Cultivating Students' Investments in Writing
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What's Contributing to their Apathy

Prior experiences: teachers who don't care about their ideas and focus, instead, on grammar/mechanics or completion; experiences that confirm assumptions about innate writing ability
How to Intervene

Create a course in which writing is treated as a serious and important part of the disciplinary work; Value the development of their ideas

Suggested Goals

- Course should work like a lab of student ideas, bringing them into the scholarly conversation, encouraging them to get involved.
- Encourage collaboration.
- But also, create incentives for them to perform (compete with each other) – make them accountable to each other.
- Works-in-progress work best. Start with low stakes (e.g., freewriting). Make sure that they are comfortable sharing with each other by the time they share full drafts with their peers.
- Model for them how they should respond (you kick off feedback at beginning of semester and start pulling back as they get more confident and skilled).
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The Freewrite

The Rules:
1. Write whatever comes into your head.
2. Don't stop until time is called.
3. Don't edit.

Small Groups
1. One at a time, share your freewrites with your group members. You can read yours aloud or simply summarize it for your group.
2. Discuss, as a group, the struggles that you've identified in your freewrite. Does it seem like a common struggle for any writer, or is it particular to your classes or your discipline? Try to identify the source of the struggle (e.g., student apathy or fear, misunderstanding or lack of experience).

Freewrite, again
Now that you've talked with your group, what would you need to find out regarding the struggle you've identified in order to intervene in it?

GW, again
Brainstorm with your group how you might find the information you need -- e.g., creating a survey, conducting interviews, looking at scholarship in your discipline.
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Next Steps

- Resources
- How to conduct research (e.g., how to create a survey or how to analyze a study)

Both of these can be conducted in small groups in which students work together to identify and share resources and/or practice conducting research. You could have them share annotated bibliographies with each other on the same day they submit them to you for a grade, or you could ask them to present in small groups "on the conversation" that emerges around their chosen topics.
Identifying a Writing and Researching Process for the Course

An example:
1. Research question
2. Initial research: the histories, the contentions
3. Revised/focused research question
4. More research: establishing the conversation
5. Statement of purpose
6. Plan for paper
7. Draft + revision(s)
8. Edit + check Works Cited
9. Final
Group Work: you can use the same groups or switch them up for each stage.

*Always ask groups to share their work with the class. This is about valuing the work and about accountability.

Try "Featured Writers"
If you are interested in a one-on-one consultation or are looking for materials, etc., please contact me:

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