



Teaching in the 21st Century

*Adapting Writing Pedagogies
to the College Curriculum*

Edited by
Alice Robertson
Barbara Smith

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TEACHING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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PEDAGOGIES TO THE
COLLEGE CURRICULUM

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ALICE ROBERTSON
and
BARBARA SMITH

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Series Editor's Foreword

Princess Di has recently found her place on the shelf of cultural studies texts. And whether that place is well-deserved or not, a recent volume on Princess Di reminds me of the earlier days when folks outside the fold of cultural studies spoke dismissively of it as “Madonna Studies.”

Unlike those critics, I have felt that a part of the job of cultural studies teachers was to make available to their students critical readings of the world outside the classroom. Sometimes, as during the Persian Gulf War, I had felt an absence of teaching materials. At other times, like the Anita Hill hearings, the Rodney King riots, the O.J. trial, or even the silliness of the Bill-Monica affair, I have profited from the smart readings provided by my colleagues in the field.

However, in attending to the events outside the walls of the academy, cultural studies practitioners have often forgotten about the crucial site where these oppositional knowledges are mobilized: the classroom. This series with Garland—“Cultural Studies in the Classroom”—is a response to that particular lack.

Books in this series aim to focus on the deployment of cultural studies knowledges in the pedagogical space where teachers spend such a large part of their time. By paying particular attention to the classroom, we bring cultural studies back to our students.

This also functions as a reality check. What—and how—are our students learning? Paradoxically, it is only by returning to these questions in the academy that we escape the danger of having remained merely academic. If we do this work well, cultural studies as an intellectual project in the future might have a shelf life that is longer than dead princesses’.

Amitava Kumar
University of Florida

Preface

Pedagogical strategies stimulated by the resurgence and redirection of writing instruction since the late 1950s have matured and broadened as a result of both thoughtful reflection on actual class practice and increasingly complex theoretical connections. The articles in this collection provide evidence of the value of these strategies in classes in all disciplines. Inevitably (and appropriately) these strategies have been altered to suit their new contexts, but their roots remain firmly embedded in innovative practices developed first for the writing classroom.

Writing instruction occupies a unique place in education. Its ancestors—Greek, Roman, and medieval rhetoric—were far more theoretical than practical in their approaches to their subject. But beginning with lists and discussions of figures and tropes and with treatises on letter writing in the late Middle Ages, rhetoric began a move toward the pragmatic which steadily, although not consistently, focused on prescriptive instruction. In the early years in this country, such instruction acquired the label of “current-traditional.” In the “current-traditional” classroom, students analyzed texts structured more or less according to certain patterns and then were given assignments to create their own texts built on these same patterns. Form and formula, for the most part, took precedence over content and subject matter.

However, when rhetoric in a more classical sense reentered the picture, it came with a heavy emphasis on invention—an aspect of rhetoric which teachers and scholars realized was being shortchanged. This emphasis on invention, in turn, led practitioners to begin to ponder the mys-

tery of how writing actually gets done, from the first glimmer of an idea to final proofreading, including all the recursive moves in between. These ponderings gave birth to what has come to be called the “process movement,” which dominated writing instruction well into the nineties. At the heart of this “movement” lies a recognition of the effectiveness of teacher and peer intervention while writing is getting “done.” It is the strategies developed to encourage and enrich such intervention that have begun to affect education in many unpredictable but often gratifyingly profitable ways.

Involvement with students while they are writing enables teachers and researchers to begin to understand how ideas develop and how knowledge is constructed. Such awareness is obviously important in any and all education areas, as the essays in this collection document so well. Peer-group interaction and an emphasis on discussion also enable us to observe students’ thinking processes and the ways in which they come to know. As a result, we are all becoming better teachers.

But we recognize too that “coming to know” is not the same process in all disciplines. Consequently, teachers in these disciplines have begun to reflect on how they have made changes in these strategies. Those of us who are writing teachers have seen our own strategies come back to us—often improved and enriched by our colleagues in other departments. This collection focuses on adding to these original strategies in the hopes that these new tactics developed by today’s composition and rhetoric “trainees” and new teachers will improve and enrich this already-in-progress exchange, thus making our classrooms in all disciplines more engaging and effective.

Why should strategies such as those outlined and analyzed in these essays have developed first in the writing classroom? I think the answer lies in the very nature of language itself. The process movement stimulated all of us to consider the role of language in learning, particularly the role of language interactions and active engagement with others in discussion. We have come to understand that “translating” what we read and hear into our own words leads to the making of knowledge in all fields of study. Teachers in other classrooms cannot and usually do not ape the activities and assignments of the writing classroom; they find their own ways to stimulate intense language interaction—both through writing and talking. Teachers promote classroom discussion, peer interaction, and feedback, with response to early drafts in combination with the ways of learning of their particular discipline. The richness of this mix is amply documented in this collection. It will be a valuable prod to increased

reflection by all of us about our own classrooms as well as a compendium of practical suggestions to make our own classrooms centers of active learning.

Pat Belanoff
SUNY-Stony Brook

Acknowledgments

Writing is a collaborative act and this book, too, is the result of the efforts and encouragement of a number of people who deserve to be acknowledged here:

Pat Belanoff, who never stopped believing in us and this project;

Paul Dolan, our Stony Brook colleague who, three years ago, pushed us into actually starting work on the project we had been talking about for so long;

Leslie Chilton, one of our authors who voluntarily gave up her Christmas vacation to help with the final editing of this collection;

Judi Hardin, English department secretary who worked tirelessly to type the final version of our manuscript;

All our colleagues at Western Illinois University and the College of Mount Saint Vincent who listened to our complaints, held our hands, and helped us solve our problems;

And, last but never least, our families who put up with and supported us during the three years it took to complete this project. Specifically, from Barbara, "Personally, I am grateful for the conversations I've had about this book, writing, and the acquisition of knowledge with my husband, Ira Berger, and for his and my children, Jamie and Brett's, unwavering and loving support." And from Alice, "I wish to especially thank my son Jeff, who listened patiently to all my complaints and problems (about the book, academia, and life in general); he was always there for me and that has made all the difference."

Introduction

Today's college classrooms seldom resemble the traditional halls-of-ivy images that so long dominated the American conception of higher education. The present widespread shift in student demographics in the last three decades—more first-generation college students coming from more diverse backgrounds with less academic preparation—has created a completely different classroom population, one that the standard lecture format, so long the hallmark of a university education, often fails to reach.

Acknowledging the problem and attempting to address it, a number of universities like the University of Minnesota and Northwestern have recently instituted teacher training courses for their Ph.D. candidates in all fields. What these teachers need to know in order to teach, what their nontraditional students need in order to learn are decentered, interactive classrooms that directly involve and engage students in their own learning processes. If this assertion sounds familiar, it should, because it is the basis of the revolution and restructuring organization that occurred in college writing classrooms over twenty years ago. Composition teachers like Mina Shaughnessey in the City University of New York system faced this issue as early as 1977 and began to devise strategies and approaches to reach this new and diverse student population. The results of the pedagogical experimentation and development of early pioneers like Shaughnessey have been incorporated into composition-teacher-training practicums for English PhDs for almost two decades, and those practicums have produced a new generation of college professors trained in the art of creating student-centered, collaborative classroom commu-

nities. This collection is really their story, narratives of their successes in implementing and adapting composition's interactive pedagogies to their own students in their own classrooms.

Firmly established Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs have already successfully exported the first and most important concept of these classrooms—writing to learn—to other college disciplines. The purpose of this collection is to reinforce that exportation by expanding it and introducing other successful pedagogies developed in writing classes to those same disciplines. These authors have already successfully adapted these strategies in their own content-based classrooms and now seek to share their adaptations with colleagues from all areas of the college curriculum.

This book is not simply about ways to use writing itself in other classrooms. It is not campaigning for more or longer papers or essays rather than objective exams. It focuses instead on a wide variety of pedagogical approaches and specific teaching techniques, activities, and assignments that grew out of composition training and can be effectively exported to the classrooms of literature and other disciplines.

Most of the contributors were trained, as part of their PhD program, in composition theory and practice. All the authors—both English PhDs and WAC-trained professors in other disciplines—discuss how composition theory informs their teaching (evaluation processes, presuppositions about language, the making of meaning, discourse analysis) and how they implement their own philosophies in the classroom to plug into their students' learning processes. They have, in a variety of ways, adapted the principles of those theories and the techniques and activities derived from them for literature and other “content” classrooms. While writing processes are often involved in their adaptations, developing new classroom dynamics and teaching practices that create learning-centered classrooms is our focus.

Writing theorists, regardless of the particular philosophies they embrace (social constructivism, expressionism, traditional rhetoric, etc.), believe that writing is a cognitive process rather than just an act of recording what one already knows. Hence, their classroom activities and assignments go beyond the recording of knowledge through essay exams and term papers. Writing theorists also believe that knowledge is socially constructed and acquired through a series of certain learning processes. Hence, they develop activities that involve collaborative forms and sequenced strategies that tap into those learning processes. They also approach texts with the understanding that these texts invite active col-

laboration of the readers in the same way that the collaborative classroom invites participation of the students.

This collection of twenty essays suggests and discusses ways for teaching assistants, beginning professors, and inexperienced writing-to-learn instructors in any discipline to adapt and modify successful interactive formats originally developed in composition classes to enhance teaching and learning in their own disciplines. To make this collection as comprehensive and broad as possible, we are including authors from two-year schools, four-year colleges, and research universities located throughout the country. All have experience teaching writing and “content” courses and base their articles on proven composition theories and practical classroom experience. Additionally, there is no one theoretical bias here either; the contributors range from traditional classical rhetoricians through the more popular expressionists to the now dominant social constructionists. All the authors recognize the degree to which cultures reciprocally shape us as well as our students and attempt to deal with those cultural forces in their classrooms by being aware of them and being reflective and understanding about them. While all their articles blend theory and practice and a few are highly theoretical, most are almost entirely practical adaptations easily accessible for readers in any discipline. Someone teaching biology at UCLA, a history professor in a midwestern community college, and a literature instructor at Oberlin can all find strategies to enhance learning in their classrooms in this text. Any college professor responsible for preparing graduate students to teach on the college level in any field will find here a series of general pedagogies and specific approaches that will, if incorporated into their teacher training now, greatly enhance their future classroom performance.

The collection itself consists of twenty essays—fifteen from composition-trained English professors and five from WAC converts from other disciplines. These five essays were chosen because they represented the widest possible range among other discipline-specific courses; history and film are text-based “humanities” fields very similar to literature while mathematics and computer science represent “hard scientific” disciplines as far removed, in content and purpose, from English studies as an area can be. Yet all five record the successful implementation of wellknown WAC techniques and strategies into their own classrooms. We opened the collection with these “success stories” to prove that writing techniques can be imported and adapted to any college classroom. The fifteen articles that follow and comprise the bulk of this collection

provide a whole range of new, lesser-known approaches and strategies that, like their more famous WAC counterparts, will also enhance and improve instruction in all kinds of courses.

In "Teaching from Within," Stephen Tchudi and Dick Davies set the stage for our narrative of importation by describing the integration of writing pedagogies into a university-wide seminar program at the University of Nevada-Reno. Tchudi, who heads the seminar program, outlines the course structure and background and provides the rationale for its writing focus; Davies, his colleague and a history professor at Reno, provides the specific example for Tchudi's general program—a detailed description of his use of writing techniques in his particular seminar class, "Sports and Society." Leslie Chilton's article, "*It Came from Aristotle*: Rhetoric and the Film Class," describes a teaching format at Arizona State University that adapts classical Aristotelian paradigms to the teaching of film. Her comparison/contrast structure shifts her course focus away from traditional thematic analyses and enables her to integrate social, political, and cultural studies into a film class.

In "Why Lecture?" and "Experiences with Writing Assignments," Tchudi and Davies' hard science counterparts from Butler University, Judith Morrel and Jonathan Sorenson from mathematics and computer science respectively, recount in detail how they have adapted a series of WAC approaches and techniques to their own classrooms. Their unexpected "success stories" cover a number of their courses and include specific graded and nongraded writing assignments as well as general rationales for designing and conducting collaborative class structures to replace the accepted lecture format. Kathleen Schmalz's essay, "Informing Our Values and Sexual Behavior through the Use of Writing Communities," asserts that when teaching affective behavioral components (feelings, values, and attitudes), it is difficult to use the lecture format to accomplish her objective, which is to get students to clarify their own values in the light of alternative perspectives. Small-group discussion works well because it provides the participants with a way to talk about sexual concerns—a sensitive issue in our culture—and not feel threatened. Through a highly-structured small group setting, Dr. Schmalz enables her students not only to identify their own issues in the area of sexuality and other complex and potentially controversial topics, but empowers them to formulate their reactions to these issues based on an informed consideration of their previous thoughts, present ideas, readings, writing exercises, and peer feedback.

Having proven that writing techniques and approaches work in such a wide range of other disciplines, the collection next focuses on the fifteen articles by English professors. These were chosen to create as eclectic a collection as possible to cover all the bases, so to speak. We wanted to introduce a maximum number of new strategies and approaches from all levels of postsecondary education (university, college, and community college venues), all kinds of schools (private, public, research, teaching), in all kinds of geographical areas (rural, urban, midwest, northeast, southern, western—even the University of Alaska is represented here).

The first of these articles, Glenn Klopfenstein's "Students Writing the Ghetto into Short Fiction," describes his teaching experience getting nontraditional literature students involved in their texts through personal experience writing in an urban blue-collar New Jersey community college. Representing a four-year state school in upstate New York, Kevin Railey writes of "Teaching Literature As/Is A Process," an essay that focuses on refining students' reading abilities through a process approach.

Two articles focus on interdisciplinary classrooms and ways to involve today's students in the often diverse and sometimes difficult material they encounter in such courses. Barbara Smith's "Role-Playing in the Interdisciplinary Classroom" describes an exercise in which students in class assume the personas of characters in the assigned text. This "acting process" not only forces them to engage directly with assigned material: it also helps them to empathize and eventually understand an "other" point of view, one often alien to their own. Additional perspectives are gained when students research and roleplay approaches from diverse professional arenas in order to see the complexities inherent in a particular issue, ultimately resulting in the design of an effective, comprehensive strategy for problem solving. Combining poetry, politics, performance, and writing, Amitava Kumar's article, "Performing Politics: Poetry in a Writing Classroom," focuses on using poetry to introduce and discuss politics from a multicultural perspective. He believes that connecting poetry with performance allows him to reach students on an immediate and effective level and then engages them with discussion of complex political issues. His drama techniques could easily be successfully exported to other content courses like history, sociology, and psychology.

