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Improving Student Learning: An English Teacher's Research, Planning, and Analysis Journey

Rachel Lantz
Bowling Green State University, rlantz@bgsu.edu

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Improving Student Learning: An English Teacher's Research, Planning, and Analysis Journey

Rachel Elizabeth Lantz
rlantz@bgsu.edu

A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English
with a specialization in
English Teaching

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Dr. Heather Jordan, First Reader
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

Table of Contents

Analytical Narrative	3
Revised Project 1:	
“Finding Commonality: Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication”	10
Revised Project 2:	
“Poetry Unit and Assignment Plan: A Desire for Freedom”	23
Revised Project 3:	
“Professional / Technical Writing Instruction at the Secondary Level: Preparing Students for Success in the Workplace”	31
Revised Project 4:	
“F.S. Fitzgerald’s <i>The Great Gatsby</i> and T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”: Finding Commonalities through a Marxist Lens”	50

Analytical Narrative

I crave education, and I want to be fed. Without educational sustenance, my soul would starve. Thus, after attending various professional development sessions and conferences that did not feed me, I began my journey to earn my Master of Arts degree in English. Through the program at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), I have been able to feed my insatiable need for education. More importantly, my need to be the best English teacher I can be for my students, so that they may succeed and learn to the best of their abilities, has been quenched, at least for now.

In addition to my love of education, I want to be a role model for my children and my students. As a student at the graduate level, I am in the trenches with them. I can be empathetic to their overloaded lives as I struggle with my own responsibilities. I can also share the tales of possibilities right along with the cautionary tales. Is the journey easy? No. Is it possible? Yes. Would it have been easier to pursue this degree without the responsibility of three kids, a full-time teaching position, and an English department to run? Definitely. However, I believe I have learned more because of these experiences, and that makes me a better English teacher.

Furthermore, advancing myself, by not remaining stagnant in my career, is also important to me. Earning a higher-level degree allows me to teach concurrent enrollment classes at the high school where I work. Next year, I am already slated to teach two college-level classes: Introduction to Fiction and Introduction to Shakespeare through Cardinal Stritch University. The BGSU graduate program also puts me in a position to eventually pursue a doctorate degree in the field of English. As I mature, I would love to end up at a university. However, this is a journey, and along the way, I am researching, planning, and analyzing all in an attempt to make my students, my co-workers, my mentees, and myself a successful learner and communicator.

To begin, the Master of Arts in English with a Specialization in English Teaching program has given me so many valuable ways to approach the teaching of English. Most notably, Dr. Cheryl Hoy's class Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing allowed me to find a love for grammar that I never had. After being taught grammar through rote-memorization and a plethora of worksheets, I grew to strongly dislike grammar all together-yes, I do see the irony. This affected my teaching of English through a natural avoidance of explicitly teaching grammar in my classes. All the avoidance changed when Dr. Hoy introduced me to Henry Noden's *Image Grammar: Teaching Grammar as Part of the Writing Process*. Being exposed to this text and Noden's theories provided me with a new instructional framework for teaching grammar in the context of writing. In turn, this gave me a new purpose in teaching my students to love grammar through Noden's techniques.

Another example of how BGSU's program has strengthened my means as an English teacher and educator is Ms. Kimberly Spallinger's willingness to lead an Independent Study: Advanced Writing course for me. Through this course, Ms. Spallinger had me complete a comparative genre analysis of a reputable English journal. In my analysis, I was able to strengthen my graduate level writing and really hone my academic writing skills. This also put me in a position to be able to write my own journal articles for publication. In this, I hope to take what I have learned at BGSU and apply those skills to inspire other educators to improve student learning.

Ultimately, BGSU has been a place of substantial growth for me in the areas of research, planning and analysis. This has naturally emerged as a theme for my portfolio. The four pieces that I selected signify a journey that I am on to improve student learning in whatever capacity I can. Perhaps it is through my own instruction planning as an English teacher. Maybe it is through

mentoring and instructional coaching for new teachers. It could even be through modeling research and analysis for my own students. Whatever it may be, my work at BGSU has afforded me this opportunity to improve student learning, which is the whole reason I am in the field of education.

The first of my four projects for my portfolio serves as my substantive research paper. The paper explores the ways in which the field of technical communication can achieve even more power and legitimacy. The research and analysis skills used in writing this paper pushed my capabilities as a researcher. The paper was on a topic I was extremely unfamiliar with. I had to complete authentic research, learn the history of a new field, and form my own opinions about the field of technical communication; it was an invaluable process that I shared with my own students. My second project serves as my teaching-based project, which is required for my specialization in English Teaching. This project is a unit plan that exhibits my ability to plan instruction aligned with standards to meet my objectives as a teacher. It also shows my belief in exposing students to multiple perspectives by having them study and create poems that focus on the human desire to be free both physically and mentally. My third project is a combination of both a substantial research and teaching-based project. In this project, I discuss how professional / technical writing can prepare students for success. However, I also created a unit plan to help teachers include this type of writing in their own classrooms. Finally, for my fourth project I chose a literary theory paper, since this is my niche-literature. However, I did not do as well on this paper, at least by my standards, but I revised it outside of class to improve my own abilities as a graduate writer. This is reflective of being in my first semester of graduate school. When I look back at this piece to where I am now, I see extensive growth. That is something I like to instill in my own English students. It isn't about the grade; it's about the growth.

In my first project, my final research paper, “Finding Commonality: Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication,” from Dr. Judith Edminster’s ENG 6470 course, I selected a topic that I knew little about, but understood the importance of it in many communication interactions. The research connected me to the *Technical Communication Journal* which was a new source for me-now I see it as invaluable. I also learned how a profession grows to be seen as legitimate and powerful, which has far reaching effects in many areas of my life-let alone applying these same ideas to the teaching profession. The first step in my growth, or revisions, for this project, and all projects, involved addressing the feedback of my instructors and my peers. This involved fleshing out ideas in more detail and making sure I didn’t leave my audience with too many unanswered questions. Lack of connections is something I wrestled with in the early part of my graduate studies. I was relying too heavily on quoted material from my sources. I wasn’t trusting my synthesis of the research I was completing. However, through feedback from Dr. Edminster and my ENG 6910 instructor, Dr. Heather Jordan, I have been able to further develop my ideas to make connections that I had once assumed my readers would make on their own. This has significantly helped me in my ability to teach students how to research yet come up with their own claims. It has also allowed me to be able to compose pieces suitable for publication. More importantly, I learned authentic research-something I can pass on to my own students whether it is at the secondary level or the post-secondary level.

For my second project, my Poetry Unit and Assignment Plan for Dr. Kim Coates’ ENG 6090 course was created as a potential unit for a poetry class being offered at my current teaching situation. Although I will not be teaching the course myself, as the English Department Chair, I wanted to provide an exemplar for my English department. They sometimes struggle

with lesson planning, and for my revisions, I wanted to reflect on the process of creating while expanding the lessons and improving clarity. In my revisions, my biggest undertaking was being explicit in my objectives. Both Dr. Coates and Dr. Jordan noted the need for work in this area. After clarifying my objectives, I noticed it was easier to tie my methods and philosophy together more thoroughly. Since my goals were not clear in the beginning, the sections that followed also lacked in clarity. This was a great lesson to learn. Although it seems like I should have known to be explicit in the beginning, sometimes the creator needs to take a step back in order to move forward more successfully. This growth has impacted my current teaching and planning for future teaching. In the classroom, I write student objectives on my board daily, and I always think back to Dr. Jordan's advice of making sure I include a verb and an object when constructing my objectives. It has to be measurable. I also use this knowledge in creating additional units as my English department is undertaking a review of our curriculum and making sure the standards align with the units of instruction.

For my third project, my final research project, "Professional / Technical Writing Instruction at the Secondary Level: Preparing Students for Success in the Workplace," from Dr. Gary Heba's class ENG 6460 course, I knew I wanted to combine my research and my unit planning; this was in lieu of a traditional seminar paper. In it, I discuss how professional / technical writing can prepare students for success. This was an idea that came to fruition from my work in Dr. Edminster's class. Through the coursework for both Dr. Heba's and her class, I developed a new-found respect for professional / technical communication. On reflection, I saw how little of that type of writing was included in the secondary classroom. I wanted to complete more research on how I could incorporate this genre of writing into my own classroom, but, I also wanted to create a unit plan to help teachers include this type of writing in their classrooms

too. Similar to my first project, the revisions I made focused on being more explicit in my connections so that my reader can follow my argument. Through these revisions and the persistence of Dr. Jordan, I learned to push myself. I learned to plan, to draft, to revise, to edit, and then do it all over again. Although I know this as the writing process, our daily lives often interrupt our intent to follow the process. My students often struggle with this in their homework-filled, sports-filled, clubs-filled, Snap Chat, Instagram, and Twitter-filled lives. The past two years of this graduate program emphasized the writing process importance all over again, and I have this experience to share with my students.

