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Michel Foucault has told us that it is the relation of objects that form disciplines and discourse communities. In making his point clear, he stresses, “But let there be no misunderstanding: it is not the objects that remain constant nor the domain that they form; it is not even their point of emergence or their mode of characterization; but the relation between the surfaces on which they appear, on which they can be delimited, on which they can be analyzed and specified” (“From The Archeology of Knowledge” 1440). In the field of composition and rhetoric, it is impossible to study one defined surface, or subject area, without coming into contact with the many surrounding surfaces. Those many surfaces provide the discourse with the terms and content necessary to make sense and meaning of that which we study. For the portfolio, I chose to study a new aspect of composition pedagogical studies: Writing about Writing (WAW). My initial concerns for this project were that I would be looking at a subject area that was so new that I would not have enough material from which to draw to complete the portfolio. However, as the initial phases of my research began, I kept bumping into familiar surfaces, familiar names, familiar theories, and familiar “objects”: Foucault and his theories of surfaces, culture, discourse, subject position, author function, and epistemology; Richards Fulkerson’s axiological consistency in the classroom; Mina Shaughnessy’s call for an Aristotle in our field to help us talk to students about their writing; Patricia Bizzell’s addressing of academic discourse; Peter Elbow and his exhortation not to create academics; David Bartholomae’s insistence that we should teach writing for the academy; Steve North’s
breakdown of our field’s making of knowledge; and Wendy Bishop’s book “The Subject is Writing,” just to name a few. Each and every one of these authors I encountered along the way and perhaps read too separately, I now see as connected, contingent, and cultivated as unified parts of a whole.

WAW pedagogy, although “newer,” connects with and “interplays” with current pedagogical theories. Primarily, WAW is an attempt to solve many of the issues involved in reconciling the difficulties involved in Writing across the Curriculum (WAC), or more simply put, preparing students to write in the rest of their classes, i.e. their major. It is not surprising, then, that much debate has surrounded this inquiry in the field. Any major shift or change in the field, more specifically in first-year composition (FYC), always attracts much attention, and none more recently than the debate over WAC and the introduction of WAW pedagogy. Of course, they both, as are all pedagogical theories, attempting to get to the core of what it is we should be teaching in composition courses, how it is that we should go about teaching it, and why. There will never be one sufficient answer to satiate all concerned parties, but perhaps we move closer to helping students improve their reading, writing and thinking skills as a result of the evolving discussions.

My portfolio addresses what I believe to be the key issue of pedagogy within the composition classroom. I concentrate on one aspect of the classroom: the discourse of the classroom, or “how we will talk [to students] about their writing” (Shaughnessy “Diving” 234). Of course, discourse covers a magnitude of possibilities and pitfalls, but I do believe that my area of concentration alleviates greater discursive concerns. Furthermore, I do believe that it sufficiently exposes a real area of improvement not only for our field but also, and more importantly, for the benefit of all of our students who come to us with varying degrees of success in writing papers,
essays, and any task that requires syntactical facility. Within the research that is contained herein I have included sources that lament and extol the benefits of transfer and whether or not it is even possible (Downs and Wardle ‘Teaching’; Downs and Wardle ‘Reimagining’; Kutney, Smit; Wardle). The idea here is that what students learn in FYC will “transfer” with them to their future courses and be readily available to them as they are faced with each new writing situation. For example, a student who has successfully passed FYC and is later taking a psychology, sociology, or biology class is then able to write for that class. In other words, what they learn in FYC sticks with them and is useful to them in all of their future or major classes, and when students are able to do that well, write for their other classes, then we, as composition instructors, are said to have “done our jobs.”

In the interest of full disclosure, Dr. Similly helped me to make a very important distinction. When I refer to the “traditional” form of transfer in this portfolio, and as is defined my sources, I used the term “transfer,” but when I am referring to the benefits of how I view what a student is able to perform and do after the class, I use the term “internalize.” Both Dr. Similly and I believe that this term greater signifies what it is that not only I purport in my argument but also what is at the heart of what my teaching materials aim to help the student do. That is, my argument essentially states that if a student’s writing is going to genuinely improve, and by improvement I mean here the ability to talk about their writing and to know what to do when faced with a new “writing situation,” then students need the discourse of how we talk about their writing and what we do when a new writing situation is presented. For a student to successfully perform these “tasks,” however, they will need an immersion in the content of the whats, hows, and whys of writing. Much like Downs and Wardle report what they refer to as “adoption” in their research as the ability of students to begin to write in a more scholarly way
because of being exposed to the content and type of writing we want them to produce. I believe that the necessary requisite skills that our students still need to be prepared for writing in other “writing situations” in college and beyond, can be “internalized,” much like Downs and Wardle’s claims of students “adopting” scholarly writing in assignments.

