

FORUM

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From the Editor

Evelyn Beck

In this issue of *FORUM*, we get both faculty and administrative perspectives on the adjunct experience, both inside and outside the classroom. Elizabeth Allan discusses the different approaches she must take to teaching writing as an adjunct at three different institutions. Lisette Davies Ward recounts her first experience at a professional conference and how she received funding from her department to attend. Dan Jones, a former administrator, offers tips for adjuncts seeking to be hired into full-time positions by their departments; while his advice may not seem relevant to the experience of some adjuncts, he provides a valuable administrative perspective, especially for those wondering why adjuncts get passed over for full-time teaching positions. And James Mayo mulls the frustrations of being a powerless adjunct at odds with current approaches to teaching composition. As always, I encourage your submissions on any dimension of the experience of teaching English as an adjunct.

About Forum

Forum is published twice a year by the Committee on Contingent, Adjunct, and Part-Time Faculty (CAP) of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. As editor, I welcome you to submit news items, book reviews, editorials, and/or articles related to non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition courses. Submissions for the fall issue should be received no later than May 1; for the winter issue, the deadline is September 1. Note: Submissions will not be returned.

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The Triple-Voiced Adjunct: Finding a Middle Space while Teaching Writing on the Road

Elizabeth Allan

There is an intersection near my house which, for several years, was the literal turning point for my pedagogical practices on a daily basis. Turning right meant becoming a grammatical gatekeeper in a suburban community college. Turning left meant balancing discipline-specific discourse practices with general education goals in a small, professionally oriented university on the outskirts of the city. *Not* turning meant entering the world of the large, urban research university where theory reigns and lower-order concerns are simultaneously consequential and marginalized in teaching writing. This paper began as a reflection on the conscious cognitive shifts that I made as I moved among these institutions, listening to myself speak with three voices while trying to find my own. My purpose, though, is not to provide a how-to guide for adjunct writing instructors juggling multiple roles. Neither do I intend to present these three institutional cases as candidates for Best (or Worst) Writing Program. Rather, I want to examine the relationship between institutional identity and strategies for teaching writing in a given institutional context.

What drives pedagogical practices in these disparate educational environments? Are they operating within incompatible theoretical frameworks, or could a productive synthesis be developed from a collision of paradigms? I view myself not as an

anomalous link between distinct institutional worlds but as someone uniquely situated to articulate how each of these three institutions is part of a network of forces affecting multiple literacies. Literacy theorist Deborah Brandt calls this phenomenon the “sponsorship of literacy” by individual and institutional agents who “recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (19).

As students move from one discourse community to another—within the same academic institution, among different academic institutions, or between academia and the community or workplace—the literacy practices that they have accumulated take on different values: the skills that they have worked so hard to develop according to one institution’s literacy values may have little or no currency in their new surroundings. We are, perhaps, accustomed to thinking of this as the perennial problem of acclimating high school students to the college environment. I argue, however, that the implications of literacy sponsorship are much deeper and wider than that, for all concerned. Academic institutions must maintain relationships with one another, with the employers they supply with graduates, and with the communities they inhabit and influence. Just as instructors form opinions about individual students based on valued or devalued literacy skills, the agents of other institutions, academic or otherwise, judge a college or university based on the literacy practices of its graduates. Consequently, each institution has a vested interest in promoting or suppressing particular literacies, based on its own assumptions about what will be valued elsewhere. This process of managing literacies necessarily involves admissions policies, curricular decisions, and what I call the *sponsorship of pedagogy*.

As informal case studies, my own experiences—and those of my students—reveal that each institution manages several key elements in writing instruction to reinforce its chosen identity. For each case—the suburban two-year college I call Richfield Community College, the professional–liberal arts hybrid I call Laneville University, and the urban research institution I call Stonerock State University—I will sketch out the writing program’s learning objectives, assessment process, assignment design, and preferred teaching strategies to trace how each institution sponsors both literacy and pedagogy, accentuating some practices and muffling others.