My fourth and final project, “F.S. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”: Finding Commonalities through a Marxist Lens,” for Dr. Erin Labbie’s ENG 6070 course is a literary theory paper, and since I love literature, and most of the courses I teach are literature based, I felt I needed to display a paper that I would ask my students to write. I wanted to grow as an English student and teacher in this area. For this piece, I chose two of my favorite pieces of literature. Ever since I was in high school, I have loved *The Great Gatsby*. Most of that love had to do with my English teacher. She had a way of seeing literature and helping her students see literature in new lights as well. I can see that I have developed my own critical lens in the creation of this paper, and that is really what I ask my students to do in their own literature courses. This paper wasn’t easy for me, but that is a good thing. Understanding struggle makes me more empathetic to my students’ struggles in their writing. From where I started in the beginning of my graduate studies, I made many leaps in this paper.

Overall, the four pieces in my portfolio represent my growth in research, planning, and analysis. Looking back over the two years I have been in this program, I have satiated my soul.

Every single class was worth my time away from my family and my students. Not only have I learned theories, philosophies, and methods to improve my teaching, I have also become a skilled writer for publication and a better teacher mentor. As my need for education is quenched, I can now reflect even further on my experiences in this program and apply them to my teaching context. I know I am improving student learning along the way.

Rachel Lantz

Dr. Judith Edminster

English 6470

14 December 2018

Finding Commonality: Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication

Introduction

“For a group to have its ideas and concerns viewed as legitimate—or worthy of attention and consideration—by others, the members of that group need to stand behind a common central idea and a shared agenda to advocate. It is a case of unity equals power” (St. Amant and Meloncon 268). Currently, technical communication lacks this shared agenda and unity and is drowning in a historical sea of theories and definitions. This accumulation of ideology calls into question the field’s power and legitimacy. Since the 1940s, the field has been trying to achieve some sense of professional status or power (Light 4). Without a common foundation, the field lacks the harmony that leads to authority and validity in society. This lack of power and legitimacy in the field of technical communication is linked to the indeterminacy of its definition and the unspecified role of authorship.

Defining Technical Communication

The various definitions by authors/scholars in the field create a lack of legitimacy and power in technical communication. In order to move forward, the authors of "The Future is the Past: Has Technical Communication Arrived as a Profession?" pose the question, “As we think about the future of technical communication and specifically its relationship to technology, why not look to what we’ve done for a very long time and what we do now, and embrace a stable vision of the profession as one in which we use tools to design effective communication products

for specific users?” (Pringle and Williams 369). There is no need to recreate the wheel. The field has a wide body of research and history to draw from. It is just a lack of commonality that is diminishing the power in the field. So, to begin, the question of what are the current, or past, definitions of technical communication that could help further the field?

The Bureau of Labor Statistics defines the technical communicators as “Technical writers, also called *technical communicators*, prepare instruction manuals, how-to guides, journal articles, and other supporting documents to communicate complex and technical information more easily. They also develop, gather, and disseminate technical information through an organization’s communications channels” (“Technical Writers”). Having this definition listed in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* is a step in the right direction. Even though some may see it as limiting, Henning and Bemer, authors of “Reconsidering Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication: A Case for Enlarging the Definition of Technical Communicator,” claim:

This articulation of what technical communicators are grants the field power in presenting a united front in the workplace and in explaining work responsibilities. It legitimizes the profession as a whole by giving technical communicators a way to measure themselves (against the definition) to show others (and themselves) the value of what they are accomplishing. A definition of the field also creates legitimacy by helping outsiders to understand and trust practitioners of technical communication. (Henning and Bemer 314)

Knowledge and understanding are the keys to all power and legitimacy. Without the ability to define what it is a group is or does, how does a person know it is something of value? Of need? This idea of status and worth is something that has dominated American life for years. In Israel Light’s article “Technical Communication and Professional Status,” he claims that “The

existence, intensity, and importance of the psychological and emotion-laden urge for social status cannot be brushed under the rug” (4). This “urge” is what technical communication possesses. The field wants to be defined, wants to be included, and wants to have power, and a definition is just the beginning of this process.

This idea of defining also goes back to the time of Aristotle who “...suggests, defining a term to get at its essential meaning and using the result can be a good way to provide reasoning on a point at issue (Honeycutt, 2011). This line of reasoning also brings power and legitimacy to the term being defined” (Henning and Bemer 315). There are sources, both present and past, that support that a common definition brings power to a field, or whatever it may be that is being defined. However, this doesn’t suggest that the definition remains fixed.

Even with the Bureau of Labor Statics’ aforementioned definition, Henning and Bemer suggest a revised version: “Technical writers, also called technical communicators, produce documents in a variety of media to communicate complex and technical information. They employ theories and conventions of communication to develop, gather, and disseminate technical usable information among specific audiences such as customers, designers, and manufacturers” (Henning and Bemer 328). This update is warranted due to the developments in diverse media. Again, having a common definition does not mean the definition becomes stagnant. There should be an agreed upon definition to limit confusion and lack of purpose and to develop power and legitimacy. However, when the needs of society, in the field being defined, change, the definition must also change with those needs. This evolution is what prevents the definition from becoming extremely limiting and diminishing to the power and legitimacy created by having a common definition.

In “History, Rhetoric, and Humanism: Toward a More Comprehensive Definition of Technical Communication,” Russell Rutter discusses the fact that “Current theories of technical communication are the products of chance and misunderstanding, certainly, but they have resulted also from nineteenth-century responses to explosive growth in demand for technical writing courses” (Rutter 140). In fact, current experts in the field should not condemn those who came before them. As the field of technical communication is further defined, Rutter’s claim is still relevant. Instead of the explosive demand for courses that were seen in the 19th century, there is a current explosion of digital mediums in which to communicate. As the need for technical communication increases and the technology, in which people can communicate, advances, there is room for even further development of the definition of technical communication and the role of technical communicators.

Establishing a Role (or New Roles) for Authorship

Technical communicators have various roles they fulfill as authors of technical communication. In “History, Rhetoric, and Humanism: Toward a More Comprehensive Definition of Technical Communication,” Rutter discusses this role: “If technical communicators actively create versions of reality instead of serving merely as windows through which reality in all of its pre-existent configurations may be seen, then technical communication must be fundamentally rhetorical: it builds a case that reality is one way and not some other” (Rutter 144). Essentially, Rutter is discussing what technical communicators do as rhetors. Technical communicators have the role of communicating reality. This is a quite powerful claim. They function as communicators of information. With this defined role, Rutter claims that since “technical communication is essentially rhetorical, then the very definition of the discipline must

undergo change” (144). This further establishes the need for a common definition to both the role of the technical communicator and technical communication itself.

In “Reconsidering Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication: A Case for Enlarging the Definition of Technical Communicator” by Henning and Bemer, they claim, “When a technical communicator has the ability to do, the strength to be influential in a particular context, and the capacity to direct, he or she is able to occupy a genuine status and have legitimacy” (316-317). This has merit in almost any field. As a teacher, I know that I have the most power when I am able to influence students and increase their learning. I gain genuine status among multiple stakeholders: students, parents, faculty, and administration when this occurs. This is similar to the role of technical communicators. When they are able to influence their clients, companies, and society at large, that is when their status, power, and legitimacy grows. So, how can the role of the technical communicator be clearly defined?

According to a study by Pringle and Williams, in their work “The Future is the Past: Has Technical Communication Arrived as a Profession?” there are four ideas that were central to the participants:

1. Technical communicators will continue to subordinate technology to information design skills.
2. Technical communicators will continue to practice and teach information design skills.
3. Technical communicators will continue to be heavy users of technology.
4. Technical communicators will participate more frequently in the development cycles of technology. (Pringle and Williams 368-369)

Pringle and Williams concluded that “...the values of this limited sample positioned technical communication squarely in the camp of “communication,” demonstrating a concern for

audience, for writing, for communicating, and for designing information with little regard for technology, or the “technical” aspect of the field” (364-365). Those who were a part of the study “represented a wide range of job titles, suggesting that many organizations still don’t recognize technical communication as a field, even though all of the participants identified themselves as technical communicators” (Pringle and Williams 364). This supports the idea that technical communicators need a defined role. Defining the role and defining the authorship will raise the status and legitimacy of these technical communicators within their organizations.