Collaboration and community have always been at the heart of successful writing classes. In "A Pedagogy of Community and Collaboration: A Beginning," Bill Broz outlines a series of steps teachers can fol-

low to establish just such a collaborative community in their own classrooms. Based on two courses he recently taught at Western Illinois University, this article focuses on the importance of peer and teacher interaction in establishing effective classroom communities. Approaching collaboration from another aspect, Hector Vila's "Authority, Collaboration, and Ownership: Sources for Critical Writing and Portfolio Assessment" argues for importing writing portfolios into literature classes. Using portfolios in literature (or any content course) will, he asserts, enable students to integrate their own experiences with the content of the course and thus enhance their mastery of the content itself.

Christopher Weaver's "Interpretative Communities: Making Use of Readings and Misreadings in the Literature Classroom and Elsewhere" shifts the focus from collaboration to community; but since his concern is designing workshop courses based on peer interaction, he too accents collaborative learning as an essential tool for effectively reaching and engaging students. His article advocates transporting the peer workshop format so popular in writing courses into his literature classroom at the University of Alaska-Juneau to enhance discussion of readings and help develop the "meaning(s)" of texts through interactive social construction. His techniques are easily adaptable to any text-based course.

Reading is the focus of another article, "Read, Write, and Learn: Improving Literacy Instruction across the Disciplines," coauthored by Bonnie Hain, an English Language Arts specialist with the Maryland State Department of Education, and Richard Louth, a professor at Southeastern Louisiana University. Based on reader response theory, this essay first traces the reading process, outlines student deficiencies in that process, and then proposes uniting writing and reading to improve student comprehension of difficult texts. They argue that reading, like writing, is a process, albeit an individual one, and it too can be taught. Readers, like writers, can be made aware of their own processes in order to control and use them efficiently. While teaching reading may sound like an activity that should be relegated to the primary grades, our experience has taught us that, as the complexity of texts increases, basic reading skills are no longer adequate for student access to the deep structure of their required college reading material. Hence, poor student performance results.

Also concerned with the reading process is Diane Delia Croce and Graham Everett's "Emerging Meaning: Reading as a Process." This article describes an experiment in teaching reading processes to Adelphi University students in a core-curriculum course called "The Modern Condition." They underscore that "reading, like writing, is a develop-

mental and ongoing skill” and discuss methods teachers can employ to help students develop and hone that skill in any text-based class.

While several reading theories play important roles in Della Croce and Everett’s article, literary theory surfaces in a number of the essays in the collection. Alice Robertson’s “Critical Theory: A Jump Start and Road Map for Student Writers” describes a semester-long classroom experiment in which students were asked to use contemporary critical theories as methods of investigating texts and organizing and writing analytical essays about those texts. She argues that student writing and comprehension improved because students learned to use feminism, marxism, psychoanalytic theory, reader response theory, and the cultural studies approach as heuristics for reading, discussing, and writing about the assigned texts: short stories, poems, plays, and a novel. The same heuristic—using theoretical methodologies to approach texts—can be adapted to any theoretically-based discipline.

More theoretically grounded but equally practical for all disciplines is Mike Hill’s “Teaching, Writing, Changes: Disciplines, Genres, and the Errors of Professional Belief.” Based on a re-reading of the writing profession and its relation to literary studies in much the same way that Mina Shaughnessy examined the logic of error in *Errors and Expectations*, this article seeks to apply both the process-oriented and metacognitive approaches to learning to the construction of a senior seminar he taught in English/Communication Arts/History at Marymont College in New York City.

Also concerned with the literature/composition relationship is Patricia Comitini’s essay, “The Tie that Binds: Toward an Understanding of Ideology in the Composition and Literature Classroom (and Beyond).” Positioning ideology as both the intermediary and link between the two areas, she discusses utilizing popular culture to make students aware of their own ideological positions, thus enabling them to recognize and “read” the positions of others as expressed in complex and difficult texts. The students’ openly discussing and writing about these ideologies allowed her to naturally integrate history, politics, and sociology into the literary works those students were reading in her Introduction to Literature class at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania.

Equally theoretical but with a totally practical application is Christopher Schroeder’s “Blurring Boundaries: Rhetoric in Literature and Other Classrooms.” Like Comitini, he seeks to dissolve the boundaries between literature and composition, but the tools he selects are tactics from classical rhetoric. His original distinction that writing classes

are designed for the production of texts and literature classes for the consumption of texts blurs when both courses are viewed, and taught, from the perspective of rhetoric, Edward P.J. Corbett's "The Enabling Discipline."

Rob Jacklosky's "The ComPosition-ing of *Culture and Anarchy*" uses the example of teaching a complex work to illustrate involving students in their own learning process by creating canonical conflict in the classroom. He contends that applying composition theory to Arnold's controversial text engenders discussion and reaction that helps working-class and marginal students find their voices in our alien academic culture.

Closing the collection is probably the most comprehensive of the articles, comprehensive in the sense that it involves more different disciplines in a single course than any other essay. Michael Bernard-Donals' "Case Studies in the Writing Classroom: Theory and Practice" presents the history of his use of "case-based education" in his writing classes and his students' exploration of and writing about complex research subjects. He outlines in detail a course that, through the use of case studies, pairs rhetoric with a series of other fields—literature, science, politics, and so forth. The applications for other disciplines are immediately obvious.

Overall, though all the essays deal with similar pedagogical issues, each presents a different approach or arrives at a different solution. None is redundant, and all have direct practical applications to many contentbased courses in today's college curriculum. What they have in common is a rejection of the traditional lecture mode of the teacher-centered classroom and a desire to create, using pedagogies they have internalized through writing instruction, a student centered, collaborative community which includes and embraces all our students. The interactive collaborative spaces they create allow teachers and students to engage with complex subjects from any discipline, "make meanings," and promote understanding together.

Alice Robertson

Barbara Smith

ESSAY 1

Teaching from Within

Meshing Interdisciplinary Learning and Writing Pedagogy in a University Seminar Program

STEPHEN TCHUDI

RICHARD O.DAVIES

Seven years ago, the University of Nevada at Reno instituted a university-wide seminar program containing a major writing component. This essay, written in two parts by two professors, describes how this program was introduced, implemented, and developed. The first part explains the implementation of the seminar program under the leadership of English professor Stephen Tchudi and discusses background, course structure, and results. In the second part, Richard Davies, a history professor at the same school, provides a specific, personal view of the effects and results of teaching such a university-wide seminar. The conclusions of both authors end the chapter.

UNIVERSITY SEMINARS: ORIGINS AND PHILOSOPHY

In 1992, the associate vice president for academic affairs at the University of Nevada-Reno, invited faculty members to apply for an administrative internship to develop a freshman-year seminar experience. Like such programs on many campuses, this one would place new students with experienced faculty as a way of welcoming freshmen to the university community. Through a process much too long and dreary to be recounted here, I was selected for the internship and developed a program we call the University Seminars. These are sections of the conventional English 102—boringly entitled Composition II—taught by faculty members and administrators from units across campus. In a sense, this structure is the reverse of traditional writing-across-the-curriculum projects: It might be labeled “Writing Across the Curriculum Comes to Freshman English.”

As I write after the fifth year of the program, over fifty faculty members and administrators have participated, offering about ten sections of the course each year, open as an alternative to English 102. Class size is limited to eighteen (regular freshman English classes enroll twenty-two) as a modest perk for faculty teaching writing for the first time. In the fall semester, all sections of the course are taught to honors students, generally first-year students who, because of their writing skill, have waived English 101. The clientele for the spring semesters is quite different: Seminars are open to any student in the university needing the required 102, and this may range from second-semester freshmen who are proceeding through the university on schedule to fifth- and sixth-year seniors who have delayed taking the required 102 as long as possible (or who have taken it previously and failed the course). Ideally, we'd like the model to be attractive to any student in the university, with the course taken as early in the student's career as possible.

Faculty have been especially imaginative in coming up with topics that reflect their own interests yet will engage the interests and sensibilities of students. Current offerings include such courses as Reading, Thinking, and Writing about Controversies, taught by a journalism professor; South American Women and Gender Issues, by a professor of foreign languages; Culture and Dance, from health and physical recreation; Language and Social Interaction, by a professor of English as a second language; From Gutenberg to Cyberspace, by a professor of education; and Medicine and Science, team-taught by a chemistry professor and a member of the medical school faculty. Our all-time student favorite seminar is *Star Trek, Visions of Justice*, taught three times by a professor of criminal justice.

The response to these seminars has been gratifying, from both students and faculty. We presently have a backlog of over twenty faculty members who'd like to teach in the program, but who could not be worked in due to limitations of available sections. One of our "regulars" is the coauthor on this paper, Dick Davies from the Department of History, who has thrice taught an extremely popular seminar in *Sports in American Society*.

In developing these seminars, I was faced with the core problem directly discussed in this volume: how to adapt writing pedagogy to discipline-specific (or in this case, interdisciplinary-specific) classrooms. In particular, I wondered how I could encourage faculty members and administrators who might or might not have had much experience teaching writing to do so comfortably. Perhaps predictably, one of the most com-

mon reasons offered by faculty who *declined* to teach was their discomfort with writing: “I struggled with freshman English myself; I’m not all that happy with my professional writing, and now you want me to teach it?!”

The approach that I developed grows from my own teaching of college writing in a variety of settings and from my allegiance to what I call an “experiential” approach to learning writing. I believe that writing is better learned than taught: learned through the experience of writing (with plenty of coaching and mentoring), and with human experience as the fuel that drives the writing engine.¹

In reassuring instructors, I ask them to forget about trying to be “English professors,” with all that implies. Rather, I argue that the instructors’ knowledge of their own field(s), whether medicine, chemistry, criminal justice, Asian-American studies, political science, or nursing is precisely the sort of rich experience they should share with their students. “Your job,” I tell them, “is not to teach rhetoric or grammar or spelling, but to help students engage with the material, to think about it, and to share their ideas and thoughts with others.” I also argue that, although we are necessarily concerned with surface correctness, a great many of students’ surface problems come, not from lack of language skill, but from lack of experience handling complex ideas. Moreover, the university has a writing center that can offer proofreading as well as revision guidance. From a theoretical standpoint, then, the University Seminar approach to writing (and oral language) sees language development as an outgrowth of experience rather than a formula or restrictive container for it.

I also decided early in the project that formal in-service training in writing was probably *not* appropriate for the University Seminar instructors. In the first place, it was pragmatically impossible to get these folks together for as much as a half day of workshopping. More important, I wanted to stress that what I was saying about the teaching of writing applied to the learning of the teaching of writing as well; that is, we could coherently discuss writing not through formal workshops but through informal sessions where we dealt with problems as they arose. We thus developed a collegial system of sharing pedagogical wisdom, where instructors for upcoming seminars are invited to sit in on a series of informal “syllabus swaps” and brown-bag lunches with those currently teaching in the program. Perhaps not surprisingly, virtually any topic I could propose for a formal workshop comes up in our brown-bag discussions: How do we encourage reluctant writers? What about students who have

great ideas but no fluency? What do I do about spelling and grammar? Is there a right way to respond to student papers?

It's important to note that all these questions are discussed in the context of the instructor's (inter)disciplinary course, in the context of struggling with a paper about justice in the *Star Trek* series, or issues in sports ethics, or narratives as a form of academic writing, or using the internet as a research tool. In that way, I am able to keep the discussions focused through the central premise of the program, that the instructor's knowledge of the discipline and his or her concern for young people's ideas are what make a "teacher of writing."

Over the five years, in fact, a considerable body of composition-teaching wisdom has grown up in the UNR seminars and is passed along from one teaching generation to the next, by me, by second- and thirdtime instructors, by osmosis and word of mouth at the brown bags. I should add that I have taught the seminars myself, once with the university president, a political scientist, on the theme Current Issues and Enduring Concerns, once with the associate vice president for academic affairs, a physicist and car restoring hobbyist, on *The Automobile in American Life*. Obviously such experience gives me the opportunity to raise issues in the brown-bag seminars. Perhaps not surprisingly, my questions as a teacher of content/writing are not very different from those of the other faculty.

Typically a University Seminar opens with a period of exploration of the main topic with most of the input provided by the instructor. Whether we're studying automobiles or sports issues, the professor supplies readings, engages the students in discussion, and encourages response. To put everyone at ease—faculty *and* students—we encourage informal writing for the first third of the course: We call these "commentaries," and they are rather like a public journal in form and focus. The students articulate their reactions to the ideas floating in the seminar. In the middle third of the course, the professors ask the students themselves to find material on the topic through library and internet searches, through interviews, through film and video archives. Students collect and share information; they continue to write commentaries, but they are increasingly engaged in noting, summarizing, synthesizing, and evaluating documents they have discovered for themselves. In the final third of the course, each student chooses a topic related to the course theme and develops a research paper on it. But this is not the typical college research paper of footnotes and passive voice; we encourage the instructors and students to fill these papers with voice, energy, commitment, passion, and style, reflecting our

belief (to reiterate) that the best writing emerges when people are richly engaged in their study.

Some instructors use this part of the course as an occasion to introduce real-world writing in their own fields or disciplines, say, the form of the environmental impact statement for a course on Range and Wildlife Management or a public policy statement in a course on Voices of South African Women. Other instructors encourage students to seek out a form of presentation that will allow them to best express their ideas, so we have had students create film scripts, videos, photo essays, feature articles, and letters to the editor. In addition, each student in the seminar does a poster display summarizing his/her research, and these posters are shown at a mass meeting of all seminars, a closing event where 100–150 students set up displays with posters and papers, respond to one another's work (using Post-its provided by the management), and award gold seals to projects they think are particularly well done. In addition, within each seminar section, the students themselves select two papers they think are particularly well done for publication in a University Seminar journal, *I²* or *Eye-Squared*, which reinforces the notion that what students see and think (the Eye and the I) is multiplied in power when put in writing.

TEACHING A UNIVERSITY SEMINAR

During seventeen midcareer years devoted to the responsibilities of academic dean, vice president for academic affairs, and interim president, I had many opportunities to address the importance of undergraduate writing. From my lofty administrative perches, I endorsed, without in-depth reflection, the concept of Writing Across the Curriculum, and I publicly stated upon several occasions that I considered freshman composition to be one of the most important courses in the curriculum because it provides the foundation upon which a college education is built.

