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Ten years ago, John Clark warned new TA's at NYU that their first course as college teachers, Freshman Composition, was no less than an "awesome encyclopedic mastodon," a course in Thinking, Reading, Writing, Sociology, Psychology, History, Modern Science, World Literature, Religion, Politics, and Sex.¹ As Director of Composition at the University of Miami, pondering how I might teach TA's how to teach an encyclopedic mastodon, I was presented with a departmental committee's answer--an encyclopedic mastodon of our own, of course. True to the outline drawn up by the committee for our first course in "problems of teaching" composition, I include units on History of Language, Theory of Grammar, Theory of Rhetoric, Theory of Pedagogy, and even Theory of Literature (our second-term composition course was based on belles-lettres), not to mention grading sessions and numerous trouble-shooting interludes.

Furthermore, the committee reasoned that I might as well include research methodology. That way, the new course (English 693) could be justified by traditional material already regarded as critical enough to be required of every graduate student (English 690, Bibliography and Research). TA's could then bypass English 690, with the net effect that the new "teaching" course wouldn't add a requirement to the curricula of students being molded into literature M.A.'s and Ph.D.'s (not composition teachers). So I taught it, all of it. And at the end of the term, in a frenzy of inclusiveness, I added a unit on "Professionalism"--job-hunting, publishing, grant-getting, and so on--discussed in my livingroom over wine, cheese, and respirators.

The evolution of English 693 at the University of Miami has been the refinement of a mastodon into at least a manageable baby elephant at this point, with empirically selected traits. Duly battered from my first bout with the encyclopedic creature, I quickly stripped it of research methodology, history of the language, and theory of literature. For a couple of years, I stubbornly kept a unit on theory of general pedagogy, using Wilbert McKeachie's Teaching Tips, but the book, despite some good sense, served mainly as a whipping

boy because of the repeated inappropriateness of its comprehensive paradigms to the specifics of teaching composition. English 693 in its present shape still strikes a more massive figure than the ideal. The final streamlining, which should be completed next year, will split the course into two--creating a new English 692 in grammatical and rhetorical theory for TA's, leaving English 693 as a practicum, with principles from Irmscher's book and guest lectures by our composition specialists.

Objectives

As the course has evolved, I have realized increasingly the naiveté of trying to fill all gaps in the theory and practice of composition pedagogy, particularly for TA's specializing in literature--many of whom exempted their own college composition courses. More realistic objectives, still strenuously ambitious, include:

- (1) An excitement about teaching in general, especially an appreciation of the variety of creative teaching styles (no less than the variety of effective writing styles).
- (2) An excitement about teaching composition in particular. Introducing TA's to the state of the art engenders a respect for the substantiality, the sophistication of, composition pedagogy. From a sampling of theories and techniques, TA's begin to develop their own approaches and, inevitably, some confidence.
- (3) The beginning of some pedagogy, however eclectic.
- (4) Exposure to specific examples of composition cruxes in :
 - (a) Objectives, like the ratio of basic skills to rhetoric, or the inclusion of history of language, use of the dictionary, or research mechanics and methodology.
 - (b) Reading requirements, like professional vis-a-vis student essays vis-a-vis belles lettres vis-a-vis preoccupation with non-print materials.
 - (c) Teaching techniques, like peer editing, the annotation of rough drafts, and sentence combining.
 - (d) Writing requirements, including type, length, and frequency.
 - (e) Evaluation, including when to grade, what grade weight to assign each paper, what significance to attach to various patterns of errors, how to annotate in the margins, between the lines, at the end.

Reading Requirements

English 693 students are required to read Irmischer's Teaching Expository Writing and Tate's Teaching Composition. Irmischer's wit and professionalism are universally appreciated. There is resistance to the essays in the Tate anthology when the theories expounded strike TA's as rigidly systematic or gratuitously intricate, but by and large the wealth of knowledge is respected and the bibliographic guidance is gratefully (if warily) acknowledged. Barbara McDaniel's new index to Teaching Composition (Blaine, Washington: Verlaine Books) makes the book an even more valuable tool.

Writing Requirements

Using the key in the front of the Tate anthology as the major guide, each student submits every week a typed one-page abstract of a composition journal article published within a calendar year of the class. In the second half of the course, each TA presents to the seminar a set of three to five student essays representing a wide grade range, xeroxed with annotations but usually without the final grades. Within a half hour or so, the TA explains the assignment and the evaluation of the product, noting the reading (or other experience) and class discussion on which the topic was based, the focal point of rhetoric at which it was aimed, and the criteria on which the essays were judged. The exercise serves as a helpful prelude to grading sessions later in the semester when TA's have to commit themselves in the company of experienced composition faculty. The major writing requirement of the course, a twelve- to twenty-page seminar paper, is delivered in the last few weeks. Topics have ranged from Zollnerism to the role of the subconscious in heuristics to dialectal problems in basic skills instruction. Finally, students write a two-hour exam the week after classes end.

Teaching Techniques

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to detail teaching techniques in the English 693 seminar. But I will mention three points. First of all, the class really isn't a seminar until the final few weeks. Most TA's have had so little exposure to grammatical and rhetorical theory that the classes usually combine micro-lectures and discussion, with regrettably less involvement of students than typifies a traditional literature seminar. But when the students finally do take center stage in their seminar presentations, I try to make sure that the time is intensely productive. Seminar papers must be xeroxed or dittoed for all class members by at least 4:00 p.m. on the day before the presentation. As a result, each TA's half hour or so at the lectern is spent giving a broader context than the paper could embrace, sharing the process and problems of research encountered in the project, extrapolating, interpolating, and of course fielding questions.

A final technique in English 693, more an adjunct than a technique, is our apprenticeship program. First-year TA's, though paid as much as their second-year counterparts, are not assigned independent responsibility for composition classes. Apprenticed to "master teachers," full-time specialists in the teaching of writing, they begin applying what they are learning in English 693 under close, sympathetic supervision. Some of the master teachers deliver guest lectures to the seminar, and all of them keep me informed of the progress of their TA's.

Evaluation

The final grade in English 693 is figured as follows:

Paper-set presentation	10%
Seminar presentation	55%
Class participation	5%
Final Exam	30%

The following representative English 693 final exam reflects much of the course:

For the essay assigned below, to be written in class next Thursday, you may bring an outline limited to both sides of this sheet, containing complete sentences only for quoted material. Bring an 8 1/2 x 11 bluebook to the exam, and plan to fill a minimum of 12 pages (both sides) with double-spaced eloquence.

Design an ideal first-term freshman composition curriculum.

- A. Deal with
 1. Objectives and
 2. Two of the following:
 - a. Assignments in reading (and, optionally, non-print material)
 - b. Writing assignments (type, length, frequency)
 - c. Teaching techniques
 - d. Annotation and evaluation

- B. Defend your conception on the basis of evidence drawn from at least
 1. Three chapters of Irmscher's Teaching Writing
 2. Two chapters from Tate's anthology
 3. Two seminar papers other than your own
 4. Two journal articles you abstracted, unrelated to your seminar project

Mastodons and Mastery

Some of the essays generated for that final exam are awesome, but the topic and the seminar in general demand too much focus for truly mastodonic conceptions, too much definition of a discipline. And that, I think, is the point of the course. It encourages at least a first few steps toward mastery of a specialty as sophisticated in its professionalism as it is rich and vital in its humanism.

¹"Teaching Freshman Composition," Freshman English News 1 (Fall 1972): 1.