



THE PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY  
PROCEEDINGS OF THE 2014 CONFERENCE  
MAY 29-31, 2014  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY – DOMINGUEZ HILLS  
CARSON, CALIFORNIA

**BEYOND BASIC: REIMAGINING PEER-LED DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING**

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Typical University Developmental Writing curricula rely mainly on workbooks and skill and drill teaching. This de-contextualized approach ignores much of what we now know about learning and cognition (Rose, 2009). Based on theories of multimodal learning and drawing from scholarship that examines the cognitive aspects of visual literacy and multimodal composing (Bowen & Whithaus, 2013; Efland, 2002), English department faculty at California State University (CSU) Dominguez Hills designed and piloted a Developmental Writing curriculum that promotes multimodal composition as a mode of inquiry and part of reading and writing processes. Peer Leaders as Supplemental Instructors (SI's) have played an active role in implementing this curriculum, one that goes beyond confining their efforts to addressing problems in mechanics and testing demands. Assignments from the curriculum designed to enhance the critical and creative thinking of students and the role of Peer Leaders in helping deliver and adapt this material will be discussed.

Introduction

In 2013, over 50% of all incoming freshman to the California State University (CSU) system required remediation in Math and English. At CSU Dominguez Hills, a diverse, urban university in Los Angeles, the figure was 67.3%. The standard remedial model consists of a sequence of several non-credit courses and has tended to focus on the obvious deficiencies of grammar and sentence mechanics. Instruction is parceled out into isolated grammar and workbook exercises divorced from meaningful context and unconnected to the kinds of thinking and writing that is required in other courses. While supported by existing course requirements and a sizeable textbook industry, what is left out in this model is an acknowledgement of current research in learning and cognition that argues that students' "grammatical, stylistic, and organizational problems" can best be addressed "in the context of their academic writing" (Rose, 2009). We share Rose's conviction that this "is a huge point and one that is tied to our core assumptions about cognition and language: writing filled with grammatical error does not preclude engagement with sophisticated intellectual material, and errors can be dealt with effectively as one works with such material" (Rose, 2009).

In the summer of 2010, English department faculty were offered the opportunity to partner with the campus Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) office and design a pilot Summer Bridge Developmental Writing Curriculum that incorporated Peer Leaders as Supplementary Instructors (SI's). The pilot arts-

integrated curriculum promoted multimodal composition as a mode of inquiry and part of reading and writing processes. Although the tracking data shows a 90% pass rate for the pilot cohort in subsequent required writing classes, we do not view the curriculum as static, however, and have encouraged peer leaders to play an active role in adapting course content as part of their ongoing pedagogical training in the English Education option of the English major. We see an opportunity to introduce to the Developmental Writing course and the kinds of best-practices composition pedagogies, including multimodal approaches, explored in our pre-service undergraduate courses and graduate seminars. In what follows, we discuss how Peer Leaders Amanda Reyes and Ronald Farol build on assignments and concepts encountered in their English coursework, first as undergraduates and then subsequently as students in the graduate program, and have integrated these pedagogies into the Summer Bridge English Developmental Writing curriculum.

### Program goals

Not bound by the usual departmental requirements of a semester-long Developmental Writing course, the faculty team approached the pilot as a chance to put into play promising concepts in current Composition theory and explore the opportunities afforded by PLTL. Our goals for students were as follows:

- Understand reading and writing as linked skills and understand that building one helps develop the other
- Understand that reading and writing skills provide the foundation for success in college-level courses and beyond
- Seek out contradictions or problems in different kinds of texts and explore a range of possible critical responses to them
- Build the ability to shift your personal point of view and assume the perspectives of others so that varying opinions and experiences enrich your thinking
- Bring texts into conversation with each other and experience the rewards of building upon existing knowledge and experience
- To bridge affect and intellect, critical and creative faculties and to enable students to do what teachers and academics do: derive pleasure from intellectual inquiry and exchange.

If the first five goals reflect current Composition scholarship on understanding reading and writing as interconnected and intertextual, and the importance of developing inquiry-based pedagogies as opposed to top-down deficit models, the last goal is the most important as it draws on theories of arts-integrated learning and cognition, and the importance of intrinsic motivation in creating the conditions of possibility for life-long learning. While many of the more progressive Developmental Writing pedagogies seek to empower students by bringing them into the academic conversation at the same time as they address basic writing needs, we find even in these approaches an an-hedonic aspect also characteristic of much writing instruction in general. In his provocative essay, "School Sucks," T.R. Johnson characterizes this stance as composition's unspoken 'will to "masochism', and argues for reinserting notions of "authorial pleasure" into the writing class through including more poetic and creative assignments

(Johnson, 2001). We see this move as perhaps even more crucial in a frequently stigmatized class such as Developmental Writing, a class typically perceived by students as a form of punishment.