Richfield Community College: The Gateway Model

In recent years, community colleges have taken on a dual role: preparing students for entry-level positions requiring associate’s degrees and preparing students for transfer to four-year institutions. Thus, my Richfield Community College classes were populated with students in two-year Fire Science and Dental Hygiene programs, as well as with students who were living at home to save money or hoping to raise their GPAs before transferring to local colleges or state universities. At

Richfield, writing is a skill, defined primarily as grammatical correctness, which is viewed as a badge of intellectual legitimacy and college-level proficiency. The learning outcomes for Richfield's two basic writing courses and two college-level composition courses emphasize eliminating errors and following specific rules governing distinct rhetorical modes: exemplification, comparison/contrast, and so on. The assumption is that these students will need to respond to directives appropriately—to follow assignment specifications to the letter, to take direction from a superior at work, to internalize routines. Consequently, assessment is based on quantifiable, standardized, sequenced skills.

Initial placement into the appropriate level of writing instruction is determined by the student's performance on a standardized grammar test, supplemented in borderline cases by a timed essay rated for the presence or absence of comma splices, fragments, and other countable errors. At Richfield, mastery of writing skills is orchestrated by a series of gateway courses featuring assignments that rely on objective testing and the student's written expression of personal experiences and ideas. The use of source texts or research is specifically prohibited until Composition 2, which begins by using literary primary texts (no secondary critical sources) as a basis for analytical essays and culminates in a research paper on one of several preselected topics: abortion, gun control, the death penalty. By this time, the student is expected to have mastered sentence-level correctness and accurate written expression of prior knowledge.

The teaching practices that support Richfield's literacy-acquisition system typically emphasize memorization of rules and close adherence to models of successful writing, particularly the five-paragraph theme. The scaffolding in Richfield courses is so thick that there is little room for a student to build upon it or beyond it. The slightest slip jeopardizes the student's success. Richfield's departmental guidelines refer to a five-step writing process which, in practice, is expected to proceed linearly within a tightly controlled time limit. While living in this world for nine years, my own pedagogical strategies involved making the institutional process transparent to my students. My teaching style was unabashedly directive. I devised reliable formulas and creative strategies to help my students get through the gate with a fighting chance of negotiating the obstacles of the next course.

Composition researcher Eli Goldblatt describes the mission of the community college as "produc[ing] students who will 'plug in' to other programs or employment positions readily." "Students come to [community colleges]," he says, "and legislatures fund them, in order to 'make [students] ready'" (160). Based on my observations, the Richfield Community College mindset privileges the idea that no one will take students seriously if they can't make their own subjects and verbs agree. Yet I have seen firsthand how difficult it is for these students to plug in to other institutional programs with different literacy expectations. Transfer students

from Richfield are, in many respects, ill-equipped for academic life at Laneville University or Stonerock State University, both of which have official agreements to accept credits from Richfield as equivalent to their own first-year writing courses. Still, Richfield values the literacy practices that it sees as an integral part of its identity as a reliable supplier of qualified workers and transfer students, productive and responsible citizens of corporate or academic communities.

Laneville University: The Teambuilding Model

The second institution, Laneville University, is a small private college with a dual focus on professional training and liberal arts education. Laneville's writing program emphasizes pragmatic and collaborative communication strategies, rather than correct reproduction of fixed information. Laneville uses one "fundamentals" course, one college-level writing class in the first year, and one college-level writing course in the second or third year to meet its learning objectives. The first college-level course introduces students to academic discourse in general, preparing them for upper-level liberal arts courses. The later course is a discipline-specific writing class with separate sections for students with similar professional majors, such as science or business. In this later writing course, students learn about and practice writing in the genres valued by their profession or discipline, in a kind of apprenticeship in professional writing practices.

At Laneville, students are initially placed into first-year writing on the basis of timed essays written in response to prompts that ask them to draw on personal or general knowledge. A small cadre of Laneville's writing instructors and professional tutors evaluates the placement essays using a double-grading system. Although surface errors may influence placement, the essays are rated primarily on the basis of how the student constructs and supports an argument and on the student's awareness of audience. The graders reward internally logical arguments, even those based on inaccurate information. The assumption at Laneville is that surface errors and factual errors are easily dealt with, but failures to understand the purpose of the writing task or the relationship between writer and audience are crucial deficiencies.

