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Journal 5—EDSLW Chapter 11: Literature in the teaching of second lang. composition

I felt that this was a perfect chapter for me to read! It combines what I studied in school and I feel very strongly about this topic. When I taught ESL 015 last semester, I used very little literature. I spent most class time teaching a writing skill (thesis statement, transitions), genre (summary, essay), or technique (peer review, paraphrasing) and gave the students time in class to practice. The homework I had my students do forced them to practice what we learned in class in weekly journals. They also had three essays for the class and a presentation. They had to do some reading at the beginning of the semester to choose a topic for class, but once they chose the topic, they did very little reading for the rest of the semester. Part of my reason for not assigning more reading was because I felt that my students already had enough homework and also because I wasn’t interested in any of the readings in the book I was required to use. I think it’s important to use texts that American students are using and that are a part of American culture, and the book I was required to use did not fit. Looking back at last semester with what I read this chapter, I wish I would have done more with readings. I do think that reading and discussing readings can help students with writing, but the problem of my resources and time force me to think if it would have actually been feasible to incorporate readings into what I was already teaching.

Another topic I want to touch on is what kind of readings to use. The book brought up that multicultural books are a good alternative to the often intense and complex classical literature. I agree that multicultural books are great, and ESL students may especially appreciate these books because they may relate to the authors easier and better, but one problem is that American students do not read this literature unless they are literature majors and this literature is not a definitive part of American culture (at the moment!). In my opinion, it’s extremely important to help students become aware and a part of American culture, so learning about classical literature is one way to do this. As the chapter mentions, teachers are constantly referencing these works with the presupposition that students understand what they are referring to. As a teacher, I always think about my student’s best interest and what will help them the most in the end, and I believe that knowing classical literature will help them more than multicultural literature; it’s the Americans who need to study multicultural literature! A solution alternative to multicultural literature is using abridged versions of the great works, using short stories, poems, and essays by the great authors, or taking excerpts from important texts. Unfortunately, in one semester, students do not have enough time to learn writing skills, classical literature, and multicultural literature, so if I need to choose, I will try to balance classical literature and writing skills, and that is assuming that I have the control to choose my own texts in the first place. What do you do when you have to use a book of works that are neither culturally important like the classics, nor important for interpersonal, identity reasons like multicultural literature?