ENG 5011-001: Dialogism, Situated Learning, and Collaborative Theories of Writing

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ENGLISH 5011, FALL 2004

Dialogism, Situated Learning, and Collaborative Theories of Writing

Wednesdays 7:00 - 9:30 PM/Coleman Hall 3159

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Office Hours: M 2:00 – 3:00, W 1:00 – 4:00, R 9:30 – 11:00 and by appointment

“Learning is not the miraculous reception of factual information, but a process of participation in communities of practice.” --Lave and Wegner, paraphrasing Vygotsky

“The wealth and diversity of speech genres is boundless, because the variety of human experience is inexhaustible” --Mikhail Bakhtin

Purpose of the Course
The theories of Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin have influenced a generation of composition theorists, altering the individual-centered view of writing in place in the Western world at least since Descartes. Of the many contributions of Vygotskian psychology, arguably the most important is the idea that conceptual knowledge cannot be abstracted from the situations in which it is acquired and used. Bakhtin extends this concept with his theory of dialogism, which focuses on the idea that existence is inherently reactive, involving individuals responding at a particular point in time and space to what has gone before and in expectation of what is to follow. In this course we will examine the work of these two important figures, focusing on those aspects that pertain to collaboration. We will also read articles by contemporary theorists who have used Vygotsky and/or Bakhtin to ground their work.

Books and Materials
Thought and Language. Lev Vygotsky
The Dialogic Imagination. Mikhail Bakhtin
Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. Mikhail Bakhtin (will distribute in class)
Course packet, available from Copy-X (Lincoln Avenue)

Requirements
1. Read the assigned material by the assigned date and participate in class discussions and occasional in-class writing exercises.
2. Submit ten short typed responses to readings (2-4 paragraphs)
3. Do a short oral presentation providing historical or theoretical background on a specific topic related to the readings. Oral presentations can be individual or collaborative.
4. Answer a midterm question (or questions) in collaboration with a classmate.
5. Complete a research project grounded in the theories of Vygotsky or Bakhtin.
   Present your findings in a formal paper as well as in a brief oral presentation to the class.

Attendance
Attendance is mandatory. Failure to attend class will result in failure of course, of course.
Grade Breakdown

10 Response papers (30 pts. each) 300 pts.
Short Oral Presentation 50
Collaborative Midterm 150
Research Essay, including proposal and brief presentation to class 500

Grading Scale

A 900-1000 pts.
B 800-899
C 700-799
D 600-699
E 0-599

Response Papers
Response papers will take the form of either answers to specific questions or the analysis of a specific passage of your choice. They should not be longer than 4 paragraphs, and are due on the assigned dates since there will times when we exchange response papers in class. No late response papers.

Oral Presentations
Short oral presentations will supplement some of the historical and theoretical material covered in class. They should be 10-15 minutes long. Handouts are welcome, as are visual aids. You may work with one other person if you like on your presentation.

Collaborative Midterm
You will work with a classmate to answer a question or questions related to the reading. You will get the question a week (or more) in advance. Answers should be typed, double-spaced, and no longer than 5 pages. In addition to answering the question(s), you will write a brief (1 page) description of your collaborative process: did you collaborate in person or via email; did one person do the writing while the other dictated, or did individuals write separate answers and then “stitch together” a response; was the experience positive, negative, a bit of both?

Research Paper
Choosing a topic and research methodology that you’re interested in is the first and, some might argue, most important step in writing a good paper. Since Vygotsky and Bakhtin cover so much theoretical ground, and since their philosophies cut across so many disciplines, you have a wide range of choices. Both primarily theoretical and empirically-based (that is, founded on observation) approaches are welcome. Empirically-based papers include case studies, either of individuals or of groups. Your paper should be grounded in either Vygotskian or Bakhtinian theory—you do not have to refer to both. Length of paper: To paraphrase an old cigarette commercial, “It’s not how long you make it, it’s how you make it long.” There’s no correlation between longer papers and higher grades. That said, this is a semester-long project, and a paper shorter than 10 pages brings up the question of inadequate development.

Plagiarism
Here is the English Department policy on plagiarism:
Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—“The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.
Week 1: August 25
Overview of course; introductions

Week 2: September 1
Course Packet, Seely et al., “Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning”
Matthews, “Vygotsky and Writing”
Response Paper #1

Week 3: September 8
Thought and Language, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
Short Oral Presentation: Russian Psychology in the 1920’s: “Freud, Gestalt, Reflexology, and That Slobbering Dog”
Response paper #2

Week 4: September 15
Thought and Language, Chapters 4 and 5
Response Paper #3
Short Oral Presentation: “Marxist Criticism in 1930’s Russia” (Or: The REAL Dark Ages)

Week 5: September 22
Thought and Language, Chapters 6 and 7
Flower, “Writer-Based Prose”
Emig, “Writing as a Form of Learning”
Response Paper #4
Short Oral Presentation: “What’s the Matter with Linda Flower?” (Or: Compositionists’ Gripe with Flower and Hays)

Week 6: September 29
Course Packet, Schuster, “Mikhail Bakhtin as Rhetorical Theorist”
Halasek, “A Compositionist Reads Bakhtin”
Response Paper #5
Short Oral Presentation: “Bakhtin in Relation to Kant and the Neo-Kantians” (Or, I Kant Stand this Guy Any More)

Week 7: October 6
Collaborative Midterm Paper due
Discussion of research project
Course Packet, Shuman, “Collaborative Writing”
Markelis, “Talking Through Letters”

Week 8: October 13
Speech Genres, Introduction
“The Problem of Speech Genres”
Response Paper #6
Short Oral Presentation: “As Vygotsky is to Piaget, so Bakhtin is to the Russian Formalists”
Week 9: October 20
The Dialogic Imagination, Introduction
"Discourse in the Novel," 259-300
Also, skim through Glossary
Response Paper #7

Week 10: October 27
"Discourse in the Novel," 301-366
Response Paper #8

Week 11: November 3
"Discourse in the Novel," 366-422
Short Oral Presentation: "Bakhtin vs. Derrida: The Battle of the Superstars"
One-two page research proposal due

Week 12: November 10
Course Packet, Middendorf, "Bakhtin and the Dialogic Writing Class"
Thralls, "Bakhtin, Collaborative Partners, and Published Discourse"
Response Paper #9
Short Oral Presentation: "Bakhtin: Not Just an Effective Antibacterial Spray" (Or, Bakhtin and Carnival)

Week 13: November 17
Course Packet, Howard, "Collaborative Pedagogy"
Various handouts (food as well as articles)
Short Oral Presentation: "Has Anyone Seen/My Good Friend Bakhtin?" (Or, New Currents in Bakhtin Scholarship)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14: December 1
Course Packet, Selfe, "Computer-Based Conversations"
Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'"
Response Paper #10

Week 15: December 8
Short Oral Presentations of Research Projects
Collaborative Eating at Markelis Residence

December 13
FINAL research projects due

NOTE: I may make some minor changes to this syllabus to better accommodate your needs. Any changes will be announced in advance.