Laneville describes its assignments as "text-based and thesis-driven." All formal writing assignments require the documented use of source texts to provide evidence for clearly articulated claims. In the first course, the assignments are sequenced to build from analysis of one or two short, common texts to a guided research assignment developed to meet Laneville's information-literacy goals. Students learn to draw upon general education concepts and discipline-specific knowledge to respond appropriately to predictable rhetorical situations, adopting the stance of a professional who may negotiate with a client but who knows better than the client what the client actually needs or what the project entails. Tailoring

academic prose and rhetorical strategies to the needs of the socially constructed reading audience is highly valued. Each writing assignment is graded; however, unlike in the Richfield Community College environment, at Laneville there is usually opportunity for some revision and grade adjustment at the discretion of the instructor. Both Richfield and Laneville require graded in-class essays to prepare students for taking essay exams in other courses within their institutions.

Teaching practices within the small community of Laneville vary quite widely from one instructor to another, though programmatic unity is preserved through a common theme and syllabus. Instructors may supplement the common trade-publication text with additional material of their own choosing. As an instructor at Laneville, I create my own assignments and am expected to make time for drafting, peer review, and conferences, which are assumed to be important features in writing instruction. At Laneville, errors in standard English are seen as consequential insofar as they undermine the student's credibility as a developing professional and interfere with effective communication. Laneville students also use writing-to-learn strategies in informal assignments designed to help them explore professional issues. Collaborative assignments, particularly cross-disciplinary assignments, are highly valued. As an institution, Laneville University sees its unique mission as providing professionally trained graduates with discipline-specific skills enhanced by a broader general education emphasizing critical thinking, analysis, teamwork, and problem solving.

Stonerock State University: The Research Model

Stonerock State University, the large urban research university, emphasizes not just problem solving but what Joseph Williams has called "problem-posing": creating a space for one's own voice within an academic conversation by identifying and then responding to a new theoretical problem. One of the clearest indicators of difference in the Stonerock writing program is its overt theoretical stance. In a study of university and community college writing tasks, Goldblatt has found that "the university tasks tended to emphasize taking a position drawn from a text and using theory as the frame for the essay; community college tasks [and, I would add, the professionally oriented university's tasks] tended to put more of a premium on a clearly stated opinion on a text-based topic, defended in a well-organized structure written in standard English" (154–55).

The high value that Stonerock State places on research and theory is evident in its writing program policies, beginning at the assessment level for initial placement. The apparatus for placement test scoring is derived from a complex, research-based formula of statistically significant predictors of student success for this institution's specific courses, as opposed to Richfield Community College's reliance on generic, standardized grammar tests and Laneville University's reliance on the collective

wisdom of its own team of experienced, professional educators. Incoming students to Stonerock State are given possible topics and related articles in advance to encourage them to research and plan their essays before the day of the test.

In both levels of first-year writing at Stonerock, every assignment involves independent research and semiotic analysis of popular-culture texts, including music videos, television, and film. Foregrounding theory in this way requires beginning college students to think and to write in ways quite foreign to them. The five-paragraph theme is openly debunked as indicative of high school writing, though in other Stonerock departments the five-paragraph format is upheld as a clear, concise, and even preferred method of academic writing. In Stonerock's common syllabus for first-year writing, the sequence of assignments layers increasingly complex combinations of rhetorical moves, from critique to counterargument to synthesis. Conferences and multiple drafts are required and built into the syllabus, which also emphasizes critical-reading skills. Students are graded holistically on a final portfolio of "substantially revised" papers and a reflective self-assessment.

Stonerock instructors are explicitly discouraged from grading drafts and from focusing on lower-order concerns in their responses to student writing. Typically, students are referred to handbooks or the Stonerock Writing Center to resolve grammar problems. Yet while direct instruction in the "basics" is marginalized, students' errors are, in fact, consequential because those errors are seen as evidence of underpreparedness and/or lack of effort. In other words, the fears of the Richfield Community College instructors seem to have come true: students who commit errors in their writing are seen as irresponsible—as bad academic citizens. Put another way, the fears of professionally oriented Laneville University instructors seem to have materialized: these students are seen as *un*professional in an environment that views itself as the pinnacle of academic professionalism.

