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Responding to Writerly Identity as Inclusive Pedagogy

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Serving the whole student is a goal of many writing programs and writing centers, an ethos that ideally works in tandem with inclusive pedagogies. As Sommers (1993) stated, “writing is a radical loss of certainty,” and writing teachers are positioned to help students develop certainty in their writing—not just in academia, but for life. However, it may be a challenge for instructors to offer additional strategies, such as responsive reflection, that could build that certainty for developing writers.

To reflect upon and shift pedagogy, writing instructors and writing centers often rely on external motivators such as administrative decisions or evaluative feedback. However, using in-class writerly identity reflections in tandem with inclusive pedagogies, such as Labor or Engagement-Based Grading Contracts (L/EBGC), may offer a pathway to responsive reflection opportunities that center students as writers for life (Carrillo, 2021; Inoue, 2019). Responsive writerly identity reflection also assists in the transfer of students’ writing knowledge across personal and academic contexts (Rothschild, 2020; Williamson, 2019) and can shift students’ writerly identities in positive ways (Rothschild, 2020).

Writerly Identity Reflections offers students a pathway to responsively reflect on their writerly identity; likewise, it offers instructors a path to

respond to student reflections with pedagogical shifts. When students have the opportunity to respond to their own writing without instructor feedback, it encourages honest reflection and emboldens students to identify as lifelong writers. This honesty can be just as valuable to instructors.

Context

Writerly Identity Reflections were designed for a first-year writing context but are transferable to other writing courses or writing center tutor training. They may also be used for personal reflection.

Learning Goals

- Students will reflect on the influences on their writerly identity.
- Students will acclimatize to low-stakes reflection.
- Students will reflect on writing across contexts.

Course Format

This assignment was tested online and in person. It is suitable for both.

Teacher Preparation

First, consider your student population to modify the assignment (Appendix A). This version is guided by a modification of Gee's (2001) educational identity threads (p. 101) and discusses natural, dialogic, institutional, and self-sponsored writerly identities. If your population is primarily returning learners, you might add a workplace writerly identity question.

Second, plan two low-stakes reflections—one near the start of the course and one near the end of the course. Prepare daily reflective prompts (Appendix B) and set aside time to reflect and respond to content at the end of the course.

Estimated Time

This assignment will take students 2–4 hours outside of class and five minutes per class meeting.

Procedure

Two concepts guide these connected reflective prompts and daily writings. First, these activities are low stakes. Second, they are consistent. Cohn and Stewart (2016) argue for metacognitive work, such as their reflective letter, to be low stakes for the strongest student buy-in. As such, written reflections might be assessed with an LBGC or an EBGC (Carillo, 2021). As consistent reflection has been linked to constructive reflection (Yancey et al., 2014), making regular time to reflect may be integral to effectiveness.

A consideration of these reflections is time. To respect students' time, scaffold daily low-stakes or no-stakes reflective writing. To respect teachers' time, I suggest something radical: do not grade daily writing. Further, to create an environment of inclusive learning that serves students' writerly identity, allow students to respond to their reflections without your feedback. At the end of the term once all work is turned in, assess the reflections using an EBGC and make notes on the impact of the course's pedagogy.

The rationale for this approach is threefold:

1. It allows students to have autonomy over their writing.
2. It allows teachers to avoid overflowing their already packed response and grading schedules.
3. It allows instructors to respond to writerly identity growth over the whole term.

Procedural Steps

1. Create a full or modified LBGC or EBGC. If this is a new process for you, refer to O'Meara, 2022.
2. Introduce the concept of writerly identity and in-class daily low- or no-stakes writing (Appendix B includes daily prompts that can be modified).
3. Consistently engage the class in daily reflection. Using the start of class allows late students to enter with less

- disruption. Playing study music during daily writing can bring consistency and a calm transition into coursework.
4. To introduce the Writerly Identity Reflections (Appendix A), take ten minutes of class for discussion. Emphasize that daily writings will be utilized to scaffold and that they are low- or no-stakes. If you do not plan to read reflections until the end of the term, emphasize autonomy.
 5. Give credit for the first reflection, even if you choose to wait to read them.
 6. At the end of the term, assign the second reflection, emphasizing the responsiveness of the reflection. While the first reflection asks about the students' writerly identity upon entrance to the class, the second asks students to respond to their first reflection and to the class's impact on students' writerly identity.
 7. Post-course, review the submissions side by side. What did your course engender for students? Student reflections may reveal which course activities developed students' writerly identities.
 8. Respond to the reflections by noting assignments or activities that developed students' writerly identities and what inspired less, or negative, writerly-identity development. Adjust pedagogies accordingly.

