

### Pre-Workshop Reading

To set the stage for our discussion about what project-based writing can offer, see the characterizations below of the dangers of “regular” school-writing.

----

**Verlyn Klinkenborg, in his *Several Short Sentences About Writing*, addressing student writers:**

“Were you asked to write in order to be heard, to be listened to?

Asked to write a piece that mattered to you?

Was there ever a satisfactory answer to the question,

“Why am I telling you this?”

Beside “It’s due on Monday”?

You were taught the perfect insincerity of the writing exercise,

Asked to write pieces in which you didn’t and couldn’t Believe.

You learned a strange ventriloquism,

Saying things you were implicitly being asked to say,

Knowing that no one was really listening.

You were being taught to write as part of a transaction That had

Almost nothing to do with real communication,

Learning to treat the making of sentences as busywork,

A groping for words, an act of drudgery,

A way of dressing up your meaning or your argument

with almost no attention to the character of the words or sentences you were using,

Unless you were trying to imitate

The stiff and impersonal manner of ‘formal’ prose.

You were also learning to distrust the reader and yourself.

Do you remember feeling, when you were writing a

Paper for school,

That your vocabulary was steadily shrinking?

By the end, the same few words, seemed to be buzzing

Around and around in your head, like flies weary of

Feeding.

That’s a symptom of boredom.

You were bored from the start and for good reason. (30-31)

---

College seniors quoted in Eodice, Geller, and Lerner's *The Meaningful Writing Project*

"I don't remember any meaningful [writing] project [in college] because writing to me is more of a chore for me and I do not find it enjoyable, no matter what the topic. I usually feel that when I am writing for an assignment I am writing for a purpose that is not for myself, I am writing to appease the teacher and I am writing to get an "A" (43)

\*\*\*

"Usually the prompts are pretty strict and pretty cut and dry. There's really no wiggle room. A lot of people don't like that...it's like playing in someone else's sandbox. You go there and you've got to know these rules and you can't do this, you can't do that, you've got to do this, this is the right way. If you get your own sandbox to do this stuff in, then you're more apt to have fun with it." (88)

----

Jasper Neel in his *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* (1988) laments when students produce what he calls "anti-writing": "I am not writing. I hold no position," Neel parodies. "I have nothing at all to do with discovery, communication, or persuasion. I care nothing about the truth. What I *am* is an essay. I announce my beginning, my parts, my ending, and the links between them. I announce myself as sentences correctly punctuated and words correctly spelled"

-----

Neal Lerner quoting Carolyn Keys in his article "Laboratory Lessons for Writing and Science" (p. 213)

In this climate, it is no wonder that student writing about science is rote, mechanistic, and dull. According to Carolyn Keys (1999),

When all the students in the class obtain the same results to an activity, and there is only one scientifically acceptable outcome, the learners quickly realize that they must somehow generate, copy, or paraphrase the knowledge claim that is desired by the teacher. Thus, writing in this genre can easily become a rote activity, especially when the students have no opportunity to determine the appropriate methods for the investigation, ways to display the data, or new meanings for the data. (p. 125)

----

Theresa Lillis (2002) quoted in Eodice, Lerner, and Geller's *The Meaningful Writing Project*

"It is difficult to get close to individual desires for meaning making within the context of the culture of [Higher Education]: student-writers' efforts are inevitably channeled into working out what is acceptable within [Higher Education], rather than exploring what they might want to mean" (88)

### Pre-Workshop Reflective Worksheet

In preparation for our workshop please do some quick brainstorming around the following questions (and bring your responses to the workshop as conversation starters for small-group work).

Picture the trajectory of your students' PBL experience—what are students doing at the beginning, middle, and end? Are they doing writing (or other communicating)? What kind? At which stages?
List some possible writing/communication assignments below.
<i>Example: Reflective memo accompanying the final project submission.</i>
A.
B.
C.

Choosing one or two of the above assignments you've just brainstormed, to consider... What is the primary <b>purpose</b> for that assignment? Why are you asking students to do this? What is its value? For whom?
<b>Possible purposes might include:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keeping students motivated or on-task</li><li>• Deepening student knowledge/skills</li><li>• Providing advisor/instructor with a window onto student work</li><li>• Targeting a specific readership to inform, motivate, persuade, etc.</li></ul>
<i>Example: Primary purpose of the memo is to provide a window onto student's thinking; secondary purpose is to deepen student thinking about the rationale for their decisions</i>
A.
B.
C.

For the above assignment(s), which <b>Audiences</b> are in play? Who is the student writing to? (there could be multiple audiences in play—some actual, some posited)
<b>Possible audiences might include:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The student themselves</li><li>• The student's teammates</li><li>• The instructor</li><li>• Institutional audience outside of classroom</li><li>• Outside readers</li><li>• Imaginary audiences</li></ul>

*Example: The instructor is the main audience of the memo. But if the student reflects during the process then the student might also be an audience, using reflection as a sounding board for self-understanding*

A.

B.

C.

Who will evaluate the student work and how will it be **evaluated** (if at all)?

**Possible objects of evaluation might include:**

- topic knowledge/expertise
- critical thinking/logic
- knowledge of writing conventions
- student labor or effort
- not evaluated

*Example: I won't be grading the reflection. I'll use it to help get insight into the intentionality and thoughtfulness of the final project itself (in that sense, it could affect the grade I assign to the final project).*

A.

B.

C.