When actually presented with the opportunity to teach writing in the University Seminars program at the University of Nevada-Reno, I had serious doubts. However, given my previous comments as well as a curiosity about teaching in a field other than American History, I could scarcely decline. The seminar concept was appealing to me—putting senior faculty into a freshman writing class. The assumption of the program is that faculty will draw on their own writing experiences and have the freedom to devote the entire seminar to a major theme. It was, however, with substantial unease that I accepted the invitation. Although I have published extensively in my field of modern American history, have

written far more academic planning documents and curriculum reports for governing boards and legislative committees than I care to recall, and have contributed scores of articles to mainstream journals and newspapers, the prospect of standing in front of a group of freshmen and suggesting that I could teach them how to write effectively was daunting. Far removed from my safe academic haven of history, lacking any formal training in composition theory and practice, and with my knowledge of the rules and nomenclature of grammar seriously eroded, I experienced apprehension reminiscent of my early days as an inexperienced teaching assistant at the University of Missouri four decades ago.

Fortunately, the University Seminars program is well structured, with the care and feeding of neophyte composition instructors such as myself given a high priority. The instructor's manual provided me with clear course objectives and practical suggestions for course organization. Syllabi of prior seminars were available. The various workshops and brown bags provided opportunities to discuss goals and teaching strategies with the program director as well as with other faculty.

One of the most appealing aspects of the program for students and faculty alike is that the faculty member is expected to focus upon a topic or theme drawn from his or her own research and/or teaching. While my fellow faculty pursued such intriguing subjects as the murder mystery, medical ethics, gender issues, natural resource management, research in cyberspace, and the current incarnations of The Seven Deadly Sins, I elected to examine the unique place of sports within modern American life. My choice of a seminar theme grew out of a lifetime of experiences, including an undistinguished high school athletic career, a brief stint as a sports journalist, a longtime avocation as a high school and college basketball referee, extensive faculty committee work on athletic governance and coach search committees, oversight of intercollegiate athletic programs as an academic administrator, a lifetime of daily reading two or three newspaper sports sections as well as *Sports Illustrated* and *Sporting News*, and more recently the creation and offering of an upper-division course, History of Sports in America, and publication of an interpretative history.

I initially offered the Sports and Society seminar in the fall of 1995, and made repeat appearances in 1996 and 1997. Enrollment was restricted to eighteen students who had earned admission to the Honors Program (again, the fall semester seminars are open to honors students, the spring seminars to all students). Although I had the privilege of working with bright and highly motivated students, I am persuaded that the

concept of the seminars is equally applicable to a more normal distribution of freshmen, as indeed the program has demonstrated on several occasions.

Each Sports and American Society seminar was organized to accomplish the following goals:

• *To introduce the students to an appreciation of how sports have reflected and even influenced larger issues.*

I confronted students with issues drawn from the rapidly expanding body of American sports history literature as well as the pages of current newspapers and magazines. These subjects included racism and racial discrimination; the influence of money; the impact of print and electronic media; the ongoing ethical and educational dilemmas posed by intercollegiate athletics; sexual discrimination and the struggle for equal opportunity by female athletes; the shadowy specter of the \$90 billion annual sports gambling (mostly illegal) industry; the impact of the Olympics and other forms of international sports competition upon American foreign policy and American values; and the benefits and liabilities of the heavy emphasis placed upon youth programs, such as Little League, gymnastics competitions, and interscholastic sports programs. I never conceived of the seminar as merely providing opportunities to improve writing skills, and from the beginning fully intended that each student complete the seminar with a substantially enhanced appreciation of the complexities of the world of American sports.

• *To expose my students to the processes of critical thinking.*

A hefty required-reading list provided seminar continuity and the basis for classroom discussions. Two books (including, modestly, my own *America's Obsession*, along with *A Brief History of American Sports* by Elliott Gorn and Warren Goldstein) were assigned to provide a historical perspective, and one anthology was selected to present conflicting readings on six major contemporary issues. Students were expected to approach each reading assignment carefully and analytically. We spent considerable classroom time identifying an author's point of view and probing the assumptions upon which an article or book was based. By the end of the seminar, students had become so familiar with the process that they were not only instinctively identifying an author's central thesis, but also comparing and contrasting it to other articles or books they had read. The

use and misuse of evidence provided a common discussion topic. We used newspapers and popular magazines to supplement the texts, with the unstated assumption being that intelligent readers should exercise the tools of critical thinking not only when reading academic materials, but while reading the daily newspaper, a news magazine, or even listening to a radio sports-talk show.

Each student was assigned individually two books that explored a major topic (e.g., George Will's *Men at Work*; Robert Higgs's *God in the Stadium*; J.D.Bissinger's *Friday Night Lights*; Randy Roberts's *Papa Jack*; Robin Lester's *The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Big-Time Football at Chicago*; Jules Tygiel's *Baseball's Great Experiment*; and Michael Oriard's *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*). The student presented each member of the seminar a tightly written two-page summary of the book, the purpose being to identify and critically examine the author's point of view, central thesis, frame of reference, use of evidence, and contribution to knowledge. The student was expected to expand orally upon his/her written summary and critical analysis, and I attempted to draw other students into the dialogue by relating the book in question to previously discussed books and articles or to concurrently assigned textual material. Frequently, a book's central theme would be related to current issues on the front pages of the sports section. Students brought their examination of their particular book to a conclusion by submitting a formal review essay.

• To provide each student with a series of writing experiences that would enable her/him to develop the skills necessary to present ideas in effective written form.

With this goal in mind, I organized the seminar to provide students with opportunities to write several papers of four to seven pages in length. In order to emphasize the processes of conceptualization, research, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and ultimately producing a finished product, I implemented several stages where preliminary drafts were exposed to critical analysis by their peers. Students not only had the opportunity to rewrite their own papers in response to criticisms received, but to learn the responsibilities of a critic by reviewing the drafts presented by several classmates. During my second and third seminars, I gave peer review much greater attention than in the first. It was one of the most important revisions I made based upon my evaluation of my first seminar. I found that this provided each student with an appreciation of the

several draft stages through which good writing must be taken and helped each to learn to accept valid criticism, as well as how to provide it in a nonthreatening, positive fashion.

After I had read and commented upon their papers, students were given an opportunity to rewrite their papers if substantial problems remained. For most students the process of taking an essay through several drafts was a new experience, and in my judgment, it created an environment that contributed to marked improvement in writing skills. If students were dissatisfied with the grade assigned, they could always rewrite. Because I was blessed with honors students, there were few problems with the fundamentals of usage. Consequently, we spent little time whatsoever on surface correctness, *per se*, although I made it clear that papers would be evaluated appropriately if such fundamentals went unattended. My emphasis was upon effective communication via the written word. While I duly marked spelling and usage errors, my comments were largely used to emphasize the importance of organization, effective introductory sentences (and paragraphs), syntax, logical development of a central argument, paragraph integrity, transitions between paragraphs, selection of words, logical development of an argument, the effective use of evidence, and the importance of a proper conclusion. My comments often emphasized the importance of clearly and concisely communicating an idea; some students had to be disabused of their assumption that college-level writing required the use of exotic words to be found in a thesaurus. Private conferences provided opportunities to discuss individual problems with each student.

Throughout the seminars I have drawn heavily upon my own experiences as a writer. I sought to convey my conviction that effective writing entails a never-ending process, that a successful writer never reaches a point where constructive criticism is unnecessary. Students were surprised when I displayed the seven or eight drafts of a particular chapter from *America's Obsession* that they had just read. I found that by sharing experiences drawn from my own writing career—especially the time and effort required—students grasped the inescapable fact that for even successful published authors, the process of writing remains difficult and often frustrating.

I also submitted to the students for their comments drafts of one of my own articles scheduled for publication in a popular magazine with 35,000 subscribers. They were encouraged to comment freely. After they comprehended that they were truly expected to criticize their instructor's own drafts as he did theirs, this particular exercise brought them great

joy. The assignment served to drive home my message that any writer, at whatever stage of his or her career, can benefit from constructive criticism. This particular assignment seemed to create an understanding that we were all playing the same game, that they, like myself, were simultaneously engaged in an exciting but demanding activity. It also created an environment in which they more readily accepted my comments on their papers.

During my lengthy career in the college classroom, I have always attempted to implement my own version of the Golden Rule: to treat all students, no matter their level of commitment or ability, as I would have liked to have been treated as a student. Thus, in my seminars my own less-than-pleasant experiences as a college freshman in composition courses kept coming back to me. My instructor was more concerned with teaching us literary criticism than sound composition skills. Although these recollections have undoubtedly been filtered through the selective perceptions of events of more than forty years ago, I felt that my still vivid memories as an extremely intimidated freshman composition student helped me work with my students in a manner that emphasized high quality without losing the human dimension. I repeatedly found myself seeking ways to provide criticism in a positive manner, to find ways to praise and to encourage, not to denigrate or denounce. Effort and persistence were amply rewarded.

• To provide the opportunity to undertake a research project of substantial magnitude.

The central focus of each seminar was the presentation of a paper of 15–20 pages in length. Rather than assigning a formal research paper, I found that the students could meet course objectives by presenting an article intended for a general audience rather than for a few scholars. During the first seminar I permitted students to select their topics as long as these were somehow related to American sports. I found that this led to major differences in size, scope, and the amount of work expended, producing serious problems in maintaining equity in grading. Consequently, when I prepared the syllabus for my second seminar I decided to require students to select a topic from a list that I compiled. In order to assure the availability of sources and to provide a semblance of equity, I determined that each student would write a paper upon a major sports figure prominent during the twentieth century. I excluded individuals (such as Babe Ruth and Muhammad Ali) whose lives had already attracted serious bio-

graphical treatment, and focused upon individuals whose careers reflected one or more of the major themes previously discussed. Students selected from a diverse list of twenty-five names that included such individuals as Billie Jean King, Howard Cosell, Pete Rozelle, Arthur Ashe, Clair Bee, Marvin Miller, Bill Russell, Jerry Tarkanian, Wilma Rudolph, and Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder.

Because all of the figures had a historical dimension, I felt comfortable in assisting in the project development and confident in my grading. Deadlines for oral or written progress reports were established in the course syllabus throughout the semester to assure that disastrous postponement of research and the writing of preliminary drafts did not occur. Annotated bibliographies, tentative outlines, introductory paragraphs, and argument statements were submitted and commented upon as the semester unfolded. Approximately six weeks before the paper was due, individual conferences were held to discuss progress and problems specific to the individual topics.

• To provide students an opportunity to present their findings in oral as well as in written form.

The final segment of each seminar was devoted to presentation of oral summaries of research projects. Each student was allotted thirty minutes to summarize his or her project to the seminar. Reports could not be read, although notes were permitted, and each student was subjected to questions by peers as well as by me. For some students this was a first experience in making an extended oral presentation in a formal setting. I took delight in my perception that the level of questions posed was high, giving me the sense that prior readings and discussions had provided the desired background. Because the oral presentations amplified many of the issues previously discussed during the earlier sections of the seminar, they created an important sense of context and interrelationships. They also had the effect of bringing closure to the seminar.

The final experience brought some one hundred students from the several individual seminars together for two hours. The focus of this session was the presentation of their research findings visually—via videotape or, more usually, via a poster display. The poster display provided opportunities for students to experiment with alternative formats of communicating their ideas. As I examined the posters of my students and observed the respect and attention they were receiving from students from other seminars, I recognized the level of pride that my students took

in their achievement as researchers and writers. Their smiles and body language conveyed what every faculty member desires—an affirmation that students had accomplished something meaningful and that they had grown intellectually in the process.

My experiences in this unique program have reinforced my view about the critical importance of college writing programs that go beyond the traditional freshman composition courses. I now know from firsthand experience that students can substantially improve their writing skills if placed in a creative environment; the progress made by some of my students was truly exceptional. The seminars have also reinforced my commitment to requiring extensive writing in my regular upper-division American History courses. I can now more fully appreciate the inherent validity of Writing Across the Curriculum. Just as top-notch athletes must practice their skills on a continuous basis, so, too, good writers must regularly hone their skills. In the college setting this entails requiring meaningful writing exercises at all levels, in all majors, in all courses. I believe the majority of students—especially the more serious—will respond positively to such requirements if they recognize their inherent value and relevance.

My experience in teaching these three University Seminars has convinced me that college students can write effectively if they are motivated. Of course my courses were populated by an elite group of honors students, but nearly all were products of Nevada public schools, not private elite prep schools. Contrary to widespread media-created perceptions, the great majority of these students came to the program with reasonably good writing skills. I defined my role as building upon this base. The selection of the sports theme proved to be advantageous because students respond to a subject in which they have inherent interest. It was a delight to see them wrestle intelligently with issues that are complex and replete with contradictory viewpoints.

I believe that one of the major attractions of this program is that faculty drawn from many disciplines and professions can bring to students perspectives that are unique and valuable. Whether or not this program is the equal to traditional composition courses taught by specialists in writing and literature remains for others to determine. My own sense is that the program offers many opportunities for both students and faculty. The growth in confidence and writing sophistication that was evidenced by most of my students was remarkable, and I am convinced that the skills they developed will serve them well in their future academic and professional careers. For myself, I will continue my teaching of traditional

American history courses with an enhanced appreciation of the complexity of the teaching of writing. And I will cheerfully do my part by requiring substantial writing in all of my courses.

JOINT OBSERVATIONS

The conclusion we would like to make for this paper will be brief. One of our central discoveries is that adapting writing pedagogies to contentspecific classrooms is clearly not a matter of finding, implementing, or simply modifying a “formula for success.” While there are a number of topic-type sentences that we could create about our experiences, morals to the story as it were, they would remain abstractions because they have been acquired through the hands-on experiences of teachers. The key point we want to emphasize is the apparently simple yet profoundly complex notion that applications and extensions need to be both *theoretically* and *contextually* based. We believe the University Seminar program is centered in good current writing pedagogy, but the details are often worked out *in situ*, through a set of give-and-take arrangements involving university structures, student needs, faculty interests, and, above all, a spirit of collegiality and inquiry. In contrast to some of our experiences with writing-across-the-curriculum workshops, where faculty are given the rationale for WAC and a set of strategies to apply or adapt, the University Seminar program is strongly based in the particulars of circumstance. Not surprisingly, the philosophy of writing itself embraced by the seminars is similarly experience-based. For both writers and instructors, then, the seminars offer—to employ a judicial metaphor—means, motive, and opportunity for writing and teaching. In that context, writers write, teachers teach, and both learn enormous amounts about this amorphous thing we call writing across the curriculum.

NOTES

¹ Paul Morris and Stephen Tchudi, *The New Literacy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996).

