

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS FOR SECONDARY TEACHERS

81-557

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We live in a world in which the validity or interpretation of communication depends crucially on an understanding of when and where the speaker/writer was when the text was created. A central theme of this course is the idea that new kinds of text reflect and help construct changing identities and social relations. The English language, indeed, plays a key role in the global restructuring of social and economic relations that has been collectively referred to as “the postmodern condition”. One of the noted features of the postmodern world is the blurring of boundaries – not just in the geographical space but also in social identities. This course examines ways in which the teaching of English, over time in Canadian history, has dealt with this blurring of boundaries. It is about re-conceptualizing English as a subject and rethinking teacher practice – both what is taught and how it is taught.

COURSE TEXT

Prescribed text: Barrel, B. & Hammett, R. (2000). *Advocating Change: Contemporary Issues in Subject English*. Toronto: Irwing.

Recommended text: Goodman, S. & Graddol, D. (Eds), --- (1996). *Redesigning English: new texts, new identities*. London & New York: Routledge.

Additionally, articles from journals and chapters from books will be distributed in class.

COURSE FORMAT

The course will be conducted as a seminar taking into consideration the following issues:
Readings: Each week has a set of readings. Some of these may be quite difficult but there is also material that can be read fairly quickly. The point of all this reading is to gain some understanding of how various researchers and theorists see the issues and to use their arguments to re-conceptualize Language Arts. My expectation is not that you memorize what these various authors say but that you use the readings to explore your reactions to what you have read, to think about how it confirms or challenges your assumptions about “English language education”.

Self as informant: these readings are just one-way of helping you explore language issues. We will also be using ourselves as informants. This means that we will be examining ourselves as learners, as readers and as writers to check the validity of the ideas raised in the readings, that is, to use ourselves as lenses to examine the theory.

Learner as informant: another vehicle for helping you develop as a reflective practitioner will be to work with students from your classroom, to engage them as informants to help you (and them) understand literacy and literacy development.

Writing: each week I will be asking you to reflect, in writing, on what you have been reading. The purpose of this reflective writing is to help you clarify your ideas and raise

issues from the readings that are of concern for you. To help with this, you may want to consider asking yourself the following questions about the readings:

- Does it make sense?
- Do I understand?
- What helped me understand?
- Is this true for me as a learner/educator?
- Is this consistent with my beliefs as a learner/teacher?
- Is this what happens in my classroom?
- What questions does it raise about my own reading/writing/teaching?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be three assignments:

1. Each week you will be assigned various readings, which will be discussed the following session. From these readings you are expected to write a response paper. This paper should be prepared for use in class and to hand over to me thereafter. This means that for whatever reading you do you will be expected to share your paper with others and to use it for class discussion. You will be assigned a reading on which to base your response paper. With this assigned response you will be expected to use it to lead discussion in class. For response paper writing refer to the above questions. It is worth noting that a response paper is not a summary, rather, it is a mechanism of reflecting on one's political and personal stances. Each response should not exceed two pages double space. *Aim:* to be able to examine, reflect and make connections between text and own experiences. Also to learn key concepts and debates in language arts. 20%

2. This assignment is self-directed text analysis – a de-centering of traditional texts. It is about the application of key ideas presented by various authors, which will be discussed during the first four weeks of class. You are expected to take a novel/ poetry book/ short stories/ video/ news clip, etc., and examine it using the arguments presented by different theorists (importance of subject positions; the debate about and meaning of culture; “orientalism”; deconstruction; essentialism; etc.). Once this analysis is done, you are to offer an alternative text, which could be used instead of the one, critiqued and offer reasons why this alternative is a better choice. Chinua Achebe (to be examined in class) provides an example for this text analysis assignment. Text addressed by course readings should not be chosen for this assignment (e. g. *Merchant of Venice*, *To kill a mockingbird*, *Heart of darkness*, *Lord of the flies* etc.). 40%

3. Term Paper: choose a topic of interest addressing issues on Language Arts, examine relevant theorists, relevant research, practical application regarding instruction, learning materials and ways to evaluate. This paper should be approximately 8 pages typed and double-spaced and should have a complete bibliography. *The purpose* of this assignment is to enhance research, academic writing and analytical skills. 40%

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

The following outline is tentative. It will cover the following chapters and topics from the prescribed book, *Advocating change*:

- Chapter 1, 5, 6, & 2
 - i. Colonialism and the English language
 - ii. Romanticized subject positions
 - iii. Identity construction
 - iv. Othering and essentialism
 - v. Cultural studies or English?

- Text Analysis
 - i. Chinua Achebe – Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*
 - ii. Sharon Goodman – *Visual English*
 - iii. Roger Simon – *The Yiddish Shylock*
 - iv. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o – the language of African literature

- Chapters 9, 10, & 8
 - i. Locations, identification
 - ii. Subject positions
 - iii. Culture, new ethnicities, multiculturalism

- Chapters 11, 12, 15, & Allan Bell’s *Text time and technology*
 - i. New literacies
 - ii. Technology and literacy
 - iii. Challenging traditions of/in reading and writing

- Chapters 19, 4, 18, 20
 - i. Curriculum issues
 - ii. Is it still English?
 - iii. Assessment - are students still learning/ are teachers teaching?
 - iv. Future directions – English language, cultural studies, or what?