This does not necessarily mean increasing the skills of the communicators as some may argue. Henning and Bemer state that “While arguments that technical communicators expand their skill set can be a way of gaining power through increasing abilities, such arguments can undermine the field’s legitimacy as it may not be possible to contain an ever-expanding skill set in a manner that is “conformable to rule or law” (“Legitimate,” 1991)” (Henning and Bemer 320). The old adage of “bigger isn’t always better” seems to apply here. If there is a common role for technical communicators that includes an expanded skill set that is not sustainable by the majority of the communicators, then the commonly defined role will actually detract from the status, power, and legitimacy of the field. For example, as a teacher, I see this in my own field. The teacher’s role has become wide and deep. Personally, it is overwhelming. Teachers are counselors, caregivers, educators, cooks, parents, friends, nurses, tutors, technology staff, etc. The list goes on and on. Although teachers are not considered experts that were trained in those areas, they have a sound pedagogy in the field of teaching. As such, teachers are able to apply that knowledge to other needed areas. This is especially true in a society filled with new technology, which seems to be thrown into the classroom and into the hands of the students. Although teachers may not be adept in the use of this new technology, they can still perform in

their role. They can still communicate. This is a good analogy for the role of technical communicators. There is no way for a technical communicator to know every aspect of the technical field, especially as new technologies develop and new disciplines are created. However, using their sound understanding of rhetoric, specifically the rhetorical situation. Rutter also speaks of the ability of the technical communicator to adapt to the situation. He states that “Of course, all of us have known technical communicators who can write well, edit effectively, take pictures, design gages, and do some of their own graphics, technical communicators who are in addition wise enough to work effectively within their organizations without being swallowed up by them” (Rutter 148). With power and legitimacy, the technical communicator can prevent “being swallowed up” in their companies or organizations. And they can maintain a higher status. In “Technical Writing and Professional Status,” Light claims:

The search of the technical writer for professional standing and status has been examined from a number of points of view...It appears that “profession” and “professional person” are ill-defined. Even as variously stated the current descriptions and definitions of “profession” seem increasingly outdated and meaningless. . .The one major characteristic of the professional person to which technical writers can profitably address themselves is that of specialized, academic education and training. The important elements of such training must be more clearly identified, the particular skills defined, and institutions encouraged to provide the basic competencies agreed upon. (9)

Such elements will ensure that the technical communicators are well-trained and educated in their specialization in a way that sets them up for continued success in their ever-changing profession.

In addition, it is important for technical communicators to be able to define their role. How else could they advocate for themselves, create contracts, or provide expectations when their role is not designed? In the article, “The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, Authority,” the authors claim, “It is impossible for technical communicators to take full responsibility for their work until they understand their role” and “...it is impossible to recognize the real power of technical discourse without understanding its role in the articulation and rearticulation of meaning and power” which would “thus empower the discourse of technical communicators by recognizing their full authorial role” (Slack, Miller, and Doak 33). Not only does defining the field increase power and legitimacy, but this is furthered by creating a common understanding of the role of the author, the technical communicator, in the field.

Implications for the Field of Technical Communication

A common and clear definition for the field of technical communication and a clearly defined role for the technical communicator results in many positive implications for the field. In the article “Addressing the Incommensurable: A Research-Based Perspective for Considering Issues of Power and Legitimacy in the Field,” the authors claim that “It is through such commonality that a population can make its ideas and opinions resonate as credible—or as having value, weight, or credence—to both members of that group and to others outside of the group. In this way, commonality brings not only legitimacy but also power. By getting together behind a shared idea or concept, individuals can exercise change as a unit” (St. Amant and Meloncon 268). Again, there are multiple examples of this in the history of society. When there is a common idea, or definition and role, it is easier to support. When there are multiple theories, definitions, and roles there will be fewer people supporting each one rather than all of them behind the one idea. According to “Shaping the Future of our Profession” by Marjorie Davis,

part of this new definition and role, can be “Standards for academic programs” in technical communications, and “Standards for those who practice” as technical communicators (143). Davis compares this to the likes of the board certification that medical professionals receive. Having standards in definitions, roles, and criteria will bring power and legitimacy to the field.

Another aspect that could help with building standards, definitions, and roles would be a professional society. The field currently has only one known society: Society for Technical Communication. There is an offshoot society for educators: Association for Teaching Technical Writing. These two societies are a positive; however, the field should focus on continuing to strengthen membership developing additional professional societies. Davis states, “Professional societies also play a significant role, in addition to academics. In professions such as medicine and engineering, professional societies are responsible for setting standards and establishing minimum qualifications for practice” (143). This could occur similarly in the field of technical communication. “Once a professional body agrees on knowledge, standards, and evaluation methods, then creating and administering an examination should be (comparatively) simple. Working toward a set of standards for accrediting academic programs, therefore, is the first step” (Davis 144). Although Davis suggests that the first step be in standards for academic programs, I support the professional society creating a common definition and role for technical communication as their first step.

Hopes for the Field of Technical Communication

My hope is also “as Marj Davis hopes, we have finally arrived at a point in the field where we can articulate a set of professional attitudes and practices that will help guide us toward the sense of group identity required for recognition as an authentic “profession.”” (Pringle and Williams 362). This does not invalidate the work that has been completed in the

field. For example, Nancy Coppola completed a huge undertaking in “Body of Knowledge Initiative: An Academic-Practitioner Partnership” which “laid the groundwork for a body of knowledge that has the potential to establish technical communication as a true profession” (Coppola 11). Although Coppola makes many strides and helps compile many aspects of technical communication. Even she states, “there is much more to be done” (Coppola 23).

Thus, a unified identity, definition, and role is still the hope. Power and legitimacy is still the hope. Rude supports this in her work “Building Identity and Community Through Research,” she claims that “The development of infrastructure (associations, journals, programs, textbooks, book series) and its consequence in disciplinary identity seem to have stabilized for now in the sense that it no longer is our overriding goal. However, the work is never done and is always part of how a field defines itself” (Rude 368). She goes on to say how important it is to have “A sense of community and a practice of collaboration” and that this has “always been a part of what makes technical communication appealing as a field, and those values continue to define it” (378). Rude believes that “the field’s future success will depend in part on defining for itself and for external audiences how its research contributes in significant ways to understanding of texts as they shape the world and to improving practice. Our strengths are greater than the recognition of them” (Rude 378). And, finally, I would like to highlight her thoughts that “In terms of using our research as a means of building community, identity, and recognition, part of our task is to define explicitly how the parts of our research connect to form a whole that helps to identify technical communication” (Rude 373). The importance of this statement solidifies the purpose for this paper. There has already been a tremendous amount of work in the field of technical communication. The foundation has been laid over many years of dedicated work. Now, it is

time to unify that research and make connections to create even more power and legitimacy in the technical communication field.

Beelitz and Merkl-Davies echo this in “Using Discourse to Restore Organizational Legitimacy: 'CEO-Speak' After an Incident in a German Nuclear Power Plant” when they state that:

Organizational legitimacy refers to “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995, p. 574). Legitimacy is considered vital for an organization’s survival, as it attracts resources and the continued support from its constituents (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990). (Beelitz and Merkl-Davies 101)

Just as legitimacy is paramount to an organization’s successful existence, technical communication also needs legitimacy to maintain and grow in its power as a professional field.

Conclusion:

The field of Technical Communication can achieve more power and legitimacy in society. By clearly defining the field and determining the role of the technical communicator, higher status and power will be achieved. The research from the past and the present support this claim. Whether it is the height of the 19th century and the need for technical writing courses or the explosion of the multiple digital modes through which communication is possible, technical communication, as a field, is a valid professional community. By making connections among research, building commonality in its definition, and specifying a role in authorship, the field will take its place of greater standing in society.

