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ENC 5333

24 November 2024

Merging Creative Writing, Montessori, and Professional Writing as a Writing Philosophy

 I am a graduate student studying English, specializing in creative writing. Since I am a non-traditional student, I am researching how to teach writing and rhetorical fundamentals to first-year college students. However, I have no experience in learning composition as a student; therefore, I am examining my experience through the lens of my professional writing career as a home school parent, my teaching theory and philosophy, and my skill as a creative writer to culminate into a successful English composition teacher. I created my teaching philosophy and theory because I want to learn to encourage students to express themselves with language to understand how to engage them in their writing potential. Over time, my inquiry question evolved into, “How can creative writing, the alternative pedagogical method Montessori, and my professional writing experience help students perform better and express themselves dynamically both in the classroom and in the business world?”

 My exigence stems from my experience in journalism, desiring to instruct students on concise writing. I learned that writing with fewer words that convey a complete thought without confusion works for the general public to provide a clear message. While applying my research to my teaching and writing philosophy, Dr. Bre Garrett’s words followed me: “the concepts that we learn, kairos, ethos, logos, pathos, context—help enrich our daily conversations.” As a teenager, I learned about rhetoric from advertisements, speech, and other motivational communications by absorbing the culture around me; I did not know the mechanics of rhetorical language that assisted my cognitive understanding.

 The concepts of ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos are modes of persuasion or rhetorical appeals:

* Ethos: Persuasion through establishing the character of the speaker
* Pathos: Persuasion through putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind
* Logos: Persuasion through proof or seeming proof
* Kairos: The fourth mode of persuasion, which considers the opportune moment for persuasion (Chapter 2 Rhetoric and Writing)

These fundamental elements persuade the reader through appeals of emotion, character, evidence, and timing. These concepts help the writer appeal to the audience through clear, concise language. The rhetorical appeals of emotion, character, evidence, and timing in each position of my teaching and writing philosophy connect the aspects of the three concepts: creative writing, the alternative pedagogical method Montessori, and the clarity of professional writing in the everyday world.

Theory and Philosophy

When I taught my three children in homeschooling, I matched my teaching approach to their learning styles. I tested their learning styles and created a methodology that matched their strengths. I now understand that this method is the Montessori method. In Debra Dean’s review of the article, “Talking, Sketching, Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing” by Patricia A. Dunn, Dean says, “if writing teachers had to show their intelligence or learning through another method—mathematics, art, or music—perhaps they might understand the way some students feel about showing their learning verbally” (Dunn 106).  Dunn argues that in other learning methods, including kinesthetic movement, students learn about reading and writing at their level. She adds that teachers should teach outside their comfort zone, respecting other intellectual insights into reading and writing. Creative methods do this by thinking outside the box of traditional teaching theory and practice. Choosing the right word for the right paper is difficult for some students.

Furthermore, students “grapple” with their ability to represent the correct expression through language (Bazerman 38). Not all students take to writing naturally and need encouragement to see the world of reading and writing through other cognitive senses.

With the Montessori theory, teachers can accommodate students’ individual needs. Students see writing in new ways, opening the door to a wider world. Some students' strongest learning style is kinesthetic, or learning by doing. During this stage of life, it is difficult to hold their attention long enough to ensure they absorb educational concepts. At age eleven, my daughter Kristen tested as a hundred percent kinesthetic learner. I integrated movement into her education. While sitting at a desk and listening, she could twirl her pencil or silently doodle on paper. This small compensation increased her knowledge retention enough for her to achieve her high school diploma. Other compensation methods for my daughter in subjects where visual learning was imperative, such as mathematics, included handling modeling clay and other manipulatives to integrate memorization. Integrating reading and writing for Kristen was, indeed, challenging. However, the multimodal method helped her hit the mark. Writing is a difficult topic for the kinesthetic learner, but integrating all the senses and engaging emotion, character, evidence, and timing brings ideas to the surface. Kristen’s writing improved dramatically after engaging her in a hands-on experience. She engaged with the subject so well that all her senses were activated, and she could imagine her words and fully see the memories. Maria Montessori said “He who does not possess the world of the imagination is poor” (Montessori 37). She insists that if we do not encourage imaginative play, we hinder the imagination, which hinders cognitive growth (Montessori 38). If students are not engaging with the topic entirely, it could hinder their thoughts and imagination and impede their self-expression. By not being able to express themselves, words will not flow freely. Montessori said that by giving the student more information to heighten the imagination, concepts will grow and be remembered for the rest of the child’s life, not until the end of the semester (Montessori 38-39).

Writing is used every day both in the business world and at home. Without knowing how to communicate fully and with clarity, whatever field the student enters could cause problems within the job. Although writing emails may seem dull or commonplace, messages change the world for both the writer and the recipient. By teaching writing fundamentals and ensuring clear and concise language, rhetorical communication establishes expectations, providing results. Effective use of the right words for the right message is imperative for direct communication in the workplace.

Using story-making in the classroom is another aspect of teaching that compliments the Montessori education theory. The NCTE Teaching Storytelling position statement states that when students create stories to relay their narratives, their ideas, and writing processes, the class becomes closer to understanding arguments, sharing points, and processing classroom demonstrations or discussions. Natural storytelling utilizes body language, facial expression, and eye contact. Students can use the models of storytelling they see daily to enhance their ability to speak in public, in presentations, in virtual business, or in classrooms.