ESSAY 2

It Came from Aristotle: Teaching Film with Rhetoric

LESLIE A. CHILTON

Teaching a film class, or incorporating a commercial film into a literature class—or any other text-based class—can be a wonderful experience for teacher and students. As the title suggests, combining centuries-old methodology with today's popular entertainment gives the instructor a feeling of peacemaking between two alien cultures. Also, the student benefits highly. "Going to the movies" still summons embedded cultural notions of being out with friends for fun and relaxation. Even better, students frequently have strong reactions to film—at least, far stronger than they might have about more literary texts and certainly all other written texts! Benefits of film viewing are great; student interest and involvement with the material is high, writing improves, ideas blossom, and the arguments that develop are strong and persuasive.

Of course, this is not always the case, and students are not always the ones to blame when this fails to happen. Frequently films are not used well, such as when they are screened as a source of information about some theme or point of the class. Even when film is an intrinsic component in the course—if not the entire subject of the class—the film can still be misused, or underutilized. For example, one of my colleagues was looking forward to teaching a Jane Austen course with a film component. The students read selected novels and then viewed their film and television adaptations. The course proved a disappointment; the resulting essays were desultory comparisons of the films and their novels, stating more or less the obvious: the books and the films were different but similar. Some students, more sincere, still found themselves suspended between film and literature, and never knew where to direct their focus. All essays, good and bad, were traditional interpretations of plots or charac-

ters from the film and the novel. This sounded all too familiar to me. When first experimenting with film in my composition classes, I too was disappointed with the same sort of acceptable but unimaginative essays. However, my assignments themselves were rather unimaginative—for example, I once instructed the class to compare and contrast the myth of Orpheus with *Black Orpheus* (1957), the plot of which closely followed the original tale.

My colleague might have been more successful if he had realized, as I finally did, that other options exist when teaching film. For one, the instructor does not have to approach film as another kind of literature, traditionally the method most often practiced and provided in texts about film.¹ Of course, one could reasonably argue that in the Austen course, the films must be taught as a companion to literature, for after all, they were adapted from Austen's novels. But film and literature, while undeniably similar, can and should be studied as different kinds of texts. The film instructor can do more than directing students to create interpretive essays about the film's theme, characters, or ways that the film exemplifies—or stands outside—the director's canon. Some of these other approaches must arise from the instructor's desire to address *nonliterary* elements about films—technology, economics, and sociopolitical aspects of an individual film and the entire film industry at a given point in time. For example, led by the instructor's suggestions, students can come to view individual films—and the entire medium—as a sociopolitical construct, through which our present concerns with free speech, the commodification of art, the influence of the media, and censorship can be explored and confronted.

Another way of assisting a student's study of film identifies the heart of this essay: the teacher must join rhetorical methods with the teaching of film. Beyond bringing in the basic rhetorical modes of narration, comparison and contrast and simple analysis, the teacher can powerfully extend the student's involvement with film by means of invention, particularly the practice of pre-writing. Such "writing before writing" can lead instructor and student alike to explore their experiences, presuppositions and beliefs about film. Pre-writing becomes indispensable when encouraging students to think about films in nonliterary ways and, more particularly, to engage with the film as a hegemonic discourse.

These two assertions lead to a third assertion: teaching with commercial films, and practicing traditional rhetorical methods, should not be, as this essay may be suggesting, limited to literary and composition classes. If the teaching of rhetoric needs to take its place in non-English classes,

why can't films take their place in the general college curriculum? Why can't commercial films be used as a text in history classes, psychology classes, sociology classes, nursing classes? The answer, obviously, is that films can, often are, and should be utilized in such courses. One way to do this is to consider how traditional rhetoric methods, revived and refreshed for the composition class, can improve student thinking and writing about this powerful medium.

INVENTION AND FILM STUDY

Of course, many may ask why the teacher of film—or any class other than composition—should take the responsibility for his or her students evolving clear ideas and then writing them down well. Students should come prepared to write well about their ideas; after all, isn't that what all those previous composition classes were supposed to do, prepare them for the rest of their academic writing? However, we all know that composition classes frequently and unfortunately operate in a sort of vacuum. Students in freshman composition classes are rigorously trained in writing essays; they pass with an A—or whatever grade—and then frequently go on to other classes and write in fashions which suggest that their composition teachers failed to teach them little more than the difference between summary and analysis, the importance of establishing a thesis, and finding research for support—if that.

Writing-across-the-curriculum programs seek to remedy this by encouraging teachers of all types of subjects to interact with students in their search for topics, and in the development of their ideas. As Erika Lindemann writes, "If we understand conceptual processes better, we might be able to show students how to probe their topics more efficiently, how to make effective choices, how to think through [any] writing assignment."² By means of traditional methods of Aristotelian invention, allied with the goal of "individuals calling on the full range of their humanity,"³ students can break through directed and stereotyped thinking to find and examine their own beliefs.

Invention was originally defined in classical rhetoric as a faculty of choosing in a given situation the best available means of persuasion to accomplish one's purpose. Some methods include the testimony of witnesses and the presence of contracts; other methods of persuasion are invented by means of rhetoric. Focused, refined, and redefined as "pre-writing" by modern teachers of rhetoric, such "invention"—the *creation* of material to provide means of persuasion—has evolved into powerful

means of assisting students to tap into their abilities and their thoughts. Peter Elbow, in *Writing with Power*, states that such unencumbered and ungraded work can help free the student both in the act of writing and in the more difficult act of thinking. "Freewriting," he declares, "makes writing easier by helping you with the root psychological or existential difficulty in writing: finding words in your head and putting them down on a blank piece of paper.... Frequent freewriting exercises help you learn simply *to get on with it* and not be held back by worries about whether these words are good words or the right words."⁴

Pre-writing also prompts thinking. "Pre-writing techniques," states Erika Lindemann in her indispensable *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, "trigger perceptual and conceptual processes, permitting writers to recall experiences, break through stereotyped thinking, examine relationships between ideas, assess the expectations of their audience, find an implicit order in their subject matter, and discover how they feel about the work."⁵ By these means, the students can break away from standard approaches and echoing instructor interpretations, and become personally immersed and involved with the material they are examining. In other words, they actually think about the material for themselves.

Applying these basic strategies to the class using film can help both the instructor and the student overcome standard literary approaches to film. The students' desire and ability to "break through stereotyped thinking" about this powerful entity—in other words, getting away from the abiding idea that film must be treated as a kind of visual literature to be interpreted—can be first assisted by the instructor's own knowledge about the complex web of circumstances (social, economic, technical, political) which limit, influence, and impact the creation of a film. For example, the instructor could expose the class to alternate and unconsidered aspects of the film industry, such as the evolution of the film viewing site. First seen in nickelodeon machines in sideshows, the film, as a projected medium as we know it, evolved in cheap, usually dirty, transformed storefronts, situated in large urban ghettos. Later, as films became more respectable, theaters, situated in downtown shopping districts, and in "bedroom communities," provided cleaner, more wholesome, homogenous environments that would appeal to the middle class and to families. In the booming twenties and busted thirties, the dazzling picture palace arose to feed the dreams of people confused and frightened by everyday realities. In the fifties, the drive-in created a hybrid of the twin demigods of American culture: film and car. The economic multiplex is the most notable innovation of the seventies and eighties to be

made by a film industry battling rising costs, shrinking audience, HBO, and the VCR. From this kind of historical-cultural backdrop, the instructor can evolve suggestions for impromptu writing sessions, or after-class on-line journal exercises to allow students to reflect on viewing environments and their impact on the film being studied. Did popular films create these environments and create the audience—or did the changing environments and audience influence film? Or both?

Of course, the nature and the kind of film studied, and the instructor's own program require that appropriate questions be created for the students. For example, to return to our original example, Jane Austen's *Emma*, a thoroughly English novel of manners, was composed by an aging, genteel—and extremely sharp-witted—Englishwoman in 1813. Its *filming* in the late twentieth century was accomplished by an enormous, male-driven, “big bucks” international business enterprise which recognizes that teenagers are their most consistent customers.⁶ Can such an *industry* create a faithful version of a novel? Would it wish to? Another question: popular movies—movies made for wide consumption—are largely star vehicles; does this aspect distort, interpret, or privilege any of the characters or any feature of the narrative? The two audiences—for the novel and for the film—are scarcely the same, in time, interests, education, concerns, hopes. Important feminist issues inevitably arise here, but other issues can be generated as well. Long favored by the well read, why has Austen been suddenly “served up” by a movie industry long dominated by special effects action movies? What interest can be found in modern audiences in Austen's seemingly tidy world of rural middle- and upper-class families, whose daughters are seeking appropriate husbands? Are such movies reexaminations of traditional western mores, or are they meant to stand in contrast to modern manners? Or are they little more than exquisite peeks into a re-created material world, popularized by a booming romance novel industry or Martha Stewart's visions of gracious living? More specifically, does substance or style rule the film? Presented as writing prompts, journal assignments, ten-minute freewriting exercises, such suggestions can assist students not only to transcend literary approaches to the film, they can also view the film as a *product* of a large commercial industry which depends on attracting substantial audiences—of which they are the members.

FILM AND THE COMPOSITION CLASS

The composition classroom can employ film to teach analysis, argument, the modes of narration, classification, and comparison and contrast. More important, imaginative use of film can help the composition classroom break out of its much-criticized literature-centered insularity and confront sociopolitical issues of freedom, free speech, censorship, and individual responsibility—without its becoming overpoliticized with any specific ideology.

This is a warm issue, fiercely debated—and both sides have reasons to promote or protest such an agenda. James A. Berlin, in *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Culture*, writes forcefully of politicizing the composition classroom in response to the changing cultural climate in the United States. Directing attention to Aristotelian concepts of rhetoric as a means for all individuals to recognize and confront controlling forces, Berlin encourages students to negotiate with media that seek to destroy or alter their voices in the increasingly pluralistic culture of America: “Our larger purpose,” he writes, when discussing a course model that involves students’ daily experiences with everyday culture, “is to encourage students to negotiate and resist these codes—these hegemonic discourses—to bring about a more personally humane economic, social, and political arrangement.”⁷

Some educators wince from the diatribe-like aspects of Berlin’s ideas while believing in the possibilities of making composition classes less literature-oriented and more in step with an increasingly multicultural and a more politically aware American culture. Maxine Hairston, in her “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” voiced eloquent concern over “a new model emerging for freshman writing courses...that puts dogma before diversity, politics before fact, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student.”⁸ She criticizes various statements by politically-oriented composition leaders who view the conventional course as a Foucaultian tool of the elite which teaches “a dialect of dominant class...which serves the interest of the dominant class.”⁹ Such views severely limit not only students, but instructors who find themselves unqualified or forced to conform to views they do not personally hold. Hairston suggests an alternative possibility which gives students the “opportunity to develop their critical and creative abilities and do it in an intellectually and ethically responsible context.”¹⁰ Her model allows students to focus on their own cultural experiences by which they explore their personal “lenses” on the world. This seems to me to be a highly flexible solution, combin-

ing Berlin's best points with Hairston's legitimate concerns not only for the students, but for the teachers confronting postmodern philosophies they have not been fully prepared to face. Film appears to be a medium through which this flexible balance can be implemented.

My own model, which I developed over a two-year period in advanced freshman composition classes, is a workable balance between Berlin's ideals of politicizing the composition classroom, and Hairston's model of students using their private beliefs and assumptions to produce meaningful discourse and cross-cultural awareness. By means of film, and the two *Motion Picture Production Codes* that have dominated and overseen American commercial filmmaking since 1930,¹¹ students explore their ideas and assumptions about the impact of film on the general culture, and then address the most quintessential American issue of all: free speech.

In 1930, the Motion Picture Producers Association established the stringent *Motion Picture Production Code*. In 1968 this was replaced by a new *Motion Picture Code*, which established (with several alterations) the ratings system still in use today. Introducing these texts into the class, and opening the class up to the enormous array of issues they generated—economic, artistic, political, and social—proved so successful that this single unit gradually came to dominate the semester. Student essays became more focused; their writing improved as they spent four months thinking about, writing about, clarifying, and arguing issues of the meaning of free speech, individual responsibility with media, governmental interference and/or censorship of the popular arts, and the ties between politics and the arts. During this time, the students kept track of their ideas—and their changing ideas—in journals, wrote summaries, analyzed the codes and particular films, and finally argued in a major paper their beliefs about limits and the importance of free speech. They emerged from my class more informed about the rights and problems of free speech, the problems of individual and of parental responsibility in the face of technological innovations, the clash between morality and capitalism, the control of thought, and their own role in the democratic institutions of the American nation. Their research projects, which argue issues other than movies, reveal a depth of understanding of the many and complex aspects which affect what seems to be the simplest issue—from inter-racial adoption to euthanasia. Through it all, they searched for and examined their beliefs and ideas.

The remainder of this essay details the model of my approach to the structure and teaching of the class, which interested instructors could

adapt to their own interests and focus, always alert to the tremendous potential for learning and writing opportunities inherent in this model.

CODES, FILMS, AND THE FRESHMAN COMPOSITION CLASS

“Who wants to go to the movies?” I rhetorically ask my classes as the beginning of my semester-long model. A negative vote has never been cast (but instructors should be sensitive to the students’ individual beliefs, particularly if R-rated films are to be shown to the class). Before we “go to the movies,” I provide students with copies of the two *Motion Picture Production Codes*, and these texts become the initial focus of our consideration of the film industry, censorship, and the commercial film. To teach the unit of summary (or precis) I first assign them to summarize the 1930 code. Because this is essentially a list of rules, framed by a preamble and a list of special conditions regarding certain subjects in films, the assignment challenges them to adapt a list into their own prose. Also, the summary exercise more than thoroughly introduces them to a code which dominated American moviemaking and influenced—if not controlled—the thinking of nearly two generations of Americans from the mid-thirties to the mid-sixties.

After the summary is completed, I introduce them to the shorter, more liberal 1968 code, which replaced the 1930 code’s rules and expectations of obedience to the rules with requests for the producers to observe decency and restraint, and a ratings system based on the age of the individual movie-goer and parental permission. I then pose a question: Which code is better? Of course, the students are nearly always unanimously in favor of the 1968 code, with the more conservative students holding out for the restrained and “moral” 1930 code. But, whether taking a liberal or conservative view—and I have never tried to convince any student that he or she is wrong—students are fascinated to learn of the existence of the 1930 code. This is frequently their first deliberate contact with a truly hegemonic discourse, which, though no longer in force, is a sobering lesson in censorship—and a clear example of how a relatively small band of people related to the film industry, directed by the Catholic Church, and pressured by Congress, created a single standard to which any film seeking popular release had to conform.

