

Writing Topics for Essay #2: “Learning Power: The Myth of Education and Empowerment”

Choose one of the following topics and write an essay of about three to four pages in response. In your essay, be sure to make explicit references to the critical essay in our text (by Tannen). Keep in mind that you need to **engage with** the critical essay, to **integrate and incorporate** them into your arguments, not just mention or briefly quote from them.

1. In her essay, Deborah Tannen discusses the ways in which the “argument culture,” prevalent in many classrooms, may appeal more generally to males than to females, possibly putting women at a disadvantage. One controversial method to help correct the problem is to set up schools or individual classes reserved exclusively for women. **In an essay, explore the advantages of such a program** (in other words, you’re playing “the believing game” that Tannen discusses). How could these segregated classrooms help to overcome the problems she describes? In your essay, tell how you would set up such a program (for instance, would you separate the whole school or individual classes within an integrated school? how would the students be assigned -- voluntarily or not?). Keep in mind that your program would likely be met with a great deal of skepticism or even hostility, as segregated classes go against American ideals of equality -- how would you respond to the objections you would likely encounter? (You may also use the short article “Too Few Women -- Figure it Out” by Leonard Sax to support your arguments.)

2. In her essay, Tannen describes some of the differences in the ways men and women ask and respond to questions in the classroom, and she has her students conduct some “field research” of their own, making observations in their classes of the teaching methods used and the behavior of male and female students (§16-24). For this essay, **conduct a similar investigation** in one of your classes, or in a class in which you are not enrolled (be sure to get the instructor’s permission before you do so). You need to decide beforehand specifically what to observe about the instructor’s approach (lecture, discussion, or both? does the instructor attempt to elicit student participation, and if so, how?) and the students’ responses and interactions (how do female and male students differ, with each other and with the instructor, in their questions, comments, or responses?). In your essay, be sure to describe the details of the class you visited, in addition to analyzing your findings. How do they confirm or fail to confirm Tannen’s ideas about the “argument culture”: does it exist in the classroom you researched, and how do you evaluate its presence or absence?