Andres Sanchez

WRTG 596

Identity as Foundation

Background/Context

A person’s identity is something that changes over time. A person’s identity is composed of several factors that are all constantly moving as a person grows and matures. This basic idea of identity and everything that it encompasses serves as a starting point for discussion. How a person argues and views issues is influenced, whether they like it or not, by how they are raised or how they identify with a concept. The activity presented here is a way for students to become aware of certain aspects of their own identity, and start noticing that something they took for granted, might have an influence on the way they argue. This would be a continuation from Issue 3: Writing Identities from *Understanding Rhetoric*. It is to expand on the idea of a writing identity and into how your identity as whole affects your understanding of a text.

Activity:

First, lay down some guidelines for how to run the conversation/activity. This is to help the students understand that this is a safe space for intimate discussion. Some sample guidelines below from “Who Am I? The Question of Identity”:

1. Respect – Sometimes, we may not have the same opinions, but we still can listen respectfully.
2. Confidentiality – Anything of a personal nature that is said here should stay here.
3. Agree to Disagree – There may be times when the best thing that we can do is agree that we have different opinions.
4. One Mic – One person speaks at a time.
5. Acknowledge power dynamics – Try to stay aware that all of us come from different places and belong to different social identities.
6. Don’t make assumptions – Be careful not to make assumptions about fellow participants.
7. Listen for clarity, not debate.
8. Have fun! – This is a place to learn, explore, have fun.

These guidelines worked well for me. They all tie in together in trying to make a welcoming environment with simple rules in place to build this environment up.

Once guidelines have been set, the instructor has to make the decision as to whether the students will answer the questions in a public or private manner. If the instructor wants the students to answer privately, simply writing them down in a notebook should work. In addition, let the students know if the instructor will be seeing the answers to these questions, thus making the answers private to classmates, but public to the instructor. This might also make the students potentially uncomfortable, and then curtail their answers, which runs in contrast to the goal of the activity of them being honest and aware of specific aspects of their identities.

If you decided that this activity can work as a public activity in the class, there are still several ways to set it up. You can just have the students say out loud to the class the answers to the questions. Or perhaps you want to get the class out of their seats and move around. Then, depending on the question, different parts of the room can serve as potential answers to the questions and the students have to move around and stand in an area of the room when answering.

Some potential questions are:

What is your race?

What is your sexual orientation?

What is your gender identity?

What is your socioeconomic class?

What is your national origin?

What is your religious or spiritual affiliation, if there is one at all?

Do you have any physical/mental/learning/etc. disabilities?

Do you consider yourself a Republican/Democrat/liberal/conservative/communist/etc.?

What are your views on [insert issue here]?

Try to get at how students identify themselves with issues. It is very important that the instructor have a finger on the pulse of the class. How (un)comfortable might the students be answering these questions in public? In private?

We want to get them to understand that there are many different viewpoints to topics, even in this classroom, and that just because they are different doesn’t mean they are necessarily wrong. After the questions activity, the discussion would start segwaying into how our own personal beliefs might affect the way we argue about an issue. Should we let emotions get the best of us? How does our upbringing affect our views on topics? Ultimately coming to the understanding that while it is fine to have personal beliefs on issues, you sometimes must be able to split your own beliefs from a logical argument to understand how other people come at an argument.

Works Cited

Barnes, Tanesha. "Who Am I? The Question of Identity." 1 June 2010. Web. 27 Oct.

2014. <http://jlove.mvmt.com/files/2010/06/Who-Am-I.pdf>.

Goodman, Diane. "Helping Students Explore Their Privileged Identities." *Diversity*

*Digest*13.2 (2010): 10-11. *Diversity & Democracy*. Association of American

Colleges & Universities. Web. 2 Dec. 2014.

<http://www.diversityweb.org/DiversityDemocracy/vol13no2/vol13no2.pdf>.

Losh, Elizabeth M., Jonathan Alexander, Kevin Cannon, and Zander Cannon.

Understanding Rhetoric: A Graphic Guide to Writing. Boston: Bedford/St.

Martin's, 2015. Print.