To help students better engage with the two codes, I place the documents into general historical context by reviewing the decades in which the codes have been active. The class becomes, at least for one period, a

history course. Starting with the “wild” twenties, when the more liberal times and the creation of “talkies” created films that challenged conventional morality, we proceed through the thirties, forties, fifties, and then into the sixties, always considering the temper of the eras. The students have a fairly general grasp of the events and the attitudes of these decades, and we begin to see why and how the American people were willing to watch “preselected” films for nearly three decades. Then, in the more liberal sixties, when the American people fractured into groups, and shaking off rules and regulations of all kinds became both a sport and a duty—if not an obsession—the code was replaced.

With the codes placed into a historical and cultural context, I then put before the students an important issue—which is rich grist for the mill in pre-writing exercises and leads to the crux of their thinking and writing experience: did the 1930 code infringe upon the rights of free speech as “guaranteed” by the First Amendment? This calls for close reading of the First Amendment, which many students blithely believe protects their freedom of speech. Many are startled to learn that the sparsely-worded First Amendment only protects citizens from *congressional* interference with free speech. The 1930 code, as a set of regulations created or at least condoned by representatives of the movie industry, therefore did not truly infringe upon the First Amendment. Then another critical question is posed: because no law has been broken, and the First Amendment had not truly been damaged—was the 1930 code therefore “all right”? This leads to attempts to define the terms “illegal,” “immoral,” as well as “libel,” “slander,” “free speech,” “regulations,” “laws,” “rules,” and “codes.” This process forces the students to grapple with a series of difficult and complex concepts which address national issues as well as their own individual moral, ethical, and political beliefs.

At this point, they write their first argument paper, in which they decide if the 1930 MPPC transgressed the First Amendment, if not in word, then in spirit. Arguments have ranged from closely argued legal “briefs” of the two documents, to more conservative claims that, because the 1930 code was accepted by a majority of Americans and can be seen as an industrial self-regulation that created a “safe product,” it cannot be regarded as censorship.

After this is completed—many students have remarked that they have never had to think through so many choices—I then screen films which represent the two codes and the two eras. For several years I have screened a matched set of two “pop culture” productions which represent the more ordinary film of both eras.¹² *Out of the Past* (1947), a film

noir classic, came close to transgressing the 1930 code's admonitions against sordid situations and violence. Its remake, the R-rated *Against All Odds* (1984), is far less a classic, but is still a well-made action-romance which provides fairly ordinary amounts of sex, violence, and "bad language." Before screening the films, we review the two codes and the eras in which they were made, which raises additional issues of artistic freedom, the dangers and benefits of censorship, the problems of a ratings system, the lassitude of censored art, the subversive accommodations that censorship creates, the exploitation of the viewer, artistic rendering versus representation of reality—and the ways in which technical innovations can render it all null and void. (After all, R-rated films are frequently accessible through pay-per-view and the family's VCR!) Finally, we screen the films. We then discuss, as a class, in collaborative groups, and in their individual journals, how violence, sex, language, and crime were handled and not handled. By means of comparison and contrast the students choose and clarify their preferences and beliefs and begin to build their arguments. The two films allow students to observe how the intelligent, hard-boiled dialogue is replaced by more realistic dialogue (which is full of expletives); suggestions of a sexual relationship (crashing surf, earrings on the table) are replaced with nudity and fairly explicit sex; brief moments of unrealistic violence (bloodless shootings, a bare-knuckle fight which ends with an offscreen gunshot) are replaced by far more vivid, far more painful sequences. Finally, the fairy-tale ending, with the wicked punished and the good rewarded, has been replaced with a more relativistic but certainly more realistic conclusion. As the students prepare to argue their choice, they are repeatedly cautioned to make a political choice, not an artistic one.

Each student's response reflects his/her personal and political beliefs; moreover, I encourage them to let their beliefs make their selection. But those who argue in favor of the 1968 code and *Against All Odds* must reason how the modern film has benefited from the easing of restrictions. They must also defend a code which allows a capitalistic industry to exploit its audience. In turn, those who argue for the 1930 code and *Out of the Past* must provide equal proofs that the film was better for being regulated by a code which censored sex, violence, and criminal methods, promoted stereotypes, and avoided realistic considerations of national problems. Their arguments, enriched and improved by journal writing and free-writing in class prior to discussion, allow them to take artistic, moral, and political perspectives on their preferences.

FILM THROUGHOUT THE CURRICULUM

Studying film or employing film in study should not—as this essay may suggest—be exclusive to literature and composition studies. Consider for a moment how confined the teaching of commercial films has been within the university curriculum, and how film study has traditionally been approached in “literary” terms.

Of course, the traditional literary approach has not been inappropriate, and rendered a medium once considered literarily the province of journalism into a legitimate, scholarly area of university study, replete with journals, conferences, and schools of criticism. David Bordwell, in *Making Meaning*, a head-clearing, idea-provoking overview of film study, describes how film study became inseparable from literary study and, more particularly, from the act of interpretation. Brought into the academic environment in the fifties, the scholarly study of film created a basis, a framework, and a history by modeling itself on preexisting disciplines of literature, drama, and art history “which,” Bordwell points out, “were already committed to explication and commentary.”¹³ Taken in and reared largely by literature departments, film studies developed parallel with literature studies, which themselves had been formed and transformed at midcentury by New Criticism.

For the academic working in the shadow of New Criticism, as for the film analyst, the object of study is a text or group of texts possessing veiled meanings. In these meanings lies the significance of the work or works. The interpretation aims to be novel and to exhibit the critic’s mastery of the skills of attentive, usually “close” examination.... [T]hey have become the foundation for literature criticism as such. These assumptions shape the arrangements of specialties in the field, the nature of departments, the patterns of academic conferences, the sorts of books and journals that are being published, the way people find jobs and get grants and promotions. All proportions kept, *the same premises and institutional forces are at work in academic film criticism*.¹⁴ The single film became, like the book or poem, the “unit of study,” and “interpretation became the most convenient activity,” which provided for the “university’s demand for teachable techniques, professional specialization, and rapid publication output.”¹⁵ Teaching a film as one teaches a poem, a short story, a novel, and expecting an analytical essay considering theme, characters, “author,” setting, symbols, became the accepted doctrine and method.

What are the limitations inherent in such an enclosed approach to film? For one, the film has been given the single identity of being “artistic

object.” Yet consider for a moment how multifaceted an object the film is. It is a product of an enormous industry, its workers ranging from writers to special effects wizards to bankers to cosmeticians. Governments of all nations monitor them, promote them, decry them. Audiences of all socioeconomic classes, races, and nationalities watch them. A film’s impact is created out of a remarkable mixture of economics, personality, artistry, and technology. They affect our beliefs, provide images that we adhere to, promote—and destroy—popular beliefs, speak to us on levels that we can scarcely imagine. Films distort history, advance technology, capture the feelings of an audience, reflect, satirize, sentimentalize the decade or era in which they were made.

Consider also the idea of bringing films into classes other than the specific film course, or the freshman composition course. For example, a history class could experience how history is constructed and manipulated by historians, a group which should automatically include filmmakers. Directed film-viewing can be used to expose students to “mode emplotments” in historical narratives and to explain how such strategies manipulate their beliefs.¹⁶ Films vividly reveal how an era influences the relating of history and specific events. The instructor of history classes of any era could screen a series of films which the students would compare and contrast to learn how this century’s beliefs, changes in administration, and popular rebellion impacted how we conceive the event.

This process can be seen in how the western, the film type most frequently associated with America, changed according to the decade in which it was made. In 1957 *Gunfight at the OK Corral* revealed an heroic Wyatt Earp (played by Burt Lancaster) refusing to be intimidated by the renegade Clanton gang, who have flouted federal authority. After the climactic gunfight, which is played out like a duel, Earp rides back to the woman he left in order to stand by his brothers. In 1967 *Hour of the Gun* portrayed Wyatt Earp (played by James Garner, whose television show *Maverick* had parodied the West and the western) having to face judgment in a courtroom for his role in the gunfight. In 1971 *Doc* portrayed the Earps as American forces and the Clantons as the Vietcong; Doc Holliday became a drugged-out hippie. In 1994 *Tombstone* portrayed Wyatt Earp (played by Kurt Russell) helping to marshal a Tombstone afflicted with gang violence; he both willingly and reluctantly goes to the OK Corral to confront the Clantons, and it is clear that under the circumstances he has no other choice.

This film and rhetorical model can be adapted in other classes. Family studies could view films portraying images of the changing American

family through the decades; women's studies could view film representations of women; religious studies could view films as they represent beliefs and changing beliefs; psychology could study films for Freud's impact on this century; political science could study films for the evolution of political beliefs and the impact of political beliefs in certain eras—to provide just a few suggestions. The instructor, armed with a film encyclopedia, can introduce an element that he or she may have been unsure how to introduce: encountering and negotiating with a popular medium which has shaped ideas and beliefs.

Undoubtedly, there is much yet to be said about, written about, and experimented with in the teaching of film, and teaching with film. I have only made that proverbial scratch on the surface. But this scratch is an important one. Teaching with film has often been confined to the literature department as though it is a hothouse plant. Bringing it out into the curriculum liberates a powerful medium which, for better and worse, has helped shape our sociopolitical identities, beliefs, and ideals. In composition classes, and in many other classes, in which underprepared students will be increasingly challenged to question and defy hegemonic discourses, commercial film is an ideal text.

NOTES

¹ The table of contents of J.M.L.Peters' *Teaching about Film* (1961) clearly indicates how film study adopted literary terms: "Understanding Film Language," "Critical Assimilation of Film Content." James Monaco's *How to Read A Film* (1977), wide-ranging and thought-provoking, also considers the film as a literary object, revealed by such chapters as "The Language of Film: Signs and Syntax" and "Film Theory: Form and Function." *Writing About Literature*, by Margaret B.Bryan and Boyd H.Davis (1975), devotes only one section of the work to film study. The authors stress the difference between film and literature, but direct students to analyze the setting, the events, the shooting and editing, and the characters. Timothy Corrigan's *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* (1989) remarks upon "enthusiastic students" who then write "confused and disappointing papers" (ix). But his directions of writing essays about films encourage students to read a film by analyzing narratives, character, point of view, and *mise-en-scène*. In later chapters, he also suggests studying history of film and its genres, as well as applying theories of formalism.

² Erika Lindemann, *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 95.

³ James A.Berber, "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, 3rd ed., ed. Gary Tate, Edward P.J.Corbett, and Nancy Myers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 20.

⁴ Peter Elbow, *Writing with Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 15.

⁵ Lindemann, 105.

⁶ In the decade of the nineties, three Jane Austen novels have been filmed: *Persuasion* (1995); *Sense and Sensibility* (1996); and *Emma* (1997). The cable channel A&E broadcast a three-part adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (1996).

⁷ James A.Berlin, *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Culture* (Urbana, IL: National Council of the Teachers of English, 1996), 116.

⁸ Maxine Hairston, "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing," in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, 23.

⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹¹ To read the 1930 code, see Leonard J.Leff and Jerrold L.Simmons' *The Dame in the Kimono* (New York: Grove-Westinfield, 1990). Also see *The Motion Picture Almanac*, appropriate years, for the 1930 and the 1968 codes.

¹² For background on the political-religious pressures on Hollywood, see Gregory D.Black's *Hollywood Censored* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Leff and Simmons' *The Dame in the Kimono*.

¹³ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 22.

¹⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶ See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

ESSAY 3

Why Lecture? Using Alternatives to Teach College Mathematics

JUDITH H. MORREL

INTRODUCTION

Mathematics instruction at the college level, indeed at any level, has traditionally been synonymous with the lecture format. Of all the liberal arts disciplines, mathematics has been among the slowest to implement alternative, innovative teaching techniques. There are several reasons for this conservatism. Many college and university mathematics professors, although not all, consider themselves researchers first and teachers (a distant) second. Almost all were trained in mathematical research, not in teaching. After all, the Ph.D. is a research degree, not a pedagogical one. Thinking about changing the way we teach has not been a high priority. The majority of *all* college professors, of course, were trained to do research, so why should mathematics be any different from the other disciplines? Again, there are several reasons. First, most mathematics professors were trained by the traditional lecture method; it is our basic model of mathematical teaching. That traditional lecture method does not readily lend itself to classroom discussion or interaction. Some of us may be uncomfortable trying to lead a discussion. The symbolic nature of the language of mathematics also may inhibit verbal intercourse and discussion. In addition, mathematical research can, although it does not have to, be a relatively isolated pursuit. Teams of researchers, where they exist, often consist of a few mathematicians who are highly specialized in a particular area. While discussions about research with colleagues occur, this type of discussion is of little use in an undergraduate classroom.

After enumerating all the reasons why mathematics instruction has not strayed far from the lecture method, I might also ask, why change our approach at all? After all, we (mathematics professors) learned mathematics extraordinarily well with the traditional lecture format. Again, there are several reasons. The mathematics professoriate represents the successes of the lecture method; we are the survivors, the ones for whom such a method worked well. Current research indicates that this is not the case for many mathematics students. (See, for example, Douglas,¹ Steen,² and the Committee on the Mathematical Sciences in the Year 2000.)³ A larger, perhaps less well-prepared academically, proportion of the population is attending college. Most of the undergraduate students whom we teach are not destined to be mathematics professors; most of them are not even undergraduate mathematics majors. They really aren't "just like us, only younger." Many students, even those wishing to major in a scientific field, have been caught in recent years in a bottleneck of mathematical failure with the result that in some college mathematics courses the failure-to-complete rate approaches 50 percent.⁴ This type of statistic, together with several woeful (compared to other industrialized countries) performances by U.S. students on standardized tests, has led to much public debate and discussion over mathematics instruction in the United States. Some of the tentative conclusions of this nationwide focus imply that undergraduate students, on the whole, would be better served if a wider variety of instructional techniques were used. (Again, see Douglas,⁵ Steen,⁶ and the Committee on the Mathematical Sciences in the Year 2000.)⁷ For my own part, the pedagogical philosophy which informs my teaching is that actively engaged and participating students learn ideas and analytical thinking better and more easily than do passive students. Most of the ideas discussed in this article stem from that philosophy.

BACKGROUND

Butler University is a small, private university with a curriculum grounded in the traditional liberal arts. The university has a current enrollment of about thirty-five hundred undergraduate students and offers professional programs in business, pharmacy, fine arts, and education in addition to pre-professional curricula in medicine, law, and engineering. Located in a residential area of Indianapolis, Butler attracts better-than-average students who, with some exceptions, are usually adequately prepared in mathematics. The mean SAT mathematics score for the last few entering classes is around 590 (re-centered).