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Rachel Lantz

Dr. Kim Coates

Eng. 6090

9 March 2018

Poetry Unit and Assignment Plan: A Desire for Freedom

Statement of Learning/Performance Objectives

Through the course of this unit, students will be exposed to poems that focus on the human desire to be free both physically and mentally. Students will respond, interpret, and analyze poetry techniques. Students will also explore the basic elements of poetry such as Imagery, Sound, Rhythm and Meter, Diction, Figurative Language, Meaning, Tone, Speaker, and Form. Students will then explore what may be imprisoning them in their own lives in relation to the speakers of the poems. They will reflect on those thoughts through writing.

Students who regularly attend class, do the reading, take notes, participate regularly in class discussions, and complete all formative and summative assessments can expect to acquire the following essential skills and outcomes:

- Students will be able to actively read poetry that is ambiguous and complex from multiple viewpoints.
- Students will be able to respond to questions that ask them to reflect on the poetry they read.
- Students will be able to demonstrate a wide range of strategies for understanding texts.
- Students will be able to communicate their ideas about poetry to a larger audience.
- Students will be able to apply the vocabulary of literary studies to the genre of poetry.
- Students will be able to plan and produce writing in the genre of poetry using precise words and phrases and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the speaker's experiences and emotions.

Narrative Description of Methods

All activities in the classroom will support the goals and learning outcomes of the unit. Students will present collaborative mini-lessons on each of the following poetic techniques: Imagery, Sound, Rhythm, Meter, Diction, Figurative Language, Meaning, Tone, Speaker, and Form. An initial reading of each poem will be completed by the students prior to class. A second reading of each poem will take place in the classroom (either by the instructor, the students, or a recording), but this time there will be a focus. Students may be asked to look for a shift in point of view or to identify tone based on diction (the focus will correlate to the mini-lessons and/or weekly reflection questions). These second readings, with a specific focus, will promote active reading. Discussion will also be a large part of the classroom culture. Students will discuss in pairs, small groups, and large groups. Discussion will also take place through online discussion posts. Using these multiple forms of discussion allow all personality types to participate. Writing goals will be achieved through instructor modeling and the use of prior student exemplars. Students will write reflections, poem explications, and original poems. For major writing assignments, teacher-student conferencing, peer-peer review, and self-assessment will be used.

Methods/Teaching Philosophy Analysis

The course culminates in a portfolio project, either printed or digital, where students write original poems and reflections that focus on the human desire for freedom. Throughout the preceding weeks, students will have access to and find poems with diverse points of view from different time periods and cultural viewpoints that face this same topic of freedom. This ties to my belief that students need to have a global perspective, certainly in respect to our current global society. During the weeks leading up to their project, students will also reflect in written

papers and in online discussions; this will prepare the students to write a cohesive portfolio with reflections.

Learning is a journey in which, as a teacher, I need to use a variety of formative assessments to prepare my students for their summative assessment. Students will also be given mini-lessons on specific poetry skills that the students will collaborate on and present to their classmates. This gives students multiple opportunities to learn. This puts the learning in the students' hands as creators of the content with the instructor as the guide. To me, the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator or a mentor, and I do not want to be seen as the "sage on the stage" or the keeper of the knowledge. Students need to be prepared to find their own knowledge especially in a time where knowledge is so readily accessible. To do this, students will be asked to articulate their own beliefs about freedom by researching multiple perspectives. Students will also be asked to reflect on what they have read, trusting their own interpretations, and present their views to their peers. Additionally, students are to analyze their own "masks" which asks them to think about what keeps them from experiencing true freedom. Ultimately, they are answering the questions: What is freedom? What freedom do you desire? and What holds you back from freedom? Then, they will create their own poetry that expresses their answers to these questions. As their teacher, in the role of a facilitator, I will begin to provide opportunities for feedback through individual conferencing to allow multiple points of contact for the students. Conferencing with students face-to-face makes sure no one slips by me as an instructor. In these conferences, my primary object is to listen to the students as they reflect on their work and ask questions to push them in their thinking. I want to make sure all my students have an opportunity to succeed regardless of their comfort level in speaking in a large group setting.

Finally, students will present and defend a selection from their portfolio so that the whole class can see diverse viewpoints in poetry around the same topic, which further supports my view that global and multiple perspectives are important in educating students. Throughout all of these processes, students will be provided with visual, auditory, verbal, social, and kinesthetic opportunities to acquire knowledge, supporting my beliefs that students have multiple learning styles and all students can learn best when I can hit the multiple styles. For example, students will watch videos about freedom, listen to poetry being read, recite poetry themselves, work with partners, small groups, and large groups to discuss poetry, and use manipulatives to work on building lines of poetry.

Assessments

Students will write a **weekly reflection** that is at least 1 page in length. The student reflections will be a response to a guiding question related to the ideas of physical and mental freedom (posed by the instructor). Students will also respond to a **weekly online discussion post** that is focused on a specific poem (or poems) from the readings for that week. Students will post an initial comment of 250 words or more and respond to at least two peers with 50 words or more. In a collaborative nature, students will present **mini-lessons** to the class that teach a poetic element. This connects to being able to present ideas to a larger audience and applying the vocabulary of literary studies to the genre of poetry. In the third week, students will write a **poetry explication** (1250 words or more) of a poem of their choosing that is related to the idea of the human desire for freedom. This assessment exhibits the student's ability to comprehend, evaluate, interpret, and analyze diverse poems. Finally, the students will submit a **poetry portfolio** of five original poems based on their own need for freedom both physically and mentally. Each poem will be accompanied by a narrative reflection. This culminating project

connects to the learning outcome of writing in the genre of poetry using precise words and phrases and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the speaker's experiences and emotions. This project can be completed through documents or video. Weekly reflections are worth 20% of the grade; online discussions are also worth 20% of the grade. The poetry explication and the poetry portfolio will **each** be worth 25% of the grade. The collaborative mini-lessons will be worth 10% of the grade.

Reflection

Planning this unit really forced me to think about my students in relation to my own beliefs about teaching. I have to create a marriage between my preferred method of learning, which is primarily visual, to the multiple methods my students will prefer in the classroom. This unit also made me think about the skills that are necessary for my students to be successful in their study of literature. This is why I included learning outcomes that hit reading, writing, language, and speaking and listening. Within these subsections of studying English, students will interpret, analyze, and create which hits those higher-level thinking skills.

Over time, as a teacher, my ideas about curriculum planning have evolved from a new teacher who needed to plan daily lessons to make up a unit, to a more experienced teacher who needs to update and evolve existing units to include fresh and relatable lessons for today's students.

I hope that readers can see that I designed this unit to be universal in the sense that it can connect to all students through the idea that people desire freedom, which could include freedom from the paralyzing effects that having freedom may bring someone. Through this desire for freedom, in whatever capacity, students will be exposed to diverse authors, time periods, and

cultural perspectives. This topic lends itself to global poetry from the past to the present, because the desire for freedom is something felt at any time by anyone.

Daily Syllabus

Begins on next page to preserve formatting.

Week One:

Online Discussion: Which person researched most closely aligns with your ideas of freedom? Or, if you were submitting an entry into the book *Dreams of Freedom: In Words and Pictures*, what would your entry be?

Written Reflection: What “dreams of freedom” stood out to you most from the reading?

Readings:

Dreams of Freedom: In Words and Pictures

Research:

Mikhail Bakunin

Aung San Suu Kyi

Armando Valladares

Ali Ferzat

Chief Standing Bear of the Ponca Tribe

The Dalia Lama

Clare Balding

Nadia Anjuman

Anne Frank

Viewings:

[Freedom Rising TEDTalk](#)

Week Two:

Online Discussion: In William Wordsworth’s poem, what is the basic metaphor? What allusion is made? What is the irony of Lord Byron’s poem (hint-you may need to do a little research)? What are two very clear theme that arise in Henry Van Dyke’s poem?

Written Reflection: Using the poems from this week’s readings, discuss how the poetry of liberty has evolved across the centuries.

Readings:

Paradise Lost (excerpt) John Milton

The Conquest of Granada (excerpt) John Dryden

“A Little Boy Lost” William Blake

“It is not to be thought of...” William Wordsworth

“Impromptu” Lord Byron

“An American in Europe” Henry Van Dyke

Week Three:

Online Discussion: What mask do you wear? What mask does society wear? If we must die, how should we die?

Written Reflection: In this week’s readings, what are the different types of freedoms that humans desire?