In the sponsorship of my own pedagogy, I hear multiple institutional voices, accented and muffled notes that combine Richfield's pull toward conformity, Laneville's collaborative impulse, and Stonerock's drive toward complex originality. As I move among these institutions, I find myself assessing each student's situation to determine which pedagogical approach would be more beneficial at the moment, rather than sliding into a predetermined, institutionally sponsored pedagogical stance. Each day, I stand at the pedagogical crossroads: does this student need to turn right on red for a grammar lesson? Merge left to adapt to the socioacademic context for this piece of writing? Forge ahead using research to clear his or her own path to posing a problem and developing a thesis? As an agent of literacy sponsorship, I encourage my students to explore and develop a variety of literacy practices within the protected space of apprenticeship in each clearly defined academic or professional culture. At the same time, I must also prepare those students to leave

that protected space with the ability to negotiate the new terms of literacy they will inevitably encounter when they cross institutional borders.

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Conference Jewels Await—Demystifying the Process!

Lisette Davies Ward

During my first years teaching at the community college level, I watched full-timers go to several conferences a year. When they returned recharged, their energy rubbed off on me. However, my hopes of attending a conference were quickly dashed when my department secretary told me there was no money for adjuncts.

Years passed and I pursued other avenues of faculty enrichment. Then out of the blue last spring, a recently hired full-timer approached me with a leaflet from the English Council of California Two-Year Colleges (ECCTYC) and encouraged me to submit a proposal on my multimedia approaches in the classroom. She wrote "See you at the conference!" on the cover page. So I checked the submission deadline, e-mailed the Conference Request for Proposal Form, and about six weeks later received an acceptance notice in my Yahoo inbox. Little did I know, the process had just begun. To help you demystify this process, here's some advice about conference attendance and presentation based on my first-time experience:

To secure funding, try the following:

- Inquire with your department secretary or chair on the off-chance that extra funding is available (to my surprise, it was—the first time in my history of

working for this college) or that a full-timer opted for different professional development, thus making the conference kitty fuller than usual. If you cannot secure funding, share a room with a colleague or two (even offer to sleep on a rollaway bed).

- Time is of the essence, since the system seems to be first-come first-served, even for full-timers, so follow through immediately with your college's procedures for making that request formal. In order to consider my request at the appropriate meeting, my chair required a short e-mail in which I presented a travel and hotel projection.
- If presenting at a conference, you stand a chance of getting some of your request matched if funds are available. Also consider presenting with another faculty member on an issue of interest to both of you, so you can submit a funding request as a co-presenter.
- Keep all receipts of meals you eat during your stay, even snacks and beverages. I discovered when talking to the academic dean's secretary upon my return that there is a per diem for food when faculty travel. Also, conferences at this level usually provide coffee, tea, and continental breakfast every morning and have coffee available throughout the day at designated areas. I didn't discover these wonderful extras until my third day. (The information was probably somewhere in the conference packet, so read *all* information in that packet upon check-in rather than thinking "I'll read it later" as I did!)
- If you need help preparing your presentation, contact conference coordinators listed on the Web site.
- To photocopy presentation materials, ask your college if these copying fees can be taken out of your semester quota for copying.
- Take advantage of your moderator. I did not really know what role this person played, so when the moderator asked what he could do for me while I set up, I drew a blank. I later learned that in addition to moderating discussion among presenters and attendees, these individuals can help with set-up, and remind you when to switch modes from presentation to questions and discussion.

Not only did I return home recharged and re-inspired, the very thing I had envied in other conference-going faculty members in years gone by, but I also met and enjoyed learning about many other faculty across the state. My knowledge was deepened regarding our function at the state and national levels, as well as about an incredible diversity of issues from teaching a critical approach to globalization to current district contract negotiations. I also learned how to present better in the future. Ultimately, by throwing myself into what I originally considered a daunting

process, I demystified it to my happy surprise, and sang the experience's praises at our next adjunct faculty meeting as a means of spreading these "conference jewels" of knowledge and encouraging others to attend and/or present.

In sum, attending the ECCTYC conference was by far one of the most rewarding professional development activities I have experienced in my eight years of college teaching. In addition, it raised my profile in my department: my chair asked for a copy of my presentation materials, and another full-time attendee suggested we re-present our conference presentations at a departmental roundtable. Thus, if I were looking for a full-time position, this activity would help me get noticed. Finally, new friends I stayed in touch with led to potential publications and plans to meet again at future conferences. So e-mail me your "conference jewel" experiences; I'd love to hear about them or meet you at a future conference!

Lisette Davies Ward was born and raised in England, moved to continental Europe, then emigrated to the United States in 1987. She currently teaches at Santa Barbara City College; writes poetry, creative fiction, and nonfiction; and makes wreaths and mixed-media art, some of which has appeared in various art exhibitions since 2005. For more information or to e-mail her, go to www.chezlisettes.com.