The Conference on Composition and Communication Position Statement for New Teachers states that first-year composition courses must prepare students to “address and influence a variety of complex professional, civic, and social situations” (ncte.org). By preparing students to work toward clear and concise writing to meet the demands of the workplace, I will engage students' exigence for preparation of their future inside and outside the classroom. Utilizing creative writing in my pedagogy and focusing on kinesthetic and tactile learning and multi-modal media, I will use an effective and progressive curriculum that will include academic, public, and creative writing challenges.

Creative writing skills help the writer in the everyday world by imagining the person receiving the message and engaging them in the written word. In doing so, the reader of the message will engage the message with a clearer meaning. By combining creative writing skills with other academic writing, student learning is enhanced by broadening the writer’s imagination, increasing self-expression, and expanding word choice. Most of the creative aspects of composition writing culminate in the subject matter of an essay and in the hook within the introduction. Word choice is key to engaging the reader and conveying the specific meaning of the essay. In his essay, "Writing Represents the World, Events, Ideas, and Feelings," Charles Bazerman said that writers take great care in their word choice to convey the emotion they want to convey and make their text powerful. However, Bazerman said that writers resist this idea because they feel incapable of communicating through words sufficiently (Naming What We Know 38). With positive encouragement about word selection for a creative text, such as an essay, I can encourage writers against feelings of inadequacy. The writing process, setting the student’s mind inside of an engagement familiar to them every time they sit down to write, must be a moment to train their mind to connect with the subject they plan to participate in for their assignment. My grandson Hunter is now home-schooled because of low scores in reading comprehension. This affected other subjects, so his overall performance suffered. When I asked Hunter about the importance of reading, he answered that he needed to “understand better.” He never said that reading was for learning. The school he attended instilled into his mind that he could not read well and certainly didn’t understand what he read. Therefore, Hunter believed he couldn’t understand what he was reading, and reading more would only help him read a little better. I took that notion to heart. I told Hunter that reading opened doors to other worlds and other subjects. He reads to learn, and we will read to learn more together. After spending time with Hunter, I noticed he needed a specific place, time, and atmosphere conducive to reading. After explaining the need for consistency and relaxation while reading, Hunter chose a location to sit and read. After a few weeks of engaging his imagination, listening to an audio version of his text while reading, and fully engaging with the story, his reading comprehension increased and he is enjoying the stories assigned to him.

I attended Dr. Garrett’s ENG 1102 class, and made thorough notations about how she conducted the class, the students’ responses to her questions, and how she used a brochure for the students to implement their learning of the use of public writing. Dr. Garrett’s public writing class is a simplified version of the master’s level class, Topics in Rhetoric ENC 5333. Her reuse of the curriculum through ENC 1101 and 1102 benefits the student with familiarity with communicating with the public. The examples of public writing, building artifacts for an ePortfolio, and new vocabulary written on large popsicle sticks, shown with a raised hand, emphasize color and appeal. The student’s comfort in asking questions and her ease of commentary demonstrated her experience in teaching. Dr. Garrett allowed moments for reflection and writing about the new skills they’ve gained by working on their ePortfolio. She made teaching English Composition seem easy with her gestures ease of practical speech, and kindness toward the class. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who wrote *Education for Creative Living,* said concerning the relationship of teachers to their student’s learning process, that teachers are “to serve as thinking experts who guide students in their studies,” and that teachers are to “direct” students in the “creation of character,” who “leave the fact-finding to books and instead take a supporting role to the students’ learning experience” (Makiguchi 169). After spending time in Dr. Garrett’s 1102 class, I realized that she has a handle on what Makiguchi is encouraging teachers to evolve their philosophies to do and support students in their learning experience. Dr. Garrett’s engagement in ENC 5333 supports Mayer’s theory that the bridge between creative writing and composition is barred with “institutional and departmental structures” (Mayers 114). The alliance between the two would constitute a welcoming environment for composition students to engage with creative writers who “see themselves as writers and enjoy writing” and are “surrounded by like-minded peers.” Mayers suggests that composition students’ experiences differ because of the institutional differences in teaching the two writing methods. However, Dr. Garrett’s method of teaching rhetoric to the first-year composition student and on the master’s level shows great respect and freedom for the individual student and opens the floor for conversation about how each student feels about their writing. The student's ability to share personal feelings with the class and Dr. Garrett’s interest in how the class engages with the subject is a “persistent investment in romanticism” that only creative writing classes have, according to Mayer. By opening the conversation to engage openly with students, Dr. Garrett opens the door to assisting the students in finding their “true, individual, and unique selves beneath the layers of corruption heaped upon them by society” (Mayer 115). I believe Dr. Garrett engages students in this way so that they can find themselves as writers. This method can even benefit linear learners. By engaging students' imaginations, they are enabled to become comfortable with their individual writing processes. By merging the philosophies of creative writing, the alternative pedagogical method Montessori, and professional writing, my students will perform better in their reading and writing, improving/refining their performance in other academic ventures. My goal is to equip my students with creativity and professionalism. They will be able to communicate their qualifications, inspiring confidence in readers and audiences everywhere. With excellent language skills, they will be equipped for their future endeavors.

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