Readings:

“Of Old Sat Freedom on the Heights” Alfred Lord Tennyson

“Freedom’s Plow” Langston Hughes

“The Four Ages of Man” Anne Bradstreet

“Bury Me in a Free Land” Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

“If We Must Die” Claude McKay

“We Wear the Mask” Paul Lawrence Dunbar

Essay Assignment: Poetry Explication due Friday

Week Four:

Instructor-Student Conferences on Final Project

Final Project: Poetry Portfolio

Present and Defend: Present one poem from your portfolio to the class and be ready for questions on form, theme, etc.

Rachel Lantz

Dr. Gary Heba

ENG 6460: Professional/Technical Communication and Rhetorical Theory

14 December 2018

Professional / Technical Writing Instruction at the Secondary Level:

Preparing Students for Success in the Workplace

Introduction

When contemplating the future, Shoshana Zuboff claims that “[t]he choices that we face concern the conception and distribution of knowledge in the workplace” (5). Many years later, this thought is still applicable. In order to make the best choices, professionals need to be able to communicate effectively. It is through professional/technical writing that conceptions and knowledge are transferred. Why, then, do educational institutions wait so long to instruct future professionals in this type of writing? There isn’t a clear reason. Logically, this aspect of writing instruction needs to change. Especially when, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment of technical writers is projected to grow 11 percent from 2016 to 2026, faster than the average for all occupations” (“Technical Writers”). Therefore, while professional/technical writing is often taught at the college level, English teachers at the secondary level should instruct students in professional/technical writing through multimodal methods in order to facilitate future, and successful, communication in society. My goal in this essay is to provide educators with a background on and an argument for the inclusion of professional / technical writing in the secondary classroom. Additionally, I will provide strategies for teaching professional / technical writing followed by a teaching unit that secondary teachers can implement with relative ease.

Background

To begin, the first chance a student has to acquire professional / technical writing skills is typically at the college level. This could be two-year or four-year institutions. Even so, Elizabeth Tabeaux, in her article “Whatever Happened to Technical Writing,” claims that the state of technical writing is “about where we were 40 years ago with one significant difference. Basic literacy of new college students continues to decline more and more rapidly” (18). Obviously, this is not positive news, because it means that there is a need for more foundational skills to be taught at the same time instructors are trying to introduce professional / technical writing. This is just the beginning of a multitude of problems that plague the teaching of professional / technical writing purely at the college level. In Kim Campbell’s article “Flipping to Teach the Conceptual Foundations of Successful Workplace Writing,” Campbell discusses how “conceptual knowledge about business and professional writing is assumed, especially in our performance feedback, but not often explicitly taught. Because those concepts are unclear to students, our feedback is often unclear and unusable” (58). Explicitly teaching this knowledge prior to the college level could increase clarity, understanding, and student learning. Additionally, Campbell claims that “the amount of knowledge (both conceptual and procedural) required to develop into a competent apprentice writer is too vast to talk about comprehensively in a single college course” (58). Exposure to this material, at the secondary level, can aid students in the progress they make towards a proficient “apprentice” writer.

In addition to the lack of progress in the teaching of professional / technical writing, there is a lack of inclusion of professional / technical writing at the secondary level. With the adoption of Common Core State Standards in 41 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity” (English Language Arts Standards), nationally, there

is a heavy focus on argumentative, informative, and narrative writing, as those are the genres mentioned in the standards. For teachers, who feel pressure from their administration to meet the state standards, there is little time left to focus on other types of writing. However, careful analysis of the Common Core State Standards will glean that students should “Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences” (English Language Arts Standards). This leaves room for instruction in professional / technical writing. Teachers can justify teaching professional / technical writing to their administration. It does support the standards in their curriculum.

Argument for Change

By moving the instruction of professional/technical writing down to the secondary classroom, students get a jump start at becoming contributing members of society. According to author Bernadette Longo, Robert Thurston, the 1881 president of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, believed technical education should be taught to “all children” (91). Thurston believed that this would ensure “preparation for all the duties coming to the learner” (91). However, during his time, Thurston ensured this through standardization. Now, having traditional textbooks and curriculum is an outdated practice, meaning that teachers pull many resources from sources available on the internet. Yet, the need for instruction in technical writing is still great, because professional/technical writing is at the crux of society. This means that in order to be successful, society needs to be able to communicate effectively. This is accomplished through many forms of professional/technical writing, and thus, all students leaving the secondary classroom will benefit by this instruction, even those pursuing a non-academic trajectory.

Furthermore, teaching professional/technical writing in the secondary classroom provides real-world applications and authentic audiences for students. Authors Jonathan Bush and Leah Zuidema discuss student apathy for most writing assignments. They say, “Students rightly question the relevance of rote exercises that require them to follow forms and formulas without thinking about who they are writing to, or why, or in what capacity” (“Professional Writing: What You Already Know” 119). Rather than give students these formulaic assignments, teaching professional/technical writing can give meaning to student work. These new assignments could be shared beyond the classroom in the fields of interest to the students, providing community collaboration. A natural by-product of this type of writing is a specific audience, and this type of audience has long been a best practice in writing instruction.

Beyond authentic audiences, many employers are seeking employees with skills in communication-especially workplace communication. Tabeaux cites J. P. Morgan as rating “business and technical writing skills at the top of the list of required competencies needed to apply for a permanent position” (“What Ever Happened to Technical Writing” 9). These skills differ from academic communication. The typical English course would not include topics in “workplace issues, rhetoric, and style” which are needed in professional writing. In “How Professional Writing Pedagogy and University-Workplace Partnerships can Shape the Mentoring of Workplace Writing,” Liberty Kohn urges educators to think about “students who become employees [that] are caught between varying systems of knowledge construction and socialization of writing practices when shifting from school to the workplace” (168). This is the reason these types of experiences, at an earlier age and grade, are so important. To support these experiences, Clarice S. C. Chan gives her audience a closer look at two Business English classrooms. In her findings, she says, “learners perceived their learning from transcripts to be

useful and interesting, mainly because the transcripts were considered real and related to either their present or future business communication needs” (86). When students see a connection to their lives outside the classroom, they see a usefulness and a connection. Educators should want to offer that in their classrooms.

Some critics may question the secondary English teacher’s capacity or credibility to provide instruction in the professional / technical field. However, English teachers are faced with very difficult texts. For example, English teachers tackle such works as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, and Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum*, which have left even those with doctorates of English mystified. These works may rival any professional/technical piece placed before them, which supports their ability to teach professional/technical writing. English teachers often get an unfair assessment in the area of professional/technical writing. Their abilities to teach writing that is often connected to the fields of engineering, science, technology, and math are often questioned. The concentration on literature and expository writing in the current English classroom seems limiting to some experts in the professional / technical field. However, in his article “Why English Teachers Should Teach Technical Writing,” Keith Hull disagrees. He states:

Best of all, for my purpose here, a course taught by my definition is best taught by English teachers who can learn about technical writing from their studies by carefully observing innumerable examples of these principles at work. Furthermore, contrary to the popular belief as I often hear it, the English major trains not creative writers but literary critics whose written work is patterned on the characteristics I list above. English teachers are trained as technical writing teachers and trained to a degree that no scientific, technical, or professional program can match because such programs lack both the

heightened awareness of rhetorical principles and the emphasis on good writing that is implicit in the English major. (883)

For one, English teachers are trained in writing instruction. No other field is taught in this area. This gives English teachers an advantage, and this advantage places English teachers in the perfect position to introduce secondary students to professional / technical writing.

English teachers are faced with very difficult composition. This is in contrast to other disciplines. Hull states, that “[f]ew scientists, engineers, or other technically trained persons face such difficult composition problems while fewer still could meet the challenge with linguistic, rhetorical, and intellectual acumen” (880). Due to their training in linguistic, rhetoric, and sheer intellect, English teachers are better equipped to handle high-level texts and writing that is required for the technical fields. Because of this, and their training in writing instruction, English teachers should teach professional/technical writing in the secondary classroom.

Not only are English teachers instructing in difficult compositions, but they also continuously create professional / technical writing in their professional roles. They must create curriculum, unit plans, and lesson plans. Some teachers also write for publications and conferences. Additionally, there are daily emails and yearly goals and observation forms. This doesn't even take into consideration the countless models and exemplars they create for their students. For example, a teacher might complete a genre analysis with the students as a way to familiarize them the genre of technical writing. Through this type of analysis, they learn and teach the patterns that are present in technical communication.