Caveats and Alternatives

The amount of time scheduled for daily writing and assignment discussion is highly flexible. There are options to limit time consumed: assigning reflections as homework, assigning short answers rather than long, omitting daily writings, or solely drawing attention to writerly identity as changeable (Rothschild, 2020).

It is also possible to engage with this reflective assignment without a L/EBGC. Two other options are to grade the writing as either complete or

incomplete, or to emphasize the self-responsive quality of the reflections and allow students to grade themselves.

Not every instructor has autonomy over their assignments and activities. However, even a short, in-class, ungraded version of this activity may assist students to responsively reflect on writerly identity.

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Appendix A

Writerly Identity Reflections

Writer Identity Reflection

In this reflection, you will explore your writing identity. Think about the various places in your life that have shaped your language and writing—home, school, your community, your friends from sports or from the arts. How have these areas of your life helped you create a writerly identity? Or how have you dis-identified with writing, possibly because of these areas of your life?

As you write, reflect on your past writing experiences and your current writing experiences. Please answer in paragraph form, but do not worry about perfection. Per the engagement-based contract, this reflection will count toward your class participation.

1. Do you see yourself as a natural writer?
 - a. Do you consider yourself to be a “born” writer or not? Why?
2. How have institutions, such as schools, influenced your consideration of yourself as a writer?
 - b. For example, have you been given the position of “staff writer” for a newspaper or yearbook? Have you been placed in specific classes?
3. Through discourse with others, have you been recognized as having specific traits that help you identify as a writer?
 - c. Which recognized characteristics support your writing capabilities, and which ones explain your writing challenges?
4. Do you write for yourself, such as through journaling or a friend group? Do you write creatively, perhaps through poetry or short stories or graphic novels, or otherwise?
 - d. What writing knowledge assists your personal writing?

Responsive Writerly Identity Reflection

In this reflection, you will explore your writing identity as it has developed (or not) over the semester. Begin by re-reading your first Writerly Identity Reflection. Then, think about the various writing exercises we have done in class and about the term-long research project you completed. How have those assisted you to create a writerly identity or dis-identity? As you write, please respond to your first reflective writing in the class and reflect on the writing experiences of this class as well as concurrent writing experiences. Please answer in paragraph form, but do not worry about perfection. Per the engagement-based contract, this reflection will count toward your class participation.

As you write, respond to your first writerly identity reflection, and consider the following questions:

1. Do you see yourself as a natural writer?
 - a. How has this class challenged those ideas?
2. How have institutions, such as schools, influenced your consideration of yourself as a writer?
 - b. What have you learned that has assisted you to think of yourself as a writer, if anything?
3. Through discourse with others, have you been recognized as having specific traits that help you identify as a writer?
 - c. How has this class supported or interfered with those skills and traits, if it has?
4. Do you write for yourself, such as through journaling or a friend group? Do you write creatively, perhaps through poetry or short stories or graphic novels, or otherwise?
 - d. What abilities make someone “a writer”?

Appendix B

Daily Writing Prompts

Week 1

- What type of writing do you most enjoy?
- What is your discipline (your area of study) at school? Why did you choose it?

Week 2

- If you had to say you either hated or loved writing, which would it be and why?
- What is one issue from your discipline you want to tell people about?

Week 3

- Do you remember the first time you wrote for or about your discipline?
- What types of writing does your discipline use? (You can look it up.)

Week 4

- What is the most successful writing experience you have had so far?
- What types of strategies do you plan to use to write the next assignment?

Week 5

- Reflect on your writing over the weekend. What factors contributed to successful writing, and what was problematic?
- When was a time that you did not feel like a writer?

Week 6

- Do you identify as a writer in your discipline? Why or why not?
- What is the single most important part of your revision process?

Week 7

- In thinking about the next writing project, what feels most difficult about it?
- What is something you are looking forward to about the next writing project?

Week 8

- Are there famous books from your discipline? How did they impact you?
- What research habits have worked best for you in the past?

Week 9

- What is one thing you have learned about researching that you plan to try? What are two things that have worked that you want to try again? Why?
- What writing habits have worked for you in the past to successfully write longer papers?

Week 10

- What three supports most help you write research papers?
- What writing goals do you have for working on the research paper this weekend? What are you struggling with?

Week 11

- In thinking about your work on the research paper this weekend, what assisted you to meet your goals?
- What type of environment do you need to write successfully? Why do you think that is?

Week 12

- What do you think people in your discipline will most want to learn from your paper?
- Write about your strategy for your paper this weekend.

Week 13

- What is going well for you in your writing process? What strategies are working, and what is holding you back? List one thing you could use support on.
- As you go to finish your paper this weekend, what important reminders about writing will be written on a sticky note beside your computer?

Week 14

- If you had to give one piece of writing advice to writing students, what would it be?
- What qualities make someone a writer?