Where Adjuncts Can Go Wrong: Reflections of a Former Division Chair

Dan Jones

As a division chair in a relatively small rural community college for more than a decade of my thirty-five-year career, and as a "regular" full-time English faculty member for the other twenty-five years, I have had the privilege of working with many, many adjunct faculty members in a supervisory as well as a collegial capacity. That experience has taught me that adjuncts are (by far, no contest) the most exploited group of employees in higher education. Decades ago, the budgetary situation at most colleges (fed by less and less public funding for state colleges, among other things) led to the temptation, on the part of college administrations, to use adjuncts to staff more and more classes simply to free up additional funding for "other things." Predictably, this trend led, slowly but surely, to the more serious current problem—dependency on the hiring of even more adjuncts as a means to meet minimum funding levels for the total operation of the colleges. Alas, all of this has led to a system in which approximately half the classes taught in community colleges are now taught by grossly underpaid, part-time faculty members with virtually no employee benefits. This, in a nutshell, was the emerging system that I was helping to administer before I returned to full-time teaching in 1999 after ten years in the role of division chair.

In my capacity as supervisor, I was fully aware of the larger issue of the exploitation of adjuncts, but I was also keenly aware of my role in being responsible not only for staffing classes but for ensuring the quality of each class that was being taught in my division. In working with full-time and part-time faculty toward that end, I became aware of some classroom and professional issues that were not unique to adjuncts but seemed to be much more common among adjuncts as a group than among full-time faculty. It became clear to me that dealing with these problems successfully was a key to the ability of part-time faculty members to continue to develop as professionals and perhaps secure full-time positions.

Pitfall No. 1: Attempting to Manipulate Student Evaluation Results

Because adjunct faculty members are contracted on a semester-to-semester basis, there is very little job security, and thus there is a greater temptation to want to “look good” at all costs. Full-time faculty members also feel these pressures, but there is a bit more security and more often a greater awareness of larger professional issues. Because student ratings are concrete (the individual rating is reduced to an actual number on a scale), there is a tendency on the part of some supervisors and faculty to take them more seriously than other evaluation criteria that may be more subjectively derived and analyzed. In reality, though, most supervisors (but probably not most adjunct faculty) know that the best instructors most often do not get the highest student evaluations. In my own experience, for example, I found that the best instructors were the ones who, over time, achieved evidence of impressive student learning (students’ improvement in writing ability from beginning essay to final essay in a composition course, students’ ability to perform well on difficult tests in a content course, instructor’s use of a methodology that is consistent with accepted, research-based pedagogy) while at the same time showing evidence of genuine acceptance by the students through “decent” (but not necessarily exceptional) student evaluation scores. Recognizing that it is possible to manipulate student ratings by assigning grades that are higher than those assigned by other instructors or by reducing the workload to a level that is below that assigned by other instructors, adjunct faculty members are more likely to succumb to that temptation. The problem is that full-time and part-time faculty members who unprofessionally attempt to manipulate student ratings are, of course, jeopardizing their reputations among colleagues and their own futures in the profession.

Pitfall No. 2: Resisting Advice

Unfortunately, the insecurity that comes from inexperience often creates additional problems. This is true in the case of some inexperienced adjunct faculty members who are overly confident that what they are doing and how they are doing it is the

only way for them to proceed. The problem is increased when the instructor does not make an honest effort to make adjustments that his or her mentor (supervisor or designated full-time faculty member) may suggest. It is often the case, for example, that an inexperienced instructor, perhaps just out of graduate school, will assign topics in a composition class that are interesting and relevant to the instructor but are simply too far removed from the students' experience for the students to be able to write meaningfully in response to them. This is a problem that is easy for an experienced mentor to identify but sometimes very difficult for the inexperienced instructor to accept. The wise adjunct faculty member will listen, learn, and make adjustments.