However, it is acknowledged that there is still doubt or opposition to English teachers as instructors of professional / technical writing. Yet, this can be remedied, as discussed in Kristine E. Pytash's article “Secondary Preservice Teachers' Development of Teaching Scientific

Writing.” Pytash put five pre-service teachers through a unit of study in relation to scientific writing. After the unit of study, the pre-service teachers gained specific instructional strategies for teaching science genres, gained a greater appreciation for science learning, and understood the skills needed to tackle scientific writing (Pytash). Any administration, having doubts to the capabilities of English teacher, could have their teachers complete a similar unit of study to demonstrate their skills.

Strategies for Teaching Professional / Technical Writing in the Secondary Classroom

In regard to “how” secondary English teachers can incorporate this into their classrooms, there are a few main entry points. To start, in her article “Sophists or SMEs? Teaching Rhetoric Across the Curriculum in the Professional and Technical Writing Classroom,” the author, Cristy Beemer, discusses the importance of teaching rhetoric in order to improve professional/technical writing. In doing so, the author feels that there is a clearer “sense of content” (211) which improves the students’ writing and relevance due to the diverse backgrounds in these entry-level courses. In today’s secondary English classroom, there are also “diverse backgrounds” that require multi-reaching techniques. Rhetoric is a topic that applies to all types of writing and content areas. Thus, the students can transfer these skills to the content area in which they eventually end up in later on in college.

An additional “how” technique is outlined by Bush and Zuidema in their article “Professional Writing in the English Classroom: Designing a High School or Middle School Course (or Unit) in Professional Writing” which provides practical lesson ideas for the English classroom. Basically, there are three steps: Identify Essential Questions, Design Learning Activities and Assessments, and Continuing the Conversation about Professional Writing. The essential questions are just the “big ideas in professional writing” (95). The activities include

both big and small assignments to provide “opportunities for students to practice a variety of skills” (96). Finally, what the authors mean by “continuing the conversation” is to collaborate and “add your voice to the conversation by sharing what you are learning about teaching professional writing” (97). These are definitely three strategies that can be easily implemented in the English classroom without a major curriculum overhaul.

Similar to Bush and Zuidema, Bruce Robbins’ article “Weaving Workplace Writing into the English Classroom” disagrees with those who suggest that the English teacher replace or overhaul current curriculum. Instead, Robbins suggests “that rather than replace valuable content and learning experiences already in the curriculum with workplace training, we can instead draw on the functions of workplace of workplace documents to support the work we routinely do in the classroom and the school” (41). Moreover, if English teachers reflect on their current curriculum intentionally, they may find that they already include pieces of professional / technical writing. As an English teacher, I already have students create memos, emails, research papers, and presentations. I could easily incorporate fact sheets, needs assessment reports, proposals, Wikis, and Google Sites. Simple tweaks can provide more intentional instruction in the field.

In any case, Robbins goes on to offer classroom strategies such as memoranda, reports, letters, resumes, and applications. Writing memos “are a natural way for students to inform teachers about their progress on lengthy tasks like reading novels, writing research papers, and developing projects” (Robbins 42). As best practices in education continue to shift from direct instruction practices in favor of student led and project-based classrooms, memoranda and status or progress reports have an important part in keeping the teacher informed and holding the students accountable. Formal proposals and final reports are perfect pieces of professional /

technical writing for keeping track of self-selected projects. All the while, “Teaching workplace writing can be a means of achieving many common composition curriculum goals such as clarity, conciseness, organization, and careful proofreading” (Robbins 44). These are goals that many teachers have in their classrooms. Professional / technical writing can achieve these goals set students up for success later on in life.

For a more specific strategy, Sarah Gunning’s article “Designing and Testing Multimodal Instruction Sets: Writing for Real-Life Users” focuses in on Instructional Sets. In this model, Gunning discusses how “Instruction sets and usability testing are fun, yet difficult, to create. The writer learns how to help users complete an action. The writer also learns valuable methods of critiquing another student’s writing and information display strategies” (68). The students create instructional sets that their peers can follow. During the testing of these instructional sets, peers can provide feedback to the writers on their strengths and weaknesses in their communication. Along with these skills, this type of assignment will typically attract students, because there are so many topics that it applies to: “machinery, software, or crafting” (68). Instructional Sets are great for increasing engagement in the classroom. With student choice comes student empowerment and ownership. This has been shown to increase learning, which is the whole point in education.

Conclusion

By moving the instruction of professional/technical writing down to the secondary classroom, students get a jump start at becoming contributing members of society. They build their capacity to communicate clearly, accurately, and logically. Why should this type of writing be kept until college? The answer is clearly: it shouldn’t be. Not only are English teachers qualified to teach professional/technical writing through their knowledge of writing strategies

and rhetoric, but also because their intellect in this area goes far beyond those in the technical fields. Furthermore, writing instruction in the classroom should focus on real-world applications and authentic audiences. Professional/technical writing assures this engagement through the ability to focus on student passions in multiple areas. This could be transformative in the area of writing for reaching former reluctant writers with diverse backgrounds. Providing professional/technical writing for all learners should be a goal in both the field of education and the field of professional/technical writing. Moving the teaching of this writing to the secondary level rather than college will prepare students for their fields and help encourage and facilitate a prosperous society.

Proposed Teaching Unit

To ease secondary teachers into the integration of professional / technical writing, a sample unit follows. In this unit, students will be able to define professional / technical writing. After defining, students will analyze various examples of professional / technical writing. Next, students will practice writing in professional / technical genres. Finally, the unit ends in students applying principles for visual design and usability.

Sample Teaching Unit for Professional / Technical Writing in the Secondary Classroom

Unit: An Introduction to Professional / Technical Writing

Rationale:

This unit is designed to introduce the secondary student to elements of technical writing. The lessons provide students with a foundation to the field. Yet, they are still introduced to foundational works like Mike Markel's book *Technical Communication*. Students are also presented with choice in selecting their areas of interest. The hope is to foster student engagement.

Grade level: 9-12

Supporting Theory/Theorist (citation, is fine):

Bush, Jonathan, and Leah Zuidema. "Professional Writing in the English Classroom: Designing a High School or Middle School Course (or Unit) in Professional Writing." *The English Journal*, vol. 102, no. 6, 2013, pp. 94–97.

Markel, Mike. *Technical Communication*. Bedford/St. Martins, 2010, pp. 10-15.

Standards (Common Core State Standards):

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Lesson Plans

Materials and Technology Needed:

- Smartboard / Screen / or TV (for projection)
- Student iPads (or some computer)
- iMovie / Keynote / Wikis / Google Sites (or similar software)
- Exemplars of Technical Documents
- Assignment Descriptions
- Rubrics for Assessments

Student Objectives: Students will...

- understand and identify the differences between professional / technical writing and other genres they have been exposed to or studied
- analyze and write in genres common to professional / technical writing
- apply principals for visual design and usability
- work for others (clients) and with others (collaborators)
- consider the ethical implications of workplace writing decisions
- manage writing processes

Essential Questions:

- What is professional / technical writing?
- What strategies to professional / technical writers use in their work?
- What types of writing do people do in _____ profession? Why? How?
- How do technologies shape writing practices?
- How can writers use technologies well?
- When is professional / technical writing good and how do we know? Who decides?
- How are ethical perspectives related to professional / technical writing?

The number of class sessions needed: 10

Descriptions of Activities:

Class Sessions	Description of Activities
Class Session # 1: Defining Professional / Technical Writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers will introduce the topic of technical writing 2. Students will work in groups to find definitions of technical writing 3. Students will choose one definition, write it on a numbered piece of sticky chart paper, and stick on the wall 4. Students will complete a gallery walk, looking at the different numbered definitions chosen (the teacher will make sure no group choses the same one), and with a colored marker assigned to them write differences and similarities around the definition on the paper 5. As a whole group, the teacher will lead a discussion on what the student learned 6. Finally, students will be given an excerpt from Henning and Bemer’s Article called “Reconsidering Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication: A Case for Enlarging the Definition of Technical Communicator” in which they offer a definition: “Technical writers, also called technical communicators, produce documents in a variety of media to communicate complex and technical information. They employ theories and conventions of communication to develop, gather, and disseminate technical usable information among specific audiences such as customers, designers, and manufacturers.”