Taking inspiration from Mike Rose above and Peter Elbow's observation that, "we need nonacademic discourse *even* for the sake of helping students to produce good academic discourse..." (Elbow, 1991), we developed a reader that brought together poetic and literary-inflected texts, including excerpts from a graphic novel, and a range of challenging theoretical texts. Assignments approached composing as multimodal, i.e., as involving "the conscious manipulation of the interaction among various sensory experiences – visual, textual, verbal, tactile, and aural – used in the processes of producing and reading texts" (Bowen & Whithaus, 7). The pilot assignment sequence included a "musical" literacy autobiography, a "commonplace book," an "ad intervention," and a visit to the Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA).

### The CSUDH model: Bringing together SI and PLTL

The Summer Bridge program offered us the opportunity to bring together the SI and PLTL models. Unlike the standard PLTL model in which peer leaders are students who have recently taken the same course as the students they work with, we selected Peer Leaders/SI's from a better performing group who had not previously placed in Developmental Writing. And while the PLTL model recommends six to eight students in a group, funding constraints limited us to providing one Peer Leader per group of twenty students. We realize that this is not optimum, and hope to be able to achieve a more favorable peer leader-student ratio in future courses. Nevertheless, we feel that we were able to realize some of the key objectives of PLTL within what was nominally an SI-assisted course. First, like PLTL, Peer Leaders were required to attend every class meeting with the instructor present and to conduct two separate three-hour workshops per week outside the classroom. Second, the Peer Leaders/SI's and students were close in age, of similar backgrounds, and attended the same University, thus facilitating the crucial "role-model" aspect of a PLTL program (Barlow, et al., 2012).

Peer Leader Ron explains: "As a role model, I lead by example by showing students that taking risks is how real learning is done. For example, during class lectures, there are times when I honestly do not have an answer to the instructor's questions although I am expected to be a 'master' of the subject matter. Many students (and instructors) will tell you that in the academy this is a sign of weakness and fear "looking stupid"; however, I intentionally model that even signs of weakness can be starting points for growth by fostering a classroom environment where it is okay to take risks as long as there is an honest intention to learn."

Third, we maintained the close cooperation between Instructors and Peer Leaders that is a hallmark of PLTL (Gafney, 2012), beginning with the pilot course and continuing to the present date. In addition to scheduling weekly meetings between Peer Leaders and Instructors (the majority of whom are lecturers), Peer Leaders Amanda and Ron have worked closely with me over the past several years as they have moved through the undergraduate English program and into the M.A. program. In what follows, we discuss two multimodal Developmental Writing assignments Amanda and Ron adapted from pedagogy I have developed in my English courses: the "Campus Walk" and the "Musical Literacy Autobiography."

### Peer-led assignment #1: Campus walk. Narrative by Amanda Reyes

The Instructor for the class began the summer by introducing university life and culture as preparation for discussing academic and non-academic discourse. Readings for the unit were Ted Rall's "College is for Suckers" and David Foster Wallace's commencement address to the University of Kenyon. To supplement the introduction of university life and an academic ethos, we wanted to introduce visual and digital rhetoric and also include "spatial texts." To this end, as part of the prompt and as a complement to the Rall and Foster Wallace texts, we included the on-line CSUDH advertisement "This way to Your \$1 million!" for students' consideration. (See below.) Because I had created and implemented a campus walk in a previous SI-assisted course, I had materials to work with and experience to share with my co-peer leader Ron Farol. We decided to create a mini campus walk teaching unit that was loosely structured around an introduction to theory, artistic and academic models, and a final presentation of findings. Situationist theorist's Guy Debord's concept of the "derive" or "drift" was an important inspiration. As Debord explains, the "derive" is a "technique of rapid passage" through various built environments in which the "drifter" allows him/herself to be pulled without preconceptions. The intent is to discover the "specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Debord, 1958). Ron and I used the idea of the "derive" to set the stage for students to critically analyze the "spatial regime" of our own university, CSU Dominguez Hills. Our plan was to introduce the technique and then allow students to go on a walk of their own in hopes of discovering some theme or finding about their college campus, college life, or their own academic identity.

### Campus walk prompt: CSUDH derive:

*As you go on your derive, consider what objects, buildings, people, etc. stand out or catch your attention and why. What do the buildings, architecture and layout say about our campus? What are the differences among the buildings within the campus?*

Once students went on their individual derives they would then present their findings to the class in either a traditional written text or multimodal composition. We gave them several artistic and academic examples of what their presentations could look like to help guide them. We created a power point of different types of derives to provide students with models. We included examples of our own derive projects from our English courses as well as examples of sound artworks by Janet Cardiff, text and image photography by Carrie Mae Weems (Sherman, 2007), theory excerpts from Guy Debord, and a poem by Robert Frost. Each model exemplified a different genre and medium of presenting a spatial text that students could then use as a method for composing their own work. We then summarized these presentation models on a handout to assist students in the creation of their CSUDH Derive.

