

Workshop 5: Teaching Multigenre Writing

Mary Cathryn Ricker's Reflections

Making writing accessible

My philosophy really is getting students to recognize that we're all writers and that they are writers as well. And if that writing never goes past something like an autobiography where they're writing about personal experiences, or that writing never goes past just simply enjoying letter writing as a past time, or writing poetry for personal use, that's fine. But so many people in different occupations use writing that they need to come out of school feeling that they are writers so that they can jump into any situation and recognize that writing is accessible to them. Writing is an incredibly diverse means of communicating, and just with this multigenre assignment I'm hoping that they recognize that you can communicate in a variety of ways, even in writing, and that there's a lot of diversity allowed to you.

So my philosophy really is to get students first to recognize that they're writers, and that doesn't necessarily mean that we're all the same sort of writer.

Multigenre writing as an approach to differentiating instruction

I really like the multigenre approach for a few different reasons. One, I really believe in differentiating what I do with my students and giving them choices as often as possible because I feel like choice engages students. And also by differentiating, I feel like I can speak and give credit to students where they have their strengths. I can give credit to students where they have their strengths because some students, for example, might love poetry. I know—I mean, every year I have students who love poetry, so I definitely want them to feel that that's something they get to celebrate in this capstone project. But at the same time I know that there are some students at the middle level who are very nervous about poetry, downright scared of poetry, and I want to make sure that they have a style of writing or a form of writing they're going to be comfortable with. And ultimately I feel like with the multigenre approach I'm getting students to be comfortable with writing first and then the really powerful words come after that.

But also, requiring several genres, I feel also stretches the students because they can't just stay in their comfort zone. If narrative is a comfort zone for

them, I definitely want to push them, to challenge them, to try other areas so that down the line when they don't have an option they at least have some familiarity and some success with some other genres.

Different styles, different genres

I find that the multigenre approach is so useful because even though students might have, might be engaged already by writing about themselves, they're going to be engaged in different ways. Some of my students, I have found, love writing humorous pieces, and the memoir genre really lends itself to humor. And so they will really dig into that genre because it's a great complement to this sort of humor about their lives that they might want to share.

Whereas other students might have more of a talent with technical writing—they love the feel of the objective, sort of nonfiction, of a newspaper article. So they, even though they're explaining about their own life, they might love that newspaper article style. And other students who are very in touch with their feelings might find that the poetry comes very easily to them.

And so if those were three different students, one who is writing in memoir style, another who is writing in newspaper, and another who is writing in poetry style, they're really accomplishing the same objective for me. They're sharing information about their lives, they're giving me vivid details, but they're doing it and it's completely appropriate for them to do it three different ways.