

Professor Ramser's class began promptly at 4 p.m., with virtually every seat in his classroom filled. An attendance sheet was circulated while the teacher humorously mimicked "silencing" a cellphone. On the whiteboard, the instructor had listed a comprehensive array of the projects intended for this four-hour gathering. The class "plan" listed 1) Outline; 2) Review of texts; 3) Student outlines. Centrally located on the board were topics taken from one of the course's texts, written by Andrea Lunsford: "Audience/Purpose/Stance/Context/Media/Design." Over the course of the next hour, Professor Ramser would refer repeatedly to this schematic as a means of focusing class discussion.

The instructor announced that first the class would consider in detail how to write an outline for the upcoming assignment. Specifically, he challenged the class to "work backwards" from one of the assigned readings, so that all could see how a logical, organized schematic lay behind an essay by Gary Soto. As a means of understanding outline form, Professor Ramser referenced two or three Internet sites that would be of use to students; specifically, he visited "Inspiration Maps" on the web, illustrating how particular features of the website would help in the coming weeks.

Methodically, Ramser engaged the entire class in a discussion of the main ideas of Soto's essay. What stood out at this particular juncture was the instructor's knowledge of each student's name and a personality trait that had obviously been discussed during the first week of class. (This was only the fourth meeting for this eight-week section.). Using associative nicknames, the teacher called on almost every class member during the next three-quarters of an hour. This personal approach invited relaxed but meaningful participation. By way of the Socratic method, the teacher asked a series of questions of participants, all the while taking notes on the whiteboard to organize an overview of the class's collective response. Even what appeared to be the more reticent students felt empowered to contribute, and at the end of the exercise several complex patterns of rhetorical strategies used by Gary Soto had been identified.

"Can we now see where Soto started and what he was intent on doing?" Professor Ramser asked. In an hour-long exercise, the instructor had helped the class to identify the author's writing priorities, as well as the methods Soto had used to articulate differing ideas. More, Ramser had successfully engaged the entire class; out of a plethora of diverse and occasionally unrelated responses, he guided class reflection to the point where the implications of a professional writer's rhetoric had become apparent. In effect, an "outline" of Soto's piece had been composed through guided class analysis.

The first hour of Dean Ramser's ENG 1A class was a testament to effective rhetorical, organizational, and discussion skills on the part of a writing teacher. As I left the class, an analysis of the remainder of the assigned readings began, and the instructor once again challenged his class to pursue an in-depth understanding of subject and strategy.