Figure 1. Example of student's multimodal composition #1. Critical analysis of campus architecture: Below is a screenshot of a PowerPoint presentation of a student's campus walk. This student chose to contrast the architecture and conditions of the administrative buildings to those used by students.





## MY EPIPHANY

It was my sophomore year of high school and I decided to attend a College fair held on Dominguez Hills Campus.

I decided to go on a tour of the campus but instead I turned right back around.

Sculpture Garden

### Peer-led assignment #2: Musical literacy autobiography. Narrative by Ron Farol.

In this class the instructor wanted students to learn how to write case studies by applying Carol Dweck's concepts of "fixed" and "growth" mindsets and Nicholas Carr's discussion of neuroplasticity to their analyses of Mike Rose's literacy autobiography, *Lives on the Boundaries*. They were also assigned to write their own literacy autobiographies that narrated how they overcame obstacles to become "literate" in reading and writing. I wanted to expand the literacy autobiography assignment by implementing an alternative form of literacy that almost all students are familiar with: music. The assignment was to be written in traditional alphabetic text.

### Writing Prompt

*Music can usually bring up a past experience or memory from a person's life. Select five songs or pieces of music that jogs a certain memory about your past or reminds of namely your struggles and triumphs. Write down a part of the lyrics or briefly describe the piece of music, and in one or two paragraphs explain the personal experience that comes to mind every time you hear it.*



Figure 3. Example of student's multimodal composition. The following is an example of a work from a student Ron had previously encountered while a peer leader in Summer Bridge and then facilitated again while working as an SI in the fall semester ENG 99.

### Results and Discussion

Amanda reflecting on the campus walk: The student presentations went well and if anything exceeded our expectations. For the most part, most of the presenters went beyond surface analysis. We were truly surprised with the students' creativity and critical inquiry of our campus and their own academic identity. As the student example above shows (Figure 1), students were able to make critical insights about their university by utilizing multimodality and the psychogeographic perspective. As Paulo Freire puts it, "to study is to uncover; it is to gain a more exact comprehension of an object; it is to realize its relationships to other objects" (Freire, 2005). This is one purpose of the "derive," to make connections between the politics of space and our individual and collective lives. Other students were able to bring up issues of gender and race as it pertains to this campus, while some students explored the social stigmas associated with CSUDH, a large urban university with a predominant minority student body. Many were able to compose multimodal essays, by juxtaposing photographs, text, and music, while never losing sight of their central argument.

Ron reflecting on the musical literacy autobiography: To my surprise during the next workshop, one student went above and beyond by not only completing the written assignment, but also creating her own multimodal musical literacy autobiography through Prezi (a presentation software and storytelling tool for presenting ideas on a virtual canvas). This student did not know how to make a video, so she told us, during her presentation, that she just put it on a medium she was familiar with, Prezi. The piece (Figure 3) was a beautiful, insightful, and inspiring multimodal type of autobiography highlighting and analyzing certain struggles, triumphs, and instances in her life. The songs she picked (ranging from

electronic dance music to John Mayor) framed each slide in terms of what she was going to talk about. Among other issues, she wrote and talked about were her struggles with her gender and sexuality and overcoming her struggles by keeping a growth mindset. From my observation, the level of sophistication in the student's project suggests she was very much aware of how certain modes of communication can produce different rhetorical effects on an audience, how her "self" related to larger social categories, and of arrangement, organization and synthesis, all of which are conventions of an academic essay. Even more surprising was the fact this particular student was one of the students I had worked with in the Developmental English 88 class the previous semester (the first class in the regular semester Developmental English sequence). The "new literacies" in multimodal discourse which she had acquired in English 88 gave her the confidence to take risks and be successful in English 99, the second class in the sequence.

### Theoretical Context

The sample assignments discussed by the peer leaders build on composition pedagogies taught in CSUDH English classes and graduate seminars and are informed by current arguments in composition studies for the need to expand the definition of composition beyond alphabetic-only texts and conventional essay genres (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress & Leeuwen 2006; Selfe & Hawisher 2004; Sherman, 2007; Wysocki, et al, 2005). We were gratified by Amanda's and Ron's observations of their students' achievements in critical literacy and foregrounding difference, and the rhetorical skill they evidenced in creating compelling arguments that bridged affective and intellectual registers.