Butler is, in many ways, exceptionally well suited to implementing innovative changes to the traditional lecture format in mathematics instruction. Butler has a two-step mathematics core requirement which insures that all students demonstrate proficiency in algebra prior to enrolling in additional mathematics courses. Because of Butler's size and undergraduate nature (only modest graduate programs exist in the university), mathematics classes are limited to thirty-five or fewer, and nearly all are taught by regular full-time faculty. Like many other smaller universities, Butler has a long tradition of close student-faculty interaction. In addition, Butler has a Writing Across the Curriculum program which includes the requirement that all students must take a writing-intensive course, preferably within their major, during their junior or senior year. In the past several years, the university has also embarked upon a Learning Initiative, two goals of which are to insure active learning and to create student-centered classrooms rather than instructor-centered ones.

Revising pedagogy to function within an interactive atmosphere suggests borrowing ideas from humanities and social sciences to improve the delivery of mathematics instruction and the level of conceptual understanding on the part of enrolled students. The overall goal is to insure that the students are fully engaged with the instructor, with the material, and with each other. It should be practically impossible to be a passive observer in a college mathematics classroom. Over the past several years, I have also been changing the content of my mathematics courses in order to place more emphasis on the fundamental concepts and the connections between the great ideas of mathematics. This effort has been partially supported by the Lilly Foundation and the National Science Foundation. The philosophy underlying this gradual shift is based on the idea that the most important mathematical objectives for college students (especially nonmathematics majors) to achieve are the intuitive and conceptual understandings of the basic notions of quantitative reasoning. In addition, I believe that one of the most important skills to be acquired in college mathematics, indeed in many other disciplines as well, is that of problem-solving—that is, the ability to solve problems which involve the basic concepts of the area being studied. These ideas, together with the oft-repeated observation that “the only way to learn mathematics is to do mathematics,” comprise the framework in which, I believe, innovation in the teaching of college mathematics can flourish. More specifically, the objectives of my mathematics courses, whether freshman core (general education) courses or senior courses for mathematics majors, are to insure that students (at the appropriate level)

- *Write coherent mathematical solutions or arguments*
- *Read and understand mathematics on their own*
- *Apply problem-solving skills in a broad range of problem situations*
- *Exhibit thorough understanding of the basic concepts of the area*
- *Perform a wide range of computational skills, both by hand and by machine when appropriate*
- *Appreciate the power and beauty of mathematics*
- *Adopt an inquisitive, experimental attitude toward mathematics*
- *Reason in extended chains of argument*

Actually, most of the goals listed above apply, with slight modifications, to academic disciplines other than mathematics. For example, expositing a coherent argument is important in almost every field, and professors of all persuasions want their students to appreciate the beauty and extent of their discipline, read and understand material on their own, understand basic concepts, and solve problems. Since I, however, am a mathematics professor, the remainder of this article describes the implementation at Butler of alternative teaching and learning techniques for attaining the goals enumerated above within college mathematics courses at various undergraduate levels. Most of these techniques are not new, having been used in other disciplines for years. What is new, perhaps, is the adaptation of these techniques to the mathematics classroom.

DISCUSSION TECHNIQUES

Perhaps the last place one expects to find discussion is in a college-level mathematics classroom. In fact, in most mathematics classrooms there isn't much student talk at all, if you don't count grumbling. Some faculty, of course, try to use the Socratic method of posing questions and waiting (hoping) for student response. Often, the same student or students will answer most of the questions, or there will be no responses at all, especially if the professor doesn't wait at least thirty seconds before continuing. This approach, while useful in some cases, does not really engender discussion. Furthermore, college students do not come to a mathematics classroom with expectations of oral participation. For that reason, I believe it is important to change those expectations during the first few class meetings of a particular course. Especially in lower-level classes designed for students who are not majoring in mathematics or science, I often begin the course by questioning students (by name, ran-

domly selected from the roster) about what they think the course will be like. I ask

- *What do you think statistics is?*
- *What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word “calculus”?*
- *Do you think this course might be useful to you in the future? Why?*
- *What have you heard about this course?*
- *Do you agree with what she just said? Why?*
- *Why are you taking this course?*

If you are patient, these types of informal dialogues during initial course meetings can set the tone for students to feel free, perhaps eager, to talk all semester. The idea is to make them believe that they are just as responsible for the success of the course as the instructor is.

Naturally, some groups of students will be more verbal than others, but it is important to continue to provide opportunities for verbal interchange in the classroom. For example, I will often intentionally make a mistake when working at the board. If the students are actively participating in what’s going on, they will jump all over me—exactly what I want them to do. Of course, the type of error I make depends on the level of the class, but most of them involve doing something that students might do if they really don’t understand the concepts. For example, in a calculus course, I might “forget” to use the chain rule when differentiating an expression such as $\sin x^2$ in the course of a problem.

Another way that I facilitate discussion is by giving the class a problem to solve, or a theorem to prove, have them study it for a few minutes and then tell me how they would try to solve or prove it. It’s amazing how having to explain orally a proposed procedure or an idea for a proof clarifies their thinking. Sometimes I will put them into small groups first and then ask each group for advice about the method of solution or proof. Sometimes I am led down the wrong path first, which is fine because it demonstrates that problems are not always solved, nor are theorems always proved, on the first attempt. This is a mind-altering insight for many students who assume that, if they can’t solve a problem immediately, they must be “dumb in math.” If students have been exposed primarily to the lecture method of mathematics teaching, it’s not surprising that some might feel this way.

WRITING-TO-LEARN TECHNIQUES

In my mathematics classrooms I use writing techniques in two primary ways: writing-to-learn and writing for presentation. Writing-to-learn strategies are appropriate for all levels of mathematics courses, and in fact, many textbooks now come with exercises entitled something like “Writing for Understanding” or “Writing for Your Own Knowledge.”⁸ Many students find that this type of writing exercise enhances understanding. On a recent set of course evaluations, one of my students wrote, “Things make much more sense and are clearer when you see them on the page in your own words.” Another student wrote, “Writing ideas down after reading or discussing them helps solidify the concepts.” There are many variations on this theme. I sometimes ask students to paraphrase an important paragraph from the text, or to restate an important theorem in their own words. Other examples include

- *What does it mean for a function to be non-differentiable at a point?*
- *Restate the Central Limit Theorem in your own words.*
- *Explain the difference between “ $f(x)$ is differentiable at x ” and “ $f(x)$ is continuous at x .”*
- *Without using any mathematical symbols, explain what the Mean Value Theorem says.*
- *Explain to someone who knows no calculus what a derivative is. (This has, on occasion, been a final examination question.)*
- *Explain to someone who knows no statistics what a P -value of < 0.01 means.*

Another technique that I use frequently is to take the last five minutes of class and have the students write down the most confusing concept/idea/ notion/theorem from that day’s class or pose a question they would like to ask about today’s class or last night’s homework. This is useful to me because, after scanning these paragraphs, I can quickly correct confusion the next time the class meets. It also gives the students a sense of ownership in the class, a sense that is vital to active learning.

Along the same lines, I sometimes ask the students in a class to keep a journal during the entire semester, jotting in it notes about the readings, complaints about the class, questions about the material, and so on. (I will often ask a student to read aloud one of his or her questions in order to start discussion.) When I do require journals, a standing assignment is

that, before they are turned in every Friday, each student must write about the one thing during the week that he or she found the most difficult to understand.⁹ Journal-keeping requires students to keep up with the work, encourages exploration, increases communication between the students and me, and forces the students to describe what they are studying. Grading, however, can be a chore if the class is large. I usually grade this type of informal writing on the basis of the content and extent of the entries, paying minimal attention to English grammar and mathematical correctness, although such errors are noted. At the beginning of the course, I offer suggestions and comments to the class:

- *Spend fifteen to twenty minutes thinking about the week's work before you write about what confused you.*
- *A detailed journal can afford an excellent review for an exam.*
- *Feel free to include a worked exercise you want me to check, or an attempted solution you want me to "debug."*
- *Include any suggestions for improving the course. (I won't be upset!)*

I should note that the most effective way I have found to ensure that students take these types of assignments seriously is to provide feedback in some way or other, even for this type of informal writing. It doesn't always have to be graded carefully by me, but my students want someone to respond to what they have written. I have used mere completion points or a simple check mark together with comments either on individual papers or to the class as a whole. To help ease my grading burden, I will sometimes have the students swap in-class or overnight writing assignments and grade each other's writing.

Exploratory writing assignments are also useful for the first several days of class. For example, when I teach applied statistical methods, on the first day of class I will usually ask each student to write a paragraph describing what he or she thinks statistics is. After the first week or so of class, I will ask each student to revise that paragraph, and I sometimes ask for yet another revision on the final examination.

Another way in which I use informal writing is by asking students to think and write about their own mental processes when it comes to solving problems or proving theorems. One of the most striking characteristics of many of my mathematics students is their rush to begin computation (lower-level students) or to dive into a proof without a plan (upper-division students). For my calculus students, I insist that they write down

a plan of attack to solve a complicated problem. I use Polya's four main principles of problem-solving¹⁰ to give them a framework in which to operate. These principles, which are (1) understanding the problem, (2) designing a solution, (3) carrying out the proposed solution, and (4) checking the work, lend themselves nicely to informal writing. Many students, often the better ones, are accustomed to beginning with the third step (computation); in their experience, the problems have been relatively uncomplicated, and they could understand the problem and, almost unconsciously, form a solution plan in their minds. In fact, this is the style of problem-solving at which many prospective mathematics or science majors are very adept; that's part of the reason they want to be mathematics or science majors. However, these students often find themselves at a loss when the problem to be solved is not routine, but rather complicated, complex, or multistep with many possible paths to take. The mere act of writing down their thoughts about what they need to do, what a proposed solution would look like, and so forth, can clarify thinking to the point where a possible approach to solution emerges.

This approach of writing down the process in English prose has even more benefits for the student who has not experienced a great deal of success in problem-solving or theorem-proving in the past. The approach provides a ready answer to the lament, "I don't even know where to begin!" It constitutes a framework in which the problem-solving or theorem-proving process can occur. "The writing tells me what to do in the calculations," stated one of my junior mathematics majors last semester about this approach used in a numerical analysis course.

WRITING FOR PRESENTATION

One of the most important skills that mathematics and science majors need to acquire is the ability to communicate technical material correctly to colleagues, whether those colleagues are technically well versed or not. Mathematicians write, so why shouldn't mathematics students? Although almost every university requires some sort of writing course(s) for its students, many students do not have the opportunity to practice writing in their field. Since mathematical writing differs in many respects from other expository writing, it behooves us as faculty to offer mathematics students many chances to learn to write mathematics correctly and even elegantly. The traditional mathematics curriculum affords little in the way of formal writing experiences, but it can be easily enhanced to provide opportunities.

In calculus, for example, I require my students to complete Problem Sets, composed of problems taken from sources other than the textbook. These sets include multistep, non-routine problems, a few open-ended ones, some which require library, internet, and/or journal research, and a few requiring the use of the computer or other technology. Since these problems are not tied to a particular section of the text, students cannot look for the solution template in the textbook. The students have at least three weeks to work on each set and are allowed (in fact, encouraged) to work together on them, as long as the sharing is acknowledged and each person writes his/her own solution. Some of the problems in these sets are adapted from a text by Lax, Burstein, and Lax,¹¹ which is a wonderful source for ideas and non-routine problems, especially those which mix exact and approximate techniques. Other excellent sources are Spivak,¹² free-response questions from previous Advanced Placement Examinations,¹³ and Bluman.¹⁴ I myself keep an ever-expanding database of them,¹⁵ and there are various web sites which include such problems—just search for *Calculus*. Merely finding the solution is only a portion of the assignment. I require each problem solution to be written in a clear, grammatically correct, and coherent way with explanations and interpretations included. Freshman calculus students often protest, “This is not an English class,” but if I stick to my guns, some of them become passable writers of mathematics by the end of the semester. Since most of them have absolutely no experience writing mathematics for presentation, I spend some time on guidelines, supplying them with many examples of “do’s” and “don’t’s.”¹⁶ There is a fair amount of weeping and wailing after I return the first set of these problems because typically even a student who has correct answers for each problem will earn only about 75 percent credit because of exposition. I insist not only on correct mathematics, but also on correct English grammar, including writing in complete sentences. With the advent of word-processing technology, I now require that the solutions be “word-processed.” (Mathematical symbols and equations can be inserted by hand if necessary.) As a modification of this idea, I will sometimes distribute problems one at a time, solutions to which are to be turned in several days later. I have used this approach for extra credit in non-major courses as well. For example, I have asked beginning statistics students to use a confidence interval to estimate the number of blades of grass on the Butler soccer field.

I typically require one or more two- to three-page reports in my freshman calculus course. The idea here is not only to give more practice in writing about mathematics, but also to learn where the mathematics jour-

nals are and to practice the critical reading of articles about mathematics. Since the students in this course are not mathematically sophisticated, the topics are often recreational or historical in nature. For example, "Locate an article in a mathematics journal on the history of logarithms (p or Newton) and prepare a critique of it." I give the students a handout describing one way of organizing a critique in five sections: introduction, summary, analysis of the presentation, student's response to the presentation, and conclusion.¹⁷

In a second or third semester calculus course, I frequently assign a team project. I divide the class into teams of two to three students each, based loosely on major fields of interest. (For example, at Butler, a plurality of students in second semester calculus are chemistry majors, with a few computer science, physics and mathematics majors.) Approximately halfway through the term, each team is given a problem on an application of calculus in the area of interest and is responsible for making both an oral presentation and a written report about its investigation of the problem. As an example, consider Table 3.1, a project designed for a group of two chemistry majors.

Table 3.1

Problem: Describe single-reactant irreversible reactions, including definitions of rate constant, reaction order, and half-life. Find formulas for the concentration and the half-life of a reaction of order n . For given data on the concentration, determine the reaction order and rate constant of a reaction provided the reaction is of order 0, 1, or 2.

References

- Bares, J., et al. *Collection of Problems in Physical Chemistry*, Addison-Wesley, 1962.
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For upper-division classes, I often use another instructional method which combines collaborative work, discovery, and writing for presentation. The mathematician R.L.Moore at the University of Texas developed the so-called Moore method of teaching graduate level mathematics. In this method, students were required, in point set topology, for example, to discover the concepts, formulate the definitions, and state and prove the theorems themselves, concluding with a presentation to the class.

There is little doubt that the graduate students under such a system understood the topics extremely well and had a lot of practice in writing and explaining mathematics. In order to adapt this to an undergraduate setting, in which time constraints and required syllabi mitigate against the use of such a method, I have used a modification of this approach in several of my upper-division classes.¹⁸ This alternative way to structure a class divides the students into small groups of three to four, each of which is responsible for a weekly question. During the week each group must study and answer the question and prepare a written solution for distribution to me and to the rest of the class. At the end of the week, one of the groups, selected at random, presents its question and solution to the class as a whole. All students in the class are responsible on midterm and final examinations for all the material covered by each group, practically insuring active participation during class time. The written solutions are, of course, required to be clear, concise expositions of both the question and the solution, following all the usual rules of punctuation, syntax, and so forth, used by professional mathematicians. Each paper is required to have an abstract of two or three sentences and include any appropriate references.

