

ENGLISH 780

THE SOCIAL NATURE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY: BAKHTIN, VYGOTSKY, AND ZEBROSKI

SYLLABUS AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS

DR. NANCY MACK

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE

This seminar will explore an alternate world view of language and literacy. The Russian scholars, Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, proposed that language is rooted in social relations that are cultural and material rather than in cognitive skills that are isolated and abstract. In the last decade composition scholarship has taken a more social approach to language study and is beginning to be interested in the works of these two scholars which has in part made it possible to have more and better translations of their writings. Language is considered to be a socio-historic creation.

You will read a limited amount of selections from the works of Vygotsky and Bakhtin. Our main text will be James Thomas Zebroski's application of these theories to the act of composing and the composition classroom.

This course will begin with the material conditions of your lives, namely your own literacy history. From this corporeal context, we will quickly move to the types of theories that can be used to think about language. This course will ask you to spend more time examining theory than many of your other courses. You will become familiar with many of the theories current in composition scholarship and learn to "think through" them about your own life experiences. Our developing theory of language greatly affects how and why we teach students to write. Spending time reading and considering major theories and world views is a scholarly luxury. Few of you will have this opportunity again in your academic career. Implicit theories about the world can limit or expand our daily lives. In order to demonstrate the importance of theoretical thinking in the authorship of our lives, we will do two creative projects. The first project has two parts: a visual map and a parody of various theories about composition. The second project will be a quote pastiche or montage, incorporating citations from your readings with your own writing in a medium of your choice. Both of these projects should be great fun to create and share, proving that theory can be both fun and provocative.

The academic essay will grow out of close readings of the primary texts and your academic reading journal entries. The two creative projects will also provide preparation through their use of citations and analysis of theory. The academic essay will examine one, limited aspect of the social nature of language and relate it to your own or your students' literacy learning. The academic essay will be developed through prewriting, drafting, and peer writing group sharing. You may revise this paper several times in preparation for your Master's Portfolio.

We both speak and are spoken by language.

2. TEXTBOOKS

Required

Thinking Through Theory: Vygotskian Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing by James Thomas Zebroski

Thought and Language by Lev Vygotsky

Mind in Society by Lev Vygotsky

The Dialogic Imagination by Mikhail Bakhtin

Additional articles given out in class

The Theory Toolbox by Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux

3. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING PERCENTAGES

Reading Journals and Reponses	20%	Due Weeks Two through Eight
Theory Map and Parody	20%	Due Week Four and Five
Quotation Project	20%	Due Week Seven
Academic Essay	40%	Due Weeks Eight, Nine, and Eleven

4. BASIC POLICIES

A. Attendance Regular attendance is expected. Participating in classroom activities is essential to this course. You cannot miss class and fax your work into me: this is not a correspondence course. Missing one class will be equal to missing a half a week's worth of work. Poor attendance will dramatically lower your final grade. If you cannot attend class weekly or need to leave class early or need to come to class late every day, you should drop this course and take something else.

B. Class Cancellation Since Wright State rarely closes, we need a system for deciding when the weather is too bad for you to come to class. Rather than trying to call each one of you, I will follow the closing announcement for Sinclair University. So if the weather is bad, watch TV channels 2 or 7 or listen to the radio for an announcement.

C. Future Use of Your Work I like to use real student papers as good examples in class and in teacher workshops. Also, I write articles about some of my teaching strategies. If I would use your writing, you would be given full credit and would retain copyright of your piece of writing. If you do not want your writing published or shared in a future class, please notify me in writing on the cover sheet of your essay. You will not be paid for your writing, but such a publication could be listed on your resume'.

D. Incompletes Incompletes are rarely given for this class. If you feel that there are compelling circumstances to warrant an incomplete, contact me before the end of the quarter to make arrangements.

E. Recommendations If you need a recommendation for a scholarship, further graduate work, or employment, please request a letter several weeks in advance. You must have taken at least two courses with me in order for me to write an accurate recommendation.