Two additional arguments for integrating multiliteracies in a writing class we believe were borne out in the student examples are arguments for arts-integrated curriculum enabling metaphorical thinking (Efland, 2002) and concepts of "teaching for transfer" (Perkins & Solomon, 1992). Linguists Lakoff and Johnson cite the operation of metaphor as a fundamental principle underlying sophisticated cognitive processes (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For Efland, arts understanding and metaphor is about making connections and creating new realities; moreover, metaphor changes the way we see its subject. Thus for Efland, while "the arts have no monopoly on metaphor... the arts are places where the artist and the spectator are conscious of what is metaphoric in a given expression. In other realms, the use of metaphor is likely to remain in the background" (Efland, 2002). We support Efland's calls for an "integrated" aesthetic-cognitive curriculum that brings together "nonpropositional" forms such as metaphorical thinking with the traditional "propositional" curriculum of language and number. The student walk "My Epiphany" (Figure 2) shows this integration nicely, so too, the Prezi musical literacy autobiography example. In the former, the student writes in her accompanying essay of the process she went through overcoming her conflicted feelings associated with attending Dominguez Hills, a "minority" school. At first, as the text in her slide states, "I decided to go on a tour of the campus but instead I turned right back around." Over time as she gets to know the students and the campus, she realizes that her initial impressions were misguided. She represents this process through antithesis. The slide image of trees and nature contrasts the text and metaphorically alludes to her evolving introspective posture; it depicts the campus sculpture garden as the "quiet place" where she would go to think during times of stress.

The musical literacy autobiography example on the other hand, embodies how music can forge emotional connections among individuals. We can appreciate how this student's rhetorical choices of music categories and juxtapositions created what the instructor called a "transformative" effect on the

class audience. Not only did the class experience different perspectives on gender and difference, the instructor later reported that they brought new insights on the relationship between music and emotion to their own essays. We suggest that the student's multimodal rhetoric played a pivotal role in enabling this communication. As the New London Group argue, not only do "meaning makers" transform materials, "in the process of their co-engagement in designing meaning, "people transform their relations with each other, and so transform themselves" (New London Group, 1996).

Finally, Perkins and Solomon describe two kinds of transfer in teaching and learning. "Low-road transfer" is transfer between similar situations, e.g., students apply material they learn in class to an end of the semester final exam. "High-road transfer" occurs when students apply knowledge learned to new situations and/or situations that differ significantly from those in which they learned them (Perkins and Solomon, 1996). Both types of transfer have occurred in the peer led CSUDH Developmental Writing courses discussed. Not only does the tracking data show that 90% of students in the pilot have gone on to pass their subsequent required English courses, but we also see how Ron's student above adapted rhetorical knowledge learned in his peer led workshops to a new class, and, unprompted, came up with a novel approach to a new assignment. And while we can't know for certain, we can surmise that the student who composed the critical reading of campus space in Amanda's workshop will most likely continue to similarly approach new encounters with environmental and spatial texts.

### Issues and challenges

It is always a challenge in a Developmental Writing course to balance intellectual content and pragmatic writing goals. This was compounded by the fact that workshop time was limited to one hour. Many peer leaders felt that they would have appreciated more time to address rhetorical/intellectual issues in addition to providing the requisite instruction in mechanics. Both Ron and Amanda also felt that there was not enough consistency between summer and fall terms. For instance, in the summer, attendance was required; in the fall it was not and this created a problem. In a number of cases, the students who would most benefit from the workshops would not show up or would not do so consistently.

However, overall, we feel the CSUDH Summer Bridge curriculum was a particularly good fit for PLTL. Amanda and Ron already had a chance to experience our pedagogy as students in the English program. As peer leaders, they were able to make it their own and communicated this enthusiasm to the students. Consequently, we avoided some of the pitfalls associated with what otherwise could have been mainly a top-down dynamic between instructor and peer leader. If close cooperation and group cohesion is a key ingredient for a sustainable PLTL program, we believe this was achieved. Instructors and peer leaders were part of a team with a shared sense of purpose; we sought to deliver innovative teaching as a way to step outside of some of the negatives and disabling stigma associated with traditional Developmental Writing classes.

### Acknowledgments

Funding for peer leaders in English Developmental Writing classes is provided by the Equal Opportunity (EOP) Summer Bridge program and the Encounter to Excellence (ETE) Title V grant at CSU Dominguez Hills, Paz Oliverez, Director.

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**Cite this paper as:** Sherman, D.P., Reyes, A., & Farol, R. (2015). Beyond Basic; Reimagining Peer-Led Developmental Writing. *2014 Conference Proceedings of the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society*, May 29-31, 2014, California State University at Dominguez Hills, [www.pltlis.org](http://www.pltlis.org); ISSN 2329-2113.