Typically, I will distribute the regular homework problems and the team assignments on Friday, cover some background material on Monday, allow the students to work together on Wednesday and solicit advice from me, and then choose a team to present on Friday. I have used this method with good results in differential equations, numerical analysis and introductory real analysis. What follows—see Table 3.2—is a sample of the type of assignment one might use in a numerical analysis course.

A successful implementation of this collaborative method requires a certain level of student maturity and motivation, characteristics we hope (?) to see in upper-division mathematics students. Each group must decide not only how to solve the problem, but how to divide up the written work. Sometimes, a solution is written in sections with each team member writing one section; sometimes, one team member writes the entire solution. (In that case, I insist that member may not write another one until every member of the team has written an entire solution.) In addition, the group must plan the oral presentation, deciding who is going to say what, and leaving time for questions from the class. While the midterm and final examinations are graded individually, students receive a group grade (usually unsatisfactory, satisfactory, or really impressive) on the written solution, and individual grades for their part in the oral presentation.

Table 3.2

MA 365

Fall 1998

Assignment 3

Due: October 10

- **Sections: 3.1, 3.2**
- **Basics:** Polynomial interpolation—using polynomials to approximate continuous functions using a finite number of points and estimating the error involved.
 - (3.1) Using Taylor polynomials to interpolate functions
 - (3.2) Using Lagrange polynomials to interpolate functions
- **Problems:**
 - Section 3.1–1,2,3,5
 - Section 3.2–1a,1c,2,6,9
- **Team Assignments:**
 - {A.} Section 3.1, Problem 6
 - {B.} Section 3.2, Problem 8

Remember that you are to explain the problem, explain the method used to solve it, including any underlying theory, and give the solution. You may wish to include computer printouts or to use *Mathematica* from the instructor's workstation. If you wish to use an overhead projector with transparencies, let me know the day before.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Problem-solving is probably the single most important skill to be acquired by lower level mathematics students, even potential mathematics majors. For non-major freshmen and sophomores, this is likely the one skill at which they feel the least accomplished. From the instructor's point of view, any strategy that assists students in their problem-solving skills is beneficial to the atmosphere of the class. In most lower level mathematics courses, regular homework problems are assigned as a matter of course, but there are several "active learning" strategies that I employ in an effort to improve my students' ability to internalize concepts in order to solve problems.

In beginning mathematics and statistics courses, I use quite a lot of in-class small group work. For example, in first-year calculus, usually one or two days per week (out of the four or five days of class meetings) are set aside for in-class problem-solving. This can be accomplished in several different ways. Sometimes I separate the class into small groups of four to five students and distribute problems. These are attacked within the groups while I roam around as an advisor. I usually allow the students to select their group members themselves, although on occasion I will place certain students within certain groups. Sometimes, all the better students will group themselves together, leaving the other groups floundering. In a few instances, I have had to break up an especially social group! At the beginning of the semester, when the students don't know one another, I just group them by proximity of their seats.

Before we begin, I establish the ground rules for this type of collaborative work.

- *Groups are to work on the problems together. No one is allowed to work alone. I believe that students can learn a lot from one another. Incidentally, this also helps new students to get to know others on campus.*
- *Each person in the group has a responsibility to every other person in that group. That responsibility is to make sure that everyone understands the solution before the group proceeds to the next problem. This reinforces the idea of each student being partially responsible for the success of the class, as well as for his or her own learning. Even the brightest student in the group is not to go on to the next problem until everyone understands the current one. As a consequence, students obtain a great deal of practice in communicating mathematics verbally, a desirable result.*
- *If the entire group is stumped, one person raises a hand and I walk over to offer a hint. (If all the groups seem to be having difficulty with the same problem, I'll offer a hint on the board or the computer.)*

On other occasions, we, that is, the class and I, solve (usually harder or more theoretical) problems as a "committee of the whole," while I act as recorder at the chalkboard. If the proper foundation for insuring an interactive class environment has been laid, I don't have to call on students by name to get them to articulate ideas for a solution; they will talk all over

each other with their suggestions. In this way students can successfully complete difficult problems which they never would have even attempted alone. My experience has been that, if such a problem (e.g., a “starred” exercise in the text or a slightly theoretical result) is assigned as routine homework, most students will take one look and decide they cannot possibly solve it. Solving it successfully in class, even as a group, builds confidence in their abilities, which goes a long way toward insuring success in subsequent problem-solving endeavors. It seems also to be a source of great relief to them to discover that it is possible to solve such a problem even if the wrong path is taken first.

THE PLACE OF TECHNOLOGY

Inexpensive technological aids for mathematics have appeared in recent years, and the future holds even more promise along these lines. All of these can be used to enliven the mathematics classroom and insure that the students are actively participating in their learning.

Graphing calculators have become a staple in calculus and pre-calculus classes; even the Advanced Placement Calculus Examinations, which are intended to reflect current practice in college courses, now require such calculators. Since many of my students come to college already owning one, it is impractical, at least for me, to require a particular brand. (I try to be relatively fluent on several different brands.) Textbooks for many college mathematics courses are being written (or rewritten) to incorporate graphing calculator technology, but some of these merely “tack on” calculator-dependent exercises. The National Science Foundation has funded the development of some technology-dependent materials which can be easily used to foster an interactive classroom experience. See Hughes-Hallett¹⁹ for an excellent example. For a specific example of using a graphing calculator to help students develop intuition about infinite series, see Morrel.²⁰ See also Ward and Wilberschied²¹ for another example of calculator-active materials.

In both calculus and pre-calculus, I require my students to have a graphing calculator. After about a week, after everyone has had a chance to purchase a calculator if necessary, I spend one class day getting everyone up to speed on the basic functions of the machine. Without fail, I have had at least two or three students in each class who are fluent in the use of a particular brand, so I will distribute them among groups of students who have the same calculator. For example, in first semester calculus, I group together all the Casio's, all the TI-85's, all the TI-82's and

83's, etc., give each group a student expert, distribute a set of calculator exercises, and let them loose. This first set of exercises is usually designed so they learn how to use the scientific calculator functions, how to graph one or more user-entered functions, and how to trace those graphs. All other calculator functions (e.g., numerical integration, finding points of intersection) are explored on a "need-to-know" basis. I introduce them as we cover the material during the semester, using some variation of the small-group arrangement with exercises to complete.

In courses in which there is a lot of symbolic manipulation and computation, a computer algebra system (CAS), such as *Mathematica* or *Maple*, makes cumbersome calculations routine, so that the students can focus more on the concepts and the process of problem-solving—that is, "setting it up," corresponding to the first two of Polya's steps mentioned above. I am fortunate to teach second and third semester calculus, as well as linear algebra, numerical analysis, and differential equations, in an electronic classroom in which each student has an individual workstation with a CAS available. While I use graphing calculators in first semester calculus, by the end of the second semester of first-year calculus, my students are comfortable using *Mathematica* in an interactive mode. Once they have demonstrated a reasonable grasp of a few techniques of integration, I allow them to use it on examinations which, of course, means that I cannot use the same sort of examination questions that I used when such technology was not available. Since I am not focusing on the students' computational abilities, I am free to ask what I consider equally, if not more important, questions regarding concepts and process. For example, instead of asking a calculus student to find a zero of a function using Newton's method (strictly "plug-and-chug"), I ask him or her to explain *geometrically* why Newton's method with initial guess x fails when $f'(x) = 0$ or to show graphically an example of the method failing to converge.⁹ I can also use more "real world" data because I no longer have to be concerned with how bad the numbers (or the derivatives or the integrals) are. I now routinely ask "what if" questions on examinations, or questions that require a student to discern a pattern.

By using a computer algebra system or other technology in an exploratory manner, the students can actually discover some mathematics themselves. The availability of symbolic and graphing technology can be used in this way to reduce lecture time. Sometimes, I will talk (lecture!) for ten to fifteen minutes on a new topic and then ask the students, with a partner, to engage in some sort of discovery session on the topic. I find that they learn many concepts much more easily if they discover some-

thing about it themselves. I have collected a repertoire of these discovery sessions for use in most first and second year mathematics classes. Consider Table 3.3, a graphing calculator example which I use after talking a bit about exponential growth and decay. (See also Morrel.)²²

As another example of using graphing software for discovery, consider Table 3.4, a discovery session for teasing students into finding the definition for the slope of a curve. (I can usually also tease the class into noticing that a differentiable function is locally linear, a notion useful to emphasize from the beginning.)

In addition to computer algebra systems and graphing calculators, there are now appearing on the market interactive “textbooks,” CD-ROM’s on which an entire course is delivered. The best of these are multimedia products which include text, short videos, interactive homework exercises and projects, animations, and so forth. Since the individual student purchases a CD, usually shrink-wrapped with a text, large-scale investments in software (either purchase or upgrade) by the college or university may not be necessary. For example, I have taught an applied statistics course using such a set-up.²³ Not only does the CD, which runs on two different platforms, come with explanatory material (text, videos, animations, and so on,) but it also includes large data sets for statistical analysis coupled with homework problems that use those sets, and a link to statistical sites on the World Wide Web. I use this material to reduce lecturing to a minimum. The students spend a good bit of their time in class working with their CD’s. I function mainly as their cheerleader (i.e., motivator) and assistant. There is no way a student can be a passive observer with this arrangement.

CONCLUSIONS

There is little doubt that such a major shift in teaching style from the lecture format to an interactive format requires considerable effort on the part of the professor. Many aspects must be considered: the comfort level of the instructor, the time constraints of the syllabus, the maturity level of the students, and so forth. Because of reduced lecturing time, I warn my students at the beginning that they will be more responsible for reading textual material (whether hard copy or CD) on their own. (Since most students are not accustomed to reading mathematics texts, they must be reminded of this continually.) The judicious use of technology can “buy back” some class time, but I still cannot cover an example of every type of problem in the course, nor can I prove every theorem in the book.

Table 3.3

MA 106 The Die-Away Curve Fall 1997

For $a, b > 0$, let us consider the curve $y = be^{-ax}$.

- (1) On the same set of axes, graph this curve with $a=b=1$; $a=1, b=5$; $a=1, b=0.5$. What do you notice in common about all the curves above? Try some other choices.
- (2) Now suppose that the independent variable is t , time.
Differentiate the equation above (substituting t for x) and interpret the result.

The importance of this curve is that for differing choices of a and b , the equation represents the course of a great many physical processes in which something is gradually *dying away*.

Examples:

- Newton's law of cooling is given by $T(t) = T_0 e^{-at}$, where T_0 is the original excess of temperature of a hot body (!) over that of its surroundings, $T(t)$ is the excess of temperature at the end of time t , and a is a constant which depends upon the amount of the surface of the body which is exposed, and its coefficients of conductivity and emission.
- The formula $Q(t) = Q_0 e^{-\mu t}$ is used to express the charge of an electrified body, originally having a charge Q_0 , which is leaking away with a constant of decrement μ , which depends upon the capacity of the body and the resistance of the leakage-path.
- When a dose of a certain drug is injected into a body, the amount remaining in the body at time t is given by $A(t) = A_0 e^{-kt}$, where A_0 is the original dose and k is a constant depending upon the drug and the size of the patient.
- The intensity I of a beam of light which has passed through a thickness h cm of some transparent medium is $I(h) = I_0 e^{-Kh}$, where I_0 is the initial intensity of the beam and K is the "constant of absorption." (Note: Here the independent variable is not time, but what?)

In many cases the constants in question are determined experimentally. For example:

- (3) Suppose it is found that a beam of light has its intensity diminished by 18 percent in passing through 10 cm of a certain transparent medium. What is K ? Find the thickness of the medium which will reduce the intensity by one-half.
- (4) The charge Q of an electrified insulated metal sphere is reduced from 20 to 16 units in 10 minutes. Find the "coefficient of leakage" μ , if $Q(t) = Q_0 e^{-\mu t}$. Here, as usual, Q_0 is the initial charge and t is time in seconds. How long does it take to lose half its charge?

Table 3.4**Introduction to the Slope of a Curve**

- (1) Using a range of $[-2, 2]$ by $[-1, 4]$, graph the function $y=x^2$.
- (2) We are interested in extending the notion of the slope of a line to the idea of the slope of a curve. As will be the usual case in calculus, we want to use what we already know and extend it to a more general case. Here we want to use what we know about the slopes of lines to accomplish this. We are going to look near the point $(1, 1)$ on the curve and try to estimate how fast the curve is rising at that point. Regraph the curve using the range $[0, 2]$ by $[-1, 4]$. How does the slope look near $(1, 1)$? Is it flatter than before?
- (3) Redraw the graph using the range $[0.5, 1.5]$ by $[-1, 3]$. What does the graph look like now?
- (4) One more time—regraph using $[0.8, 1.2]$ by $[-1, 2]$. Now how does it look? Try several more, zooming in on $(1, 1)$ more and more. What does the curve look like, locally at least? How can you estimate the slope of the curve near $(1, 1)$ now? (Use what you know about lines and the trace function on your calculator.) What did you get for your estimate of the slope of the curve at $(1, 1)$? Compare your answer with your neighbor's.
- (5) Now repeat the above type of procedure to estimate the slope of the curve near the points $(2, 4)$ and $(0, 0)$. Wouldn't it be nice to find a way to compute this slope exactly for any point (x, x^2) on the curve? How would you go about this? What do you get when you try it?
- (6) What about other curves? When can you use the same sort of technique?

Often I will relegate what I consider less crucial topics to be covered in Problem Sets, rather than in class. This serves again as a reminder to the student that he or she bears the primary responsibility for his or her learning. It is imperative to remain flexible and open-minded. Sometimes I change what I had planned to do in class because of a question, comment, or journal entry. I do not use all of the techniques mentioned above in every class, but I have used all of them in some class.

Moving to a more student-centered classroom is an evolutionary process. Don't try to overhaul a traditional lecturing style all at once; just try a few things at a time, and see how they work for you. Professors have different natural teaching styles, just as students have different natural learning styles. Use the ideas that seem most beneficial for you and your students. Unless some specific strategies are used to reduce the load, grading can be burdensome. Use peer review wherever possible. Another trick I use is to flip a coin at the beginning of class. If it comes up heads, I collect the assignment; if it's tails, I don't. (No, I don't own a two-tailed coin!)