The ideology of internalization is not new either. I am totally ripping off, or I should say, reappropriating, Foucault’s theories of culture and discourse which is where the heart of internalization lies. In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault claims that in the ordering of discourse there are “systems of exclusion and inclusion” that “forge discourse” (1461; 1463). The greatest system of exclusion is the third, the “will to truth,” for “the [will to truth] increasingly attempts to assimilate the others, both in order to modify them and to provide them with a foundation” (1463). The “will to truth” in the composition class, then, forges discourse forward by providing students with a foundation and modifies, hopefully, their understanding. In the very nature of all discourses is an introduction to the ways the many terms (objects) that we use apply within the context of our use, remembering Foucault’s emphasis that objects do not retain their form but rather it is their relationship to others when used that signifies meaning. Applying the further Foucauldian concepts of subject position (listening, observing, participating), we can thus help our students assimilate to the discourse they will need in order to succeed in their future classes and beyond (From *The Archeology of Knowledge* 1443). By using these ideas we can begin to see where we might maximize internalization, through discourse and subject position, of the whats, hows, and whys of writing.

It was through the writing and revising of “Attendance Rising: Foucauldian Theory and the American Megachurch” that I wrote for Dr. Similly’s History of Rhetoric Since 1700 class that really improved my understanding and application of Foucauldian theories. After going
through that process, Dr. Similly pushed me to clarify how I was using Foucault and how it applied to the popular cultural phenomenon of the American Megachurch. With this “practice” at sharpening my own knowledge and use of Foucauldin theories, I then began seeing Foucault everywhere I looked. When I began to read and comprehend even the little of Foucault that I have, I noticed that there seemed be a natural application within the composition classroom. In the classroom, it was evident that I was speaking a different language than that of my students, even though I was using known words and terms, objects. I noticed that it was not until the student conference that students truly understood what I meant when I said, “Be more specific,” “More analysis,” “I know what you mean here, but your reader might not,” on their papers. Light bulbs went off during student conferences, and I then began to worry about the rest of my classes. Although I knew that I was missing something, I still wasn’t sure exactly what that something was, until Foucault. Then, my light bulbs began to go off, but I still didn’t know what to do with this newfound knowledge and understanding. I then began to read and reread articles and books in this new light, and then this overarching idea began to form. It was a direct result of understanding Foucauldian discourse, subject position, and culture, and this understanding finally reached a point where I could see how to incorporate his theories and put them into practice in the classroom.

In Foucauldian fashion, then, my teaching materials are designed to apply the discourse of my classroom by putting my students into varying subject positions. This is what Amy Devitt called “genre situations”:

Students may know the genre of letters to the editor in a superficial way, but if they have never felt the need to write such a letter—if they have never experienced the situation—they may be incapable of writing one that
appropriately responds to that situation. When we create assignments and as we evaluate responses to them, we must consider both their situational and generic demands. (583)

In other words, if we bring together the surfaces of Foucault’s subject position and Devitt’s “genre situation,” we can see where the benefits of designing assignments that work to achieve these ends might aid in students’ “internalization.” The practice sounds simple, but sitting down to design writing assignments that place students into the necessary subject positions is challenging. First, the student needs to be in the subject of position of immersion. This is where the content of the course provides the discourse in which we will talk about their writing. Second, the student needs to be placed in a writing situation that they will want to assume the generic demands of that writing situation. Lastly, the student learns how to converse about their writing knowledgeably, and they learn what writing is for, that it is different in almost every situation with which they are faced.

This is where I believe that the ideas of Downs and Wardle’s WAW pedagogy meet Foucault meet Devitt, or at least this is where I have brought these surfaces together to design a course of my own invention: Writing for Writing. It is my belief that a class in which the content of the course is centered on writing that is “in service of” their writing, not merely a static set of rules that students follow over and over again and expect different results, is a course worth teaching.

Works Cited