Pitfall No. 3: Not Making Development Opportunities a Priority

The faculty member who does not realize the enormous cumulative effect of regular professional development efforts is at risk of becoming a liability instead of an asset. Full-time faculty members in this category almost certainly lose the respect of colleagues and become less enthusiastic and less effective in the classroom. Adjunct faculty members in this category most often fade away from the college scene altogether. Those who take advantage of most if not all development opportunities (especially the free ones) offered by the college and by professional organizations (like the TYCA regionals) and who take the initiative in planning and executing their own development are most likely to be successful. While there is never a guarantee of making that breakthrough into full-time employment, evidence of substantial developmental activity and growth is an expectation in most hiring decisions. And all community college instructors, whether they are interested in full-time employment or not, need to feel like, be perceived as, and actually be true professionals. To be otherwise is to shortchange the employer and the students.

Pitfall No. 4: Avoiding Technology

One of the most difficult hiring decisions of my career as a division chair was in passing over an excellent part-time faculty member for full-time employment because the division and the college had set as a priority the need to use new hires to strengthen the technological expertise of the faculty as a whole. The adjunct had been with the college for a number of years and had been outstanding in every way—except in the development of the ability to use technology in the classroom and in the delivery of online instruction. The college was forced to seek that expertise and experience outside the immediate college community because the existing adjuncts had not developed that capability. My advice to all part-time faculty members is to take the initiative in gaining the experience needed to make themselves more useful to employers. They should seek out workshops, volunteer

to develop online classes, and familiarize themselves with all aspects of smart-classroom technology. The development of such expertise and experience is a major difference-maker in hiring decisions and a necessity for the professional faculty members of the present and future.

Some Final Thoughts

While many part-time faculty members may have ambitions of full-time employment, and I have had this group in mind throughout this discussion, I realize that there are other motives for wanting to teach part-time in the community college. When I finally retire, I too may want to become an adjunct faculty member. If I do, I will want to approach the job with the same kind of professionalism that I have been advocating for others. Others may be perfectly content with their present employment outside of teaching and simply want to teach in a college because it is so rewarding. These instructors are a great asset to the community college, and they also will want to approach their work with the same kind of professional attitude with which they approach their chosen careers. If they are serious about teaching, they will insist on informing themselves about their avocation as much as possible, becoming acquainted with relevant technology, and gaining the respect of their colleagues. So the advice applies to everyone who wants to succeed as a college instructor, part-time or full-time, and the avoidance of the identified pitfalls is just common sense.

Currently on the English faculty of Walters State Community College in Morristown, Tennessee, Dan Jones retired from the Virginia Community College System in 2002 after serving Wytheville Community College as professor of English and chair of the Division of Business, Humanities, and Social Sciences. He has been very active in TYCA—Southeast, presenting frequently and serving for two elected terms on the Regional Executive Committee.

The Love Song of an Adjunct: Reflections on Teaching Writing Part-Time and the Failure of Composition Theory

James Mayo

For the last few years, I've been something of an "apprentice" adjunct. After earning a master's degree in English, I taught for one year at a junior college in Florida, then three years at a small state university in the Florida panhandle as my wife pursued her second degree. I gave up thoughts of pursuing a terminal degree when we had the opportunity to buy some family property in Tennessee. Now I'm teaching, once again as an adjunct, at a community college in the state university

system in Tennessee. My teaching duties are the usual: Comp. 1 and 2, a literature survey every now and then, and developmental writing.

Like many adjuncts, I'm stuck in what the Beatles called a "nowhere land" of temporary positions, low pay, lack of benefits, lack of job security, lack of intellectual freedom, lack of collegiality, and lack of respect (at times). I'm a second-rate citizen. Sometimes this is nice. I can teach my two or three classes, then go home and paint walls or cut brush in the yard or other things that people who own a neglected ninety-year-old house may do. Sometimes, though, my second-class status is troubling.

I love to teach, and my Pollyanna-esque enthusiasm and my Candide-esque naïveté keep me believing the winks and nods I get from my "superiors" when possibilities of full-time openings are mentioned. "Just hang on," their winks and nods tell me. "Stick around, keep working hard, and we'll take you on permanently. You'll do *exactly* what you're doing *now*, but we'll pay you more and accept you as a colleague." And I do, or so far I have. But as semesters turn to years and the winks and nods continue, I'm learning a brand of cynicism that would make Al Prufrock blush. I "stick around" and "work hard" because I love what I do—I can't imagine a world without teaching, and I can't imagine not spending a good deal of my "free time" writing and contributing to the academic conversation. And perhaps that's what I am, in a way—a Prufrock-type figure standing on the outskirts of everything, while my full-time colleagues come and go talking of important academic ideas.

