MAKING WRITING MEANINGFUL FOR STUDENTS

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WHY AM I DOING THIS? WHY??
The research for this session comes from Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner, “What Meaningful Writing Means for Students.”

**The Meaningful Writing Project**

A study of over 700 students at 3 universities of varying sizes & demographics.
Students were asked:
What was your most meaningful writing project?
Why was it meaningful to you?
Findings:
Meaningful writing occurs when students are invited to:

a. Tap into the power of **personal connection**

b. **Immerse themselves** in what they are thinking, writing, and researching

c. Experience what they are writing as **applicable and relevant** to the real world

d. Imagine their **future** selves
Students should be encouraged to seek connections between their own interests and the subject, and subsequently to explore these connections.
In designing writing assignments, we need to ask ourselves:
Where are there opportunities for students to connect our course material to their personal lives?
How is this material applicable & relevant?
How does this connect to their future?
How can I provide an opportunity for them to immerse themselves in these things?
CREATING ASSIGNMENTS

In designing writing assignments, we need to ask ourselves:

Where can we connect students’ passions?

Their families?

Their community members?

Their past?

Their present?

Their future?

(or a combination of these influences)
Student project: “The Relationship between Vitamin D and Breast Cancer”

Why?

“I saw in the news recently Vitamin D is very hot, and it’s being implicated in many diseases... My aunt actually had breast cancer, so I thought I would see the role in breast cancer.”
Student project: “An Ethnography of Hockey-Fan Culture”

Why?

“My friend in my dorm, she was really into hockey, and she dragged me to this hockey game...I really wanted to analyze it because I was a newcomer to it. So it was sort of, kind of like an excuse to watch more hockey. But also, it was a really cool way to analyze what people did.”
Student project: “Looking at the World through an Anthropological Lens”

Why?
“I’m Indian and I grew up in an Indian household, but I went to school in a very white town...I constantly had these clashing cultures...it was sometimes difficult, sometimes kind of cool. When I took the class, it sort of made me feel better about my life, and it was just sort of, ‘Yes. This validates my life.’”
Student project: “Analyzing the Impact of Business Ethics in Today’s Economy and Society”

Why?
As a sophomore business major, this student was looking forward “to today’s ethically volatile and corrupted business practices.”
Composition 1: Defining an abstract concept such as the perfect spouse or successful learning.

Composition 2: Identifying and solving a problem in their future career field.

Literature: How can our course content help someone who is going through [a hardship]?
Prime the pump with shorter writings on how the students think, feel, or connect to the material.

Then have the students look back at these shorter writings for inspiration to larger writing assignments.
Ask yourself: how can my assignment be a growth opportunity for my students?
GROUP SHARE

How can you (or how have you) connected writing assignments to your students’ lives?

Personal
Immersive
Applicable/Relevant
Forward-Looking (Future)
CONTACT ME

Share your experiences with me

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