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Students will be asked to individually reflect on this definition in their class notebooks, putting the definition into their own words 8. The teacher will check for understanding and offer feedback
Class Session # 2: Analyzing Technical / Professional Writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher will model analysis of technical documents using Mike Markel’s “Measures of Excellence in Technical Communication” from his book <i>Technical Communication</i> 2. The teacher will select a model of choice and analyze honesty, clarity, accuracy, comprehensiveness, accessibility, conciseness, professional appearance, and correctness (Markel) 3. Next, the students practice analyzing a teacher selected technical document in small groups 4. The students use a graphic organizer with Markel’s 8 measures of excellence 5. Finally, the students will self-select their own technical document and analyze it individually with the teacher provided graphic organizer
Class Session # 3: Writing in Professional / Technical Genres (continued)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher will define the Fact Sheet 2. The teacher will show students models/ exemplars for a fact sheet 3. The teacher will present the idea of audience as a focus for this assignment 4. Students will then research a profession that is of great interest to them. More specifically, they will research the type of writing unique to that profession 5. Students will then present the findings in the form of a two-sided fact sheet 6. The fact sheet should be visually appealing and specific for the audience the teacher assigns or the students select (can be done either way) <p>Note: This assignment could have a more authentic connection if local businesses could serve as the audience.</p>
Class Sessions # 4-5: Writing in Professional / Technical Genres (continued)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher will define the Needs Assessment Report 2. The teacher will show students models/exemplars for the needs assessment report 3. The teacher will present the idea of purpose as a focus for this assignment

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Students will then research a potential client. (Using a local company as a potential client could be more engaging. Students could invite company leaders to their presentation for an authentic audience.) 5. Using a template provided by the teacher, students will then write a needs assessment report 6. Students will self-assess 7. Students will peer-assess
<p>Class Sessions # 6-8: Writing in Professional / Technical Genres (continued)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher will define the Proposal with Presentation expectations 2. The teacher will show students model proposals and provide a template 3. Based on their Needs Assessment Report, student will create a proposal to present to the teacher and class. (This could hopefully include the client in the audience.) 4. Students will submit their written proposal 5. Students will present their proposal using Keynote, iMovie, or another medium 6. Students will self-assess 7. Students will peer-assess
<p>Class Sessions # 9-10: Applying Principles for Visual Design and Usability (continued)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will create a Wiki or Goggle Site (Client Based Project) 2. First, students will be split into groups. The teacher will pick group leaders, and then the leaders will pick their groups 3. “This culminating project involves student teams building a relationship and working with a real-world client to solve some issue within the organization that involves written communication” (from “Professional Writing in the English Classroom: Designing a High School or Middle School Course (or Unit) in Professional Writing” by Bush and Zuidema) 4. Students will work together to fulfill the client’s communication need and display their progress through a Wiki project or Google Site 5. Students will self-assess 6. Students will peer assess

Describe this unit's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment:

- Formative
 - Reflection
 - Gallery Walk
 - Small Group Analysis
 - Self-Assessment
 - Peer-Assessment
- Summative
 - Self-Selected Technical Document Analysis
 - Fact Sheet
 - Needs Assessment Report
 - Proposal and Presentation
 - Wiki or Google Site

Tool(s) used for assessment:

- Teacher Rubrics
- Self-Assessments
- Peer-Assessments

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Rachel Lantz

Dr. Labbie

English 6070

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F.S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

Finding Commonalities through a Marxist Lens

In 1925, T.S. Eliot wrote a letter to F. S. Fitzgerald which stated, "When I have time I should like to write to you more fully and tell you exactly why [*The Great Gatsby*] seems to me such a remarkable book. In fact, it seems to me to be the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James..." (Eliot et al 813). It is sensible that Eliot would rave about Fitzgerald's novel, because ten years earlier he published his well-known poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" which has similar motifs regarding class roles. A close reading of both Fitzgerald's novel and Eliot's poem, with an application of Karl Marx's theory of class structure, reveals conflicts brought about by economics through multiple literary elements. Fitzgerald's novel highlights Marx's theory through setting, character, and plot, and Eliot's poem emphasizes the theory through setting, speaker, and subject, both illuminating the inevitability of the downfall of society.

To begin, the classes presented in Fitzgerald's novel should be examined. Fitzgerald sets up the class structure through physical location and character. The four main locations in the novel are West Egg, East Egg, New York City, and the Valley of the Ashes. The West Egg is described as "the less fashionable" (Fitzgerald 5). This is where the newly rich reside, including the title character Jay Gatsby. Further description could include gaudy, flashy, and over-the-top. On the other hand, the location of East Egg is described as having "white palaces" and being

“fashionable” (Fitzgerald 5). This is where those who have old money would live. Generations of family money would support long-lasting lifestyles of the arrogant rich like Tom and Daisy Buchanan. In contrast, New York City is a place where “[a]nything can happen” once the characters cross the “bridge” into the city (Fitzgerald 69). To contrast the endless opportunities of the city, Fitzgerald uses the setting of the Valley of the Ashes. This place is located “[a]bout half way between West Egg and New York” (Fitzgerald 23). This is where the narrator, Nick Carraway, meets Tom’s mistress, Myrtle. Tom describes this location as a “[t]errible place, isn’t it” (Fitzgerald 26). Fitzgerald uses words like “grotesque,” “desolate,” “dimly,” “crumbling,” and “ghastly” to contribute to a dark and foreboding tone. Some may think this is well-deserved as this is the home of the low class, the poor, George and Myrtle Wilson.

Overall, these places are all located in the East. However, in addition to these four main settings, the reader will pick up on the concept of the Midwest at the beginning and ending of the novel as a secondary setting. Although secondary, the Midwest is where Nick Carraway came from. In the beginning of the novel, the reader learns that this is where Nick grew up with his close-knit and hard-working family. It was there that he learned from his father “that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had” (1). There is a different class of people in the Midwest, one that is said to value things like family and hard work above possessions. However, Nick, like some of the others, became “restless” and bored with this lifestyle, and mistakenly, he decided to go East. After living in the East, Nick sees the differences in class, and he did not like what he saw. While at one of Gatsby’s parties, Nick uses words like “oppressiveness,” “unpleasantness,” “harshness,” and “sadness” (104) to describe what he sees when he is sober.

Towards the end of the novel, Nick even reminisces about his former Midwest, his “house in a city where dwellings are still called...by a family’s name,” the “street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark,” and “the thrilling returning trains of [his] youth” (Fitzgerald 176). This is what he longs for now that he has seen and experienced the different class of the East where money and possessions are valued over family, friendship and honesty. Pekarofski also characterizes the Midwest as “ethnically and culturally pure...which Nick is use to” (62). It is not only Nick, but also Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, and Jordan that are referred to as “Westerners” (Fitzgerald 176). None of them were very successful in the East. If they were, it was superficial success that did not last. This is important, because there is a relationship among location and class. The success, or the downfall, of a person can often times depend on location. As Fitzgerald writes, “perhaps [they] possessed some deficiency in common which made [them] subtly unadaptable to Eastern life” (Fitzgerald 176). This was due to the lower class trying to rise up and the upper class trying to maintain their status in a different location.

Equally important, examining the characters can lead the reader to see the effect of Fitzgerald’s class structure. Jay Gatsby is the archetypal rags to riches character; however, he was born to parents who “were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people” (Fitzgerald 98). As a child, Gatsby had imagined so many possibilities outside of his current class that he “had never really accepted them as his parents at all” (99). Because of this, Gatsby’s downfall should be evident from the beginning. In the “The Passing of Jay Gatsby: Class and Anti-Semitism in Fitzgerald’s 1920s America,” Michael Pekarofski claims that “It is clear that Jimmy Gatz’s disassociation from his parents represents a very stark rejection of his genealogical and cultural heritage” (58). It can be a dangerous thing to reach beyond one’s own social class. When analyzing the novel with a Marxist lens, the reader can see Leitch’s point that since the

“capitalist or bourgeois mode of our time has been characterized mainly by the conflict between the industrial working class (the proletariat, or labor) and the owners and manipulators of the means of production (the bourgeoisie)” (13), Gatsby could never succeed as a member of the bourgeoisie; he was from North Dakota. It was there that he created a future made of fantasy:

An ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain while the clock ticked...Each night he added to the pattern of his fancies until drowsiness closed down upon some vivid scene with an oblivious embrace. For a while these reveries provided an outlet for his imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing. (99)

According to Marxist criticism, “members of the working class that ascribe to bourgeois ideas and values exhibit ‘false consciousness,’ since such values ignore socioeconomic realities of their own working-class lives” (Leitch 14). This is exactly what Gatsby does. He ignores that reality of his class and aspires to live in an unrealistic reality. He could never accept his place, and therefore he self-destructed in his created fantasy on East Egg. In the end, perhaps Gatsby realized he was living in a dream:

[He] paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without begin real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about...like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees. (161)

Having a single, unattainable dream of marrying his love, Daisy, who is not in his economic class structure, was destructive for Gatsby. The world he created for himself was not based on

honesty and hard work; it was a façade founded on lies and illegal activity in which he could never succeed.