I came to this latest adjunct position with insight I didn't have before. I felt, more than ever, that one of the major problems facing me and my other part-time colleagues was that we lacked the ability to *question* established methods and policies. I first realized not long after beginning my first teaching gig that what I was being asked to do in the composition or basic writing classroom ran completely counter to the theories and pedagogies I was taught as a graduate student and that I have continued to study and attempt to practice on my own over the years. And now, as I've grown intellectually and gained more experience, that idea has reared its ugly head higher than ever. And perhaps this urge to question the establishment has come out of the cynicism that I've gained lately. That is, now that I know how "the system" works, and that my being something akin to the departmental puppy, wanting love and approval and willing to do anything to get it (e.g., never saying no to additional classes, accepting low pay without resistance, etc., etc.) is getting me nowhere, I feel it's safe to make noise if I feel the need.

One of the fundamental problems facing adjunct instructors of English is their lack of preparation for the courses they will eventually teach. Most of us who have degrees in English are trained in literary analysis and criticism. Many of us haven't been given the proper instruction needed to teach a writing course. I remember

receiving a week-long orientation session, with my graduate teaching assistant peers, before being thrown to the sharks in my first writing classes. And when that week was up and we had two sections of first-year comp. to teach, we had to learn on the fly.

But we could make it better; there was an “out.” And this is an idea that is still being practiced at some colleges and universities all over the country: we could teach literature in our writing courses! This practice is self-indulgent at best and, as others smarter than I have pointed out, does little to serve the students who are badly in need of learning the writing skills that will help them succeed in their college careers. We choose a nice anthology, heavy and overpriced, that includes the standards—“A Cask of Amontillado,” “The Lottery,” “A Rose for Emily,” “Hills like White Elephants.” Yes, the students will certainly respond to these! They always do! But I’m not quite sure how it is that students can focus on learning to write the college essay if they are focusing solely on writing the literary paper and analyzing creative texts. As I see it, our job, as instructors of writing, is to do two things: (1) prepare our students to write the papers necessary as they complete their degrees, and (2) prepare our students for the writing responsibilities they will encounter as professionals working in their chosen fields. I’m convinced that analyzing the theme of “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” will do little to help our students become better writers.

And this rift that we see in English departments across the country between the pure study of literature and the necessary study of composition and basic writing is a reflection, on a larger scale, of this same idea. Of course this is also why we’re seeing the push to form autonomous comp./rhet. departments. But can the English department afford to lose composition studies? Let me qualify that question. Can the English department afford to lose its composition *requirement*? Of course not.

But what is the adjunct who was fortunate enough to be exposed to composition theory to do in this environment? Here in just about three weeks I’ll journey forth into my Comp. 2 classrooms, my Kirszner and Mandell literature anthology in hand, my trousers rolled, to attempt to teach my students the finer points of college writing using literature as a context. “And how should I presume?” “Do I dare disturb the universe?” Do I question the established policy? Do I simply refuse to teach the three sections? Do I accept the classes and covertly teach my students composition in a way that’s more in line with current theory? Of course not. I would see my head brought in on a platter. The system is designed so that I will do as I’m told without question and so that, as a result, my students’ educational experiences are compromised.

If the current trends in composition theory are widely accepted, and I’ve been assured that they are, then why do I find myself, as an adjunct, butting my head against a system that is slow to change? Why am I having to struggle to hold my

tongue and not question the establishment, even though I feel the established principles are clearly faulty? Perhaps this is where, as valuable as it is, composition theory has failed all of us who actually go out into “the trenches” and teach the writing courses. We’re told “how” it should be done, but we’re not told “what” to do when put in positions where the theories are ignored. Can I see myself barging into our next faculty meeting (I would have to barge in, as I am not invited) and telling everyone there that the established policies are wrong and must be changed immediately? Can I see myself telling my chair, “No, I’m going to do it my way from now on”? Certainly not.

What I want to do is go back to graduate school, taking with me the years of experience I’ve gained, back to the composition theory seminar, and ask tough questions. I wouldn’t ask, “Just what is Elbow getting at here?” or “What does Berlin mean when he suggests X?” I would ask, “What do we do when we get there and things just don’t work out as you say they should?”

Work Cited

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