

Questions for Student Interviews
About the Essay Anthology or Reader

To: Freshman English Policy Committee and
English for Foreign Students Committee

From: Steven J. Storla

Subject: Interviewing 306 and 306Q students

1) As part of my dissertation research I would like to interview around ten students enrolled in English 306 and 306Q about their perceptions of the reader (essay anthology) being used in their class. During the last few minutes of a class period, I would explain the project to the students, stressing that the interviews are not a requirement of the course and would have no bearing on their course grade. I would ask potential volunteers to stay after class a minute to arrange an interview time convenient for them.

2) Although I will also be interviewing composition instructors on their use of readers, no comparison or attempt at correlation will be made between the interviews with the instructors and those with their students.

3) Attached is a copy of my dissertation proposal and a list of questions for the student interviews.

1. What is the name of the essay anthology used in your class?
2. How is the anthology used in class?
3. How much class time is spent on activities involving the anthology?
4. Does your teacher often assign essays to be read from the anthology?
5. Do you discuss these essays in class?
6. What kinds of things do you talk about in your discussion?
7. What is the relationship or connection between the essays you read and the writing assignments your teacher gives?
8. Does your teacher sometimes use essay assignments (writing assignments) taken from the essay anthology?
9. Has using the essay anthology in this class helped you to improve your writing?
10. What do you think the connection is in general between reading and writing?

Steven Storla

REVISED DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

The Role of Essay Anthologies in Composition Classes for Advanced
ESL Students and for Native Users of English

The use of essay anthologies is a common practice in ESL composition classes as well as in composition classes for native speakers, yet relatively little work has been done examining either the content of these anthologies or the ways teachers use them in the classroom. The history of the use of reading materials in writing instruction has been documented by Hight (1949), Corbett (1971), Kennedy (1972 and 1980), and Berlin (1984). Connections between the processes of reading and writing have been explored from the perspective of cognitive psychology by Tierney and Pearson (1983) and Squire (1983). Smith (1983) and Eckhoff (1983) have explored reading/writing connections in the emerging patterns of literacy in young children.

For contemporary adult learners, the issue of the use of reading materials in writing courses has been discussed in a general way by O'Dea (1965), Meyers (1978), Bazerman (1980), Behrens (1980), and Katz (1981). More specific proposals for using essays in the composition classroom have been advanced by Lynskey (1957), Larson (1971), D'Angelo (1973), Gruber (1977), Spencer (1978), Adams (1980), Escholz (1980), and Trimmer and Hairston (1985). Extremely little has been published relating specifically to the use of essay material in composition classes for advanced ESL students, though Watson-Reekie (1984) discusses positive and negative aspects of such use.

I propose to investigate both anthologies and anthology use. My study will involve two research methodologies: Evaluation Research--analysis and evaluation of the five essay anthologies used in the Freshman Composition

classes for foreign students and for native users of English (E306 and E306Q) at The University of Texas at Austin; Survey Research--background information questionnaires and extended recorded interviews with 1) instructors of composition on their teaching practices using anthologies, and 2) students in composition classes on their perceptions of anthology use. Additionally, I may also observe the classes of the instructors and the students.

The objectives of this dissertation will be:

- 1) to evaluate essay anthologies used in composition classes;
- 2) To report on the uses classroom teachers make of these anthologies;
- 3) to report on the impressions students have of these anthologies and their use;
- 4) to make an assessment of the interaction between these anthologies as texts and their pedagogical functions;
- 5) to make a proposal for their judicious use as one component of an integrated writing program.

This research has important implications for the fields of composition and ESL methodology. It will suggest the extent to which the widespread use of anthologies is effective in helping students, ESL and non-ESL, become more effective writers. It will also reflect the extent to which composition textbooks and composition teachers are stressing writing as process as opposed to writing as product, since anthologized materials have the potential to be used with either emphasis. Furthermore, on a broader scale, research of this nature is needed in order to investigate the role textbooks and other course materials play in university classes in general.

My research will be based on the theoretical premise that strong psycholinguistic connections link the processes of reading and writing and that reading materials are used in writing classes, with varying degrees of

success, in order to pedagogically exploit these connections. For the first part of the study, the evaluation of the five essay anthologies as instructional materials, I will devise a model of evaluation to use with all of the anthologies in order to have a common basis for comparison. I will review existing models of textbook evaluation, but I doubt I'll find one suitable, given that essay anthologies are different in form and content from other textbooks. I'll probably have to develop my own model through working with the anthologies themselves. I envision that such a model will measure the variables of content, structure, and intention for both the particular selections (the essays), and the editors' contributions. As I survey the essay anthologies and review the literature on their use, I'll examine the assumptions which the anthologies and the literature on them make about the processes of reading and writing and about connections between the two. Explicit and implicit messages regarding the purpose of such compilations will be sought, and analyses of texts and of methods of presentation (e.g., use of glosses, advanced organizers, and exercises) will be undertaken.

For the second part of the study, the surveys and interviews, I will construct two brief short answer written surveys to obtain background information, and a set of open-ended interview questions designed to encourage exploration of different aspects of essay anthology use in the classroom. The interviews will be taped. The interviews with the instructors will be analyzed to determine 1) the reasons instructors have for including an essay anthology as a textbook for their class, 2) the goals they seek to accomplish through the use of the anthology, and 3) the actual activities they do and assignments they make which involve the anthology. The interviews with the students will be analyzed to determine 1) the potential worth they see in using reading materials in writing classes, 2) their conceptions of activities

and assignments which involve the anthology, and 3) the degree to which they feel use of the anthology is helping them improve their writing.

In both parts of the study, I will compare essay anthologies and their use in ESL composition classes and in composition classes for native users of English. Finally, based on my findings, I will make an assessment of the content, presentation, and utilization of essay anthologies in composition classes from a sociofunctional perspective, i.e. relating to their use within the cultural context of the composition course and reflecting the interplay between their structure and content, their uses--by the teacher and the students, and their role in the setting of the writing class.

Proposed Dissertation Outline -

Chapter 1 - Introduction to the topic and statement of the problem

Chapter 2 - Review of the literature on:

- the history of the use of reading materials in writing instruction;
- the reading/writing connection;
- current uses of anthologized expository essays in composition classes.

Chapter 3 - Description of data gathering and analysis procedures.

Chapter 4 - Report and analysis of findings from essay anthology evaluations.

Chapter 5 - Report and analysis of findings from interviews.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion:

- synthesis of findings
- implications for instruction
- suggestions for future research