

Lucas Dietrich  
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My pedagogy engages students in what D. F. Mackenzie has called “the sociology of texts,” examining the social impact of reading and writing in literary history and in our time. Much like my scholarship, my pedagogy is concerned with the ways texts are produced and received, mediating interpersonal relationships and attitudes. I view reading and writing as part of a public conversation, and I encourage students to develop their own voices by entering this conversation.

In my survey of early American literature, students participate in this conversation by considering groupings of texts in relationship to one another: the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin alongside that of Olaudah Equiano, the sentimental writing of Harriet Beecher Stowe alongside Herman Melville’s dark romanticism. In one class session, students respond to a cluster of texts on Native American removal and resistance in the early nineteenth century, including work by Black Hawk, Petalesharo, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Elias Boudinot. The class discusses how each author uses specific writing strategies to connect with the reader. While Black Hawk offers a passionate indictment of settler-colonialism, Petalesharo approaches his audience cautiously, appealing to shared notions of truth and divinity. By examining these texts in conversation, students reimagine American history as a history of contending voices.

When I teach multiethnic literature, my students explore human experience across boundaries. Writers of color, working within traditions of marginalization, offer special insight to the human experience. This is what W.E.B. Du Bois described as being “born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight.” In my Contemporary Ethnic Literature course, students explore such insight through the work of Danzy Senna, Gene Luen Yang, and Octavia Butler. We consider how these authors adapt established genres to their own purposes. What happens when Senna and Yang adapt the bildungsroman to reflect racialized experiences? When Butler combines African American history and science fiction? The course concludes with a portfolio assignment, asking students to consider issues of race in their everyday lives. Several students have used the assignment to produce their own poetry and artwork, inspired by course readings.

Having earned my Ph.D. from the University of New Hampshire, my background in composition and rhetoric is essential to my teaching. Students in my classes develop their ability to write well-organized essays, employing appropriate terminology and tone. They also develop metacognitive skills for their writing process, from generating ideas to drafting and revising. For one assignment in my first-year writing course, students attend and report on local community events and exhibits. They interview attendees, take notes on relevant journalistic information, and share their findings—both as a written report and with an in-class presentation. These presentations are organized in the style of a colloquium, with panels and Q&A sessions, and they generate lively discussion among classmates. After the assignment is completed, I have helped several students to revise their reports for publication in the university newspaper. Working on this project, my students learn how communities are brought together through the process of reading and writing, and how their own voices can be used to shape public discourse.