A POSTMODERN EXAMINATION OF A COLLEGE WRITING CURRICULUM

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine a college composition class where students are introduced to reading and writing genres representing various types along the lines of race, sex/gender, sexual orientation, class, education, etc. This study was sensitive to the identities of the student participants and the hegemonic narratives that sometimes seem to exclude them. Through a postmodern theoretical lens, I studied the effect of an intentional writing curriculum focused on the nuances of identity to foster authentic student voice through the writing process.

Qualitative data were collected from interviews, writing samples, observations, and overall reflections. Data were analyzed to examine the following research questions: 1) How do students in a first-year college English composition class experience a post-structural course curriculum that emphasizes the relationship between composition and identity? 2) What are the students’ perceptions of their compositions throughout the process of engaging with this curriculum? 3) What is the generative overlap for students between postmodern and post-structural forms of identity and of curriculum, and how does this overlap then provide a lens for what college might be? Analysis of the data yielded themes regarding an intentional writing curriculum focused on identity to support students discovering their own voices: Study findings are presented as eight themes common to each participant’s story. Three of the most significant themes are the following: 1.) Identity composition is a complex third space of difficult cultural translation that collapses the composition/identity binary: composition is identity and identity is composition. 2.) Identity composition is another form of students’ identity, but they often use coping mechanisms to buffer their interaction with it, which may be tied to the initial or new nature of the curriculum for them. 3.) Identity composition can create a tension between students’ lived (life experience) and their lived (composition experience), which means they may perform their identity in a new way with this postmodern writing curriculum.

This study of identity was significant through offering important implications of a writing curriculum connected to forming a genuine understanding of experiences, focusing on the lives of our students, ourselves, and the significance of intersections.