When it comes to Nick Carraway, Fitzgerald lets the reader know he is from “prominent, well-to-do people” (3). He would have been successful if he stayed in the Midwest and continued his father’s “wholesale hardware business” instead of trying to “learn the bond business” (Fitzgerald 3). When he moves East, all he can afford is “a weather-beaten cardboard bungalow” that was an “eyesore” (Fitzgerald 3, 5). This is in contrast to his idyllic Midwest. In addition, Nick’s character didn’t match those that lived in the East. After spending time with Jordan, Nick comments that “[he is] one of the few honest people [he has] ever known (Fitzgerald 59). He doesn’t have much to say about the people he interacts with in the East except for that they are “a rotten crowd,” (154) “incurabl[y] dishonest,” (58) and “careless people” (179). Again, this contrasts with the Midwest values of honesty and hard work that he is accustomed to from his hometown.

On the other hand, Tom and Daisy Buchanan were “enormously wealthy,” “arrogant,” and “cruel” (Fitzgerald 6-7). Although those descriptions were applied only to Tom, by the end of the novel, the same can be said of Daisy. Even though their money could cover up a lot, they are not truly successful. Tom has an affair with Myrtle, and Daisy has an affair with Gatsby. They both stray from their own class structure. Also, Daisy comments that she wishes for her daughter “to be a fool-that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool” (Fitzgerald 17). So, the old adage that money can’t buy happiness applies, and what is more important is that Daisy knows what society is like during these roaring 1920s. A woman doesn’t have much more to reach for than being “a beautiful little fool” and being that fool would ensure

she doesn't realize how unfair society truly is. Is this because there is a lack of stability? Without stabilizing units like "church, school, [and] family" (Leitch 14), the ruling class will collapse.

This is supported through the way George and Myrtle's lives fall apart when they try to step outside of their class. George did this when he decided he has been in the Valley of the Ashes "too long" and wants "to get away" by going "West" (123). He thinks he can fix his marriage and his cheating wife there. For Myrtle, it was her affair with Tom that took her outside of her social class. Through him, she felt she could climb the social ladder. When she crossed over to New York, and into the façade of her apartment with Tom and clothes to enrich this fantasy, she "undergo[es] a change," and the "intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur" (30). Nick describes how even "[h]er laughter, her gestures, [and] her assertions become more violently affected moment by moment" (31). The location, the people, and the materials all had an effect on her. She was no longer the garage worker's wife from the Valley. However, the possessions she so coveted, like "a small expensive dog-leash, made of leather and braided silver," (158) gave her away. They didn't belong in the Valley of the Ashes, in her location or class. It was through these alien possessions that George knew she was not being faithful. After her eventual death, George's neighbor states, "You ought to have a church, George, for times like this" (157). George responds that his attendance at a church "was a long time ago" (157). So, although Myrtle and George's problems arise when they step out of their class, it also relates back to Leitch's claim that there needs to be stabilizing values or institutions. Therefore, the lack of family and religious values in these characters' lives also has negative effects. Ultimately, for all these characters, traversing class boundaries and a lack of these principles led to their downfall.

Turning to Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," subtle hints of class structure can be seen with careful analysis. Similarly, to *The Great Gatsby*, examining setting and character can bring this structure to light. Eliot begins his poem with a reference to Dante's *Inferno*. This connects Dante's literal hell to the figurative hell that the speaker, J. Alfred Prufrock, is currently living. The evening is compared to "a patient etherized upon a table" and that sets an unpleasant tone. Phrases such as "half-deserted streets" and "cheap motels" lead the reader to see the setting as a low-class location. The assumption can be made that when the speaker tells his acquaintance "Let us go and make our visit" that he is referring to a place that is more upper class. In this place, "the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo" which indicates they are of a higher class and education than the speaker. The speaker is in a figurative hell, because he is, in Karl Marx's view, reaching beyond his status. He "has a bald spot in the middle of [his] hair," is "grow[ing] old," and wears "modest" and "simple" clothing. In contrast, the women he seeks will be robed in "bracelet[s]," "dress[es]," "perfume[s]," and "shawl[s]." Prufrock questions, "Do I dare? / Disturb the universe?" The reader can equate the universe to the class system. Going outside of his class structure is dangerous. Prufrock also asks, "Shall I part my hair behind?" (Eliot). He looks to changing his appearance as a way to trick the women into acceptance, however that would lead to his downfall.

Towards the end of the poem Prufrock discusses his status in his society's class structure. He alludes to Shakespeare's famous play *Hamlet*:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
 Am an attendant lord, one that will do
 To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
 Advise the prince; no doubt, and easy tool,

Deferential, glad to be of use,
 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
 At times, indeed, almost ridiculous-
 Almost, at times, the Fool. (Eliot)

Ultimately, Prufrock knows his place in society. He knows he is no Prince Hamlet. Even though he can be useful like a lord's attendant, at the same time, he can be a fool. Prufrock continues by saying, "I have heard the mermaids singing..." (Eliot). These "mermaids" are an allusion to the Sirens, the mythological creatures that lure men to their downfall. This could be symbolic of the allure of the upper class to the lower class. Ultimately, he says, "I do not think that they will sing to me" (Eliot). Perhaps, he saves himself from destruction by knowing his place in society.

Commonalities:

To see the commonalities between the two texts, the effects of the dominant class on the lower class needs to be analyzed. Tom Buchanan states, "Civilization is going to pieces" (Fitzgerald 12). Then he follows it up with "It is up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things" (Fitzgerald 13). This illustrates the obsession the upper class has with keeping their status. They see it as a real threat for the lower class to rise up. One of Myrtle Wilson's guests takes it even further by saying, "I almost married a little kike who'd been after me for years. I knew he was below me" (Fitzgerald 34). Using a derogatory term like "kike" shows the guest's disdain for the man to even show interest in her. Although this offensive term for a Jew would connect Fitzgerald with Eliot's known antisemitism, the reader should also connect with the idea of Prufrock questioning, "Do I dare?" (Eliot). Classes do not like to mix, especially when it comes to the upper class marrying down. As Fitzgerald writes,

“Americans, while occasionally willing to be serfs, have always been obstinate about being peasantry” (*The Great Gatsby* 88). However, staying away from different classes can be difficult.

At the beginning of Fitzgerald’s novel, he pens a poem from a fictitious author:

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;
 IF you can bounce high, bounce for her too,
 Till she cry “Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,
 I must have you! (Fitzgerald)

This poem discusses how to attract a woman with glitz and glam. This is similar to how Tom attracted Myrtle. His money, buying the puppy, and keeping the apartment, attracts her and makes her act as if she is of a higher class. However, that is not her reality, and it eventually led to her downfall, her death. Additionally, this is similar to Prufrock contemplating changing his appearance to attract the women who talk of Michelangelo, or the Sirens attempting to attract unknowing men. It seems it is truly as Nick states, “There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy, and the tired” (79). This can be related back to the class system. The pursued are usually the upper class (Tom, Daisy, or the women from Eliot’s poem), and the pursuing are those wanting to be in a higher class (*Gatsby*, Myrtle, or Prufrock). The busy could be the working class, and the tired could be the poor.

Furthermore, many critics agree that *The Great Gatsby* “tells a cautionary tale about the debilitating effects of money and social class on American society and those who seek fulfillment within its confines” (Donaldson 210). The same could be said for Eliot’s poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” due to the figurative hell that Prufrock is in because of the class constraints imposed by society. Society is both beautiful and ugly. Nick states, “I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life”

(Fitzgerald 35). It is what Fitzgerald calls “the dark fields of the republic” that “rolled on under night” (180).

Ultimately, a Marxist application to F.S. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” illustrates the dominant class’s power over the inferior classes. Looking closely at location and character helps differentiate the class structure in both the novel and the poem. Using this approach to the texts shows the authors’ views of society, and it is not so pretty. In fact, it is pretty tough and full of conflict. Ultimately, this battle between the classes will be the downfall of society. However, until then, “...we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past (Fitzgerald 180), not learning from the mistakes of previous generations.

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