

# Composing Theory and Pedagogy Examination

Spring 2000

## Instructions

You have four hours to complete this examination.

You must answer three (3) questions, one from each section of the exam.

Questions in section A are worth fifty percent (50%). Questions in sections B and C are each worth twenty-five percent (25%). Plan your time according to the value of the question.

In your responses be sure to refer to a range of sources. Do not write extensively on a major theorist or theory in more than one answer.

## Section A

1. Composition researchers and theorists, especially those in professional writing programs, are currently debating the implications of theories of situated learning. Lave and Wenger, for example, have coined the phrase “legitimate peripheral participation” to describe the way newcomers acquire skills and knowledge in workplace settings. Discuss some of the theoretical and pedagogical issues involved in this debate.

2. According to Jasper Neel, “For the teaching of writing, poststructuralism poses... such difficult questions as: What is an author? What does it mean to write? And to what degree do the privileged, academic discourses of the West write the writer rather than being written by the writer?” Discuss the impact of one or more poststructuralist theorists on composition research and pedagogy.

3. The field of composition theory and pedagogy is populated by many different critical perspectives. Current traditionalism, cognitivism, expressivism, constructivism, genre theory, and discourse analysis are a few examples. Making reference to one or more research perspectives, discuss how -- and with what consequences -- a composition researcher might position herself within such a broad theoretical spectrum.

## **Section B**

1. The Undergraduate Committee at the university where you are an untenured faculty member has asked you to propose a design for a semester-length course in Composition in which literary texts will be used. In particular, the Committee is looking for a course that would appeal to first year students. Write a letter to the Committee in which you outline your plans for the course and explain your choice of textbooks.

2. Based on a selection of texts from Category A and Category B, discuss and evaluate how effective the authors of textbooks in Category B are incorporating composition theory(s) into their handbooks.

## Section C

1. Speaking of the “popular”, Stuart Hall says, “It’s not just an indulgence and an affirmation; it’s a political, intellectual, pedagogical commitment.” Comment on this statement in terms of developing university-level writing programs.

2. Henry A. Giroux writes in “Disturbing the Peace: Writing in the Cultural Studies Classroom” about how he developed writing assignments “constructed so as to give students the opportunity to acknowledge their own emotional and affective investments in issues regarding race, colonialism, and the politics of representation” (p. 20). Using your own research in Cultural Studies as your guide, how would you go about designing writing assignments that included similar goals?