ideas in this philosophy to help students see that writing truly does transcend the boundaries of the classroom.

Works Cited

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