Notes on Mike Rose's "Remedial Writing Courses: A Critique and a Proposal"

"Remedial writing curriculum must fit into the overall context of a university education: students must, early on, begin wrestling with academically oriented topics that help them develop into more critical thinkers, that provide them with some of the tools of the examined life, and that, practically, will assist them in the courses they take. "

Rose conducted a survey (1980's) of university writing tasks and found

- most frequent assignment is "a calculated marshaling of information, a sort of exposition aimed at persuading...assuming the ability to reflect on a broad range of complex material, to select and order information, and to see and re-see data and events in various contexts

- no assignments asked students to narrate or describe personal experiences, to observe relatively immediate objects or events like the architecture or campus building, to express a general opinion on something not studied closely, to reflect on self.

- amongst academic audiences, there are a plurality of assumptive frameworks and conventions that arise from them... "For example, individual's reflections on personal events are considered legitimate evidence in many areas of sociology and anthropology, but are considered much less legitimate by behaviorist psychologists."

CONCLUSION

What is needed is "a remedial program that slowly but steadily and systematically introduced remedial writers to transactional/expositional academic discourse; that relied on texts and bits of texts preferably from a variety of disciplines so that students would learn how to work with data presented in social science as with detail from a short story; that created full, rich assignments which, again slowly and systematically, encouraged the student to develop his or her structural, rhetorical. stylistic facility; that alerted students to stylistic/rhetorical variation within the university.

Simple personal topics do not provide motivation (some students don't want to disclose, students know such topics are not "real" college work); "motivation is highly complex cognitive-affective phenomenon that includes perception of the difficulty of task and perception of the role of luck or skill in completing the task"

"Creating simple topics to aid in the correction of error, then might be a less successful strategy than we think--error cannot be isolated and removed; it can reemerge whenever a student moves onto a task that challenges him or her in new ways. Furthermore, we might be demoralizing our students by giving them the same kind of topic they have been writing on for many years.

Overly simple topics also pass on " an extremely constricted notion of what composing is."   And an over concentration on correctness leads to shallow empty writing...

"Just about the only rhetorical connection the correctness model established is the negative sociolinguistic one: don't err lest ye be judged."

Teaching thinking skills
- Presenting students with intellectual worthwhile problems
- assisting them as they work through them
- offering them strategies with which to explore them
- showing them how to represent and when necessary reduce them

The reading/writing connection
- Current reading theorists present reading as a kind of "composing process" in which readers construct meaning from text

- readers need to know the conventions, structures and intentions of particular discourses to produce them and likewise to comprehend them

- one's repertoire of discourse skills is built slowly and comprehensively through reading

- a major skill in academic writing is the complex ability to write from other texts--to summarize, to disambiguate key notions and useful facts and incorporate them in one's own writing, to react critically to prose.

What to teach
- definition, seriation, classification, summary, compare/contrast, analysis and academic argument found in survey of academic writing

- Organizational patterns should be taught as thinking strategies as well as discourse structures..."central to the way we explore, order and present information when we engage in transactional/referential discourse."

- create a meaningful. context for the use of discourse/thinking strategies