Given the warnings of the last two paragraphs, it is natural to ask, "Why would I want to do such a thing?" In addition to the reasons mentioned in the introduction, I submit that the personal rewards are more than worth the effort. Class is simply more fun when the students are lively and engaged. Group work can help to build up a great deal of camaraderie in this type of class. Give-and-take between students is greatly increased as is their communication with me. Try it—you'll like it!

NOTES

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² Lynn A. Steen, ed., *Calculus for a New Century: A Pump, Not a Filter*, MAA Notes No. 8 (Washington, D.C.: Mathematical Association of America, 1987).

³ *Moving Beyond Myths: Revitalizing Undergraduate Mathematics*. (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1991).

⁴ Douglas, 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Steen.

⁷ *Moving Beyond Myths: Revitalizing Undergraduate Mathematics*.

⁸ Ross L. Finney and George B. Thomas, Jr., *Calculus*, 2nd ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, Inc., 1993).

⁹ Art Young and Toby Fulwiler, eds., *Writing Across the Disciplines: Research into Practice*. (Portsmouth, NH: Boyton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1986).

¹⁰ George Polya, *How to Solve It: A New Aspect of Mathematical Method*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

¹¹ Peter Lax, Samuel Burstein, and Anneli Lax, *Calculus with Applications and Computing*, Vol. 1. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1976).

¹² Michael Spivak, *Calculus*. (New York: W.A.Benjamin, 1967).

¹³ *AP Calculus AB and BC: Free Response Questions 1996*. (New York: College Board and Educational Testing Service, 1996).

¹⁴ George W.Bluman, *Problem Book for First Year Calculus*. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1984).

¹⁵ Judith H.Morrel, *CalcBase: A Mini Database of "Good" Calculus Problems*. (Indianapolis, IN: Butler University, 1991).

¹⁶ J.J.Price, "Learning Mathematics Through Writing: Some Guidelines," *College Mathematics Journal* (Nov 1989): 393–402.

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¹⁸ James Fink, *The Modified Moore Method*, unpublished handout, (1990).

¹⁹ Deborah Hughes-Hallett, et. al., *Calculus*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994).

²⁰ Judith H.Morrel, "A Gentle Introduction to Infinite Series Using a Graphing Calculator," *PRIMUS* II, no.1, (1992): 33–36.

²¹ Frank Ward and Doug Wilberschied, *Insight into Calculus Using Texas Instruments Graphing Calculators*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997).

²² Judith H.Morrel, "Using the CASIO FX7000G Graphing Calculator in a Reformed Calculus Course," *Proceedings of the Second Conference on Technology in Teaching Mathematics*. (Oxford, OH: Miami University, 1989).

²³ Paul Velleman, *ActivStats*. (Ithaca, NY: Data Description, Inc. and Addison-Wesley Interactive, 1997).

ESSAY 4

Experiences with Writing Assignments in Upper-Division Computer Science Courses

JONATHAN SORENSON

INTRODUCTION

When I arrived at Butler University in the Fall of 1991, I discovered the writing-across-the-curriculum program (WAC), directed by Dr. Carol Reeves. At Butler, all students must take a *writing-intensive* course during their junior or senior year. Preferably that course should be in the student's major. At Butler, WAC's primary duty is to approve courses as writing-intensive and to train faculty to competently offer such courses. As an eager new faculty member, I dutifully signed up for the training, despite my fears about using writing in computer science courses. I had never taught a course that involved writing, and I did not know how to grade writing assignments. I was not certain that writing could or should be used in upper-division computer science courses as it is in upper-division humanities courses. Perhaps fellow computer scientists feel the same way.

After several years of teaching writing-intensive courses and some trial and error, I have discovered that writing can be incorporated into many upper-division computer science courses in a way that is natural and makes sense. In particular, I have taught operating systems, database systems, algorithms, and theory of computation successfully as writing-intensive courses. I believe that these courses are better as a result. In this article, I will share some of my experience in this area in the hope that others may find some of what I say to be helpful.

If you teach computer science or something similar, but have little or no experience in using writing in your courses, then I would like you to hear me out. I hope both to convince you to include writing in some of

your courses in the future and to give you some ideas about how this can be done without making the writing assignments seem “tacked on.” Specifically, I will describe several types of writing assignments that I have used, my approach to grading writing assignments, and the role peer evaluation and revision opportunities have to play in these courses. If you are already experienced in using writing, then much of what I have to say will not be new for you. Nevertheless, I hope you find something here that is useful. Finally, if you are not a computer scientist, what I have to share may not be as relevant for you, but for the most part, the types of writing assignments I describe and some of my other comments apply equally to all disciplines, especially the more technically oriented areas.

MOTIVATION: WHY USE WRITING?

There are two primary reasons that we, as computer science educators, should be teaching writing in our undergraduate curricula.

The first reason is that our students need to be able to write, and write well, to succeed in the workplace after graduation. Most of our students who earn bachelors degrees in computer science do not attend graduate school immediately after graduation, but instead enter the workplace. But as in the academic environment, working on a day-to-day basis in the “real world” successfully requires good communication skills. Most computer professionals today probably write more memos, letters, e-mail messages, and technical documentation of various types than they do lines of code.

To make matters worse, you have probably observed that science attracts many students who have above-average quantitative reasoning skills but below-average verbal skills. This is probably more true of mathematics or physics than computer science, but it is true nevertheless. I found this quite apparent when looking at the average SAT scores of my advisees. Some of these students have very weak writing skills, yet succeed in most computer science courses. We must work with these students to improve their writing so that their success continues after graduation.

In the past, we relied upon the English department to teach all of our writing for us. English faculty are, by and large, excellent writers, and they are experienced in teaching writing. It is foolish to believe we can teach our students to write better than the English faculty can. However, the point is to teach our students to write *in computer science*. The terse,

direct style of technical writing in computer science is quite different from the style our students use in their English and other humanities courses. Our students need to know the conventions and expectations for written work in our discipline. This is best accomplished if *we* teach writing in our own computer science courses. We cannot reasonably expect English faculty to teach our students how to write in computer science when we are the ones who practice such writing. Finally, to teach our students correctly, we must give them writing exercises with a computer science content and rhetorical situation, and grade those exercises from a computer scientist's point of view.

The second reason to teach writing in our computer science courses is that writing can help students learn. The idea is that the process of verbalizing concepts on paper can help a student clarify her thoughts and thereby help her learn. The highest level of mastery of new material is obtained if you can successfully teach it to someone else. The process of writing is very similar; the writer is, in a sense, attempting to teach the new material to the reader. This concept of *writing to learn* has been examined a great deal in the literature. (See, for example, the compilation of Connolly and Vilardi on *Writing to Learn Mathematics and Science*,¹ the classic paper by Jane Emig,² and the SIGCSE papers [SIGCSE is the Special Interest Group on Computer Science Education; it is part of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)] by Flanningham and Warriner³ and Hartman.⁴) But if you have done research in computer science or some other discipline, you already know that writing up your work helps to crystallize your new knowledge. It may even illuminate new ideas or problems that you had not noticed before the writing process began. Undergraduate students can have this same experience with your course material if you have them write to learn. It works. Even my students agree. Here is a quote from one of them:

Yeah, 'cause if I had to write what I was doing, I had to think about it more; I had to understand it. I couldn't just put down an answer that I thought might be half right and hope to get some points. I had to actually know what I was doing so I could write it down for someone else.

There is a common theory that most people think in one of two different ways: verbally or visually. Neither method is inherently better, but the traditional ways to teach mathematics and science strongly favor the visual thinker. With more writing in our courses, the verbal thinkers

among our students will have a much better chance to succeed and the visual thinkers will develop much needed verbal skills.

Finally, the 1991 curriculum guidelines of the Association for Computing Machinery and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (ACM-IEEE)⁵ suggest that we should include the development of communications skills as part of our curricula.

Now that we have established that using writing is worth the effort, how do we go about incorporating it in our courses? Every teacher's style is different, and you should use writing in a way that is consistent with your style. Below I explain how I have used writing in some of my courses. You may think that some of the ideas I present below are good; you may also decide that some are not for you. Take what works for you and leave the rest. Or even better, adapt them to your particular style.

I am not the first (or, hopefully, the last) to argue for writing in computer science. (See, for example, the articles by Bickerstaff and Kaufman,⁶ Falconer and Katz,⁷ Gardner and Othmer,⁸ Jackowitz, Plishka, and Sidbury,⁹ Kay,¹⁰ Paprzycki and Zalewski,¹¹ Pesante,¹² and Walker.¹³)

TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

Writing assignments fall into one of two major categories: Formal and Informal. Think of a formal writing assignment as one that must be typed, usually follows a specified format, often has a bibliography, and normally takes several days or weeks to complete. Informal assignments are usually much shorter and are occasionally written by hand.

Let me now describe how I have used formal writing in my courses.

Formal Assignments

The two types of formal assignments I have used are project documentation, the writing of documentation or a report to accompany a course project of some sort, and what I call article reports.

Project Documentation. This is perhaps the most obvious of formal writing assignments. In fact, it may be the case that you are already using this type of assignment. The idea is to have your students write formal documentation of some sort for a class project. This assignment can cover almost anything. Possibilities include writing a user manual or programmer's notes for a program they have written, and writing a report of an experiment they carried out in lab.

Here are three examples of assignments that I have used in three different courses.

- *In my operating systems course, which uses Silberschatz and Galvin's text,¹⁴ one of the programming projects I assign is to implement several different solutions to the Dining Philosopher's Problem. Recall that this classic synchronization problem, due to Edsger Dijkstra, has five philosophers seated at a round table, with one chopstick placed between each pair of philosophers. The philosophers alternately eat and think. When they eat, they first must acquire both of the chopsticks next to them. When they are finished eating, they return the chopsticks to the table so that their neighbors might have a chance to eat. I have the students program several solutions to this problem in C++ using standard Unix system calls for synchronization. As part of this assignment, I ask the students to write formal program documentation, wherein they explain how they have translated the abstract solutions from the text into code. They also must compare and contrast the solutions, choose one as the best, and explain their reasoning for their choice. In addition to demonstrating their understanding of the problem, this forces the students to analyze what they are doing. This writing assignment normally requires about three pages, and I have them turn it in as part of their programming project.*
- *In my database systems course, which uses the text by Silberschatz, Korth, and Sudarshan,¹⁵ I give a semester-long database project, where the students design a complete database system, from an ER diagram through an SQL implementation in Access97 or Oracle, for an enterprise that they pick themselves. They work in groups of three or four. As part of this project, I have them write up a paper that presents their design, with sample queries. Their audience is a (fictitious) company that might be interested in using their database design. This paper runs about ten pages, and together with a demonstration of their database, is the final deliverable for the project. Aside from having the students demonstrate their mastery of the database design process, this assignment also gives them a chance to write for a lay audience and to write a document as a group.*

- *When I teach the algorithms course, which uses Mark Allen Weiss's text,¹⁶ I give a programming project where the students choose an algorithm from the literature that is not covered in the course. They must implement the algorithm and write a paper describing, in their own words, how the algorithm works. The purpose of the paper is to help the student understand the algorithm by explaining it for the reader. I present the assignment as writing programmers' notes for their code. This is normally five to seven pages.*

In addition to having students demonstrate their knowledge of their project through writing expository prose, this type of assignment also stresses the importance of writing good documentation and provides us with a mechanism for teaching our students the correct style and form for writing in computer science.

Article Reports. This is the second type of formal assignment I have used, and the students seem to enjoy it. I ask the students to choose an article from the literature on a topic closely related to the course material. I urge them to find something that they think is interesting, and I give them a list of journals to browse. They read the article and write a two to three page summary of the contents of the article. I also ask them to give their own opinion of the article: Is it well written? Is it interesting? Is it useful? I often give this assignment two or three times in a semester, and it works particularly well in systems courses where the articles from the research and trade journals are a bit more accessible to undergraduates.

This assignment serves several important purposes. First, each student will learn something new by reading an article from the literature, and what they learn is most probably different from what any other student in class will learn while doing the same assignment. The process of writing a report helps them learn this new material, plus, during the peer review process (which I explain a bit later) other students in the class may learn this new material as well. Second, computer science is, as you know, a rapidly changing field, and teaching students how to keep themselves current is very important. Third, the exposure to others' writing, and the mental process of critiquing that writing, can make the students themselves better writers.

Informal Assignments

Next, I will describe four different types of informal writing assignments that I have used. Recall that informal assignments are normally much shorter than formal assignments, often less than a page long.

Homework and Exam Essay Questions. This is perhaps the most obvious informal writing assignment to give. In fact, it is likely you are already using this type of assignment. I often use homework questions directly from the text, especially in systems courses. Here is an example from a take-home exam in my database systems course:

Explain the differences and similarities between the write-deferred and write-immediate log-based recovery strategies.

Here are two student responses, one good and the other poor. First, we have the good solution:

The deferred-modification technique ensures transaction atomicity by recording all database modification in the log, but deferring the execution of all write operations of a transaction until it partially commits (assuming it is executed serially). When a transaction partially commits, the information on the log associated with the transaction is used in executing the deferred writes. If the system crashes before the transaction completes its execution, or if the transaction aborts, then the information on the log is simply ignored. The immediate-update technique allows database modifications to be output to the database while the transaction is still in the active state. Data modifications written by the active transaction are called uncommitted modifications. In the event of a crash or a transaction failure, the system must use the old-value field of the log record to restore the modified data items to the value they had prior to the start of the transaction.

Although a bit longer than what I would write, it is essentially correct, and I awarded this one full credit. A longer essay is not always a better one, especially in our discipline, where conciseness is valued. But it is often the case that students write more when they understand more, even to the point of being redundant. In informal writing, I encourage you not to penalize length. Here, now, is the poor solution:

Write-deferred atomicity ensures a transaction. It does this by creating a log with all modifications to the database. Its recovery

strategy is it lets the transaction happen and ignores the log if the transaction is executed. Write-immediate lets modification happen to the database if the transaction is still occurring. It recovery strategy is to use the old log records which restores the values that they had prior to the start of the transaction.

This student reveals his confusion by choosing incorrect words in several places (for example, in the third sentence, “executed” should be “aborted” or “terminated”) and by not being clear (what does it mean to ensure a transaction?). Also note how much shorter this essay is. This student, who is capable of writing good essays, probably just tried to rewrite material from the text in his own words without understanding the concepts.

The purpose of this sort of assignment is to have the students demonstrate their understanding of the material. As mentioned earlier, the process of writing the answers helps clarify the information in their own minds. It also encourages them to keep up with the course and read the text. If you tell the students that you will grade not only the content of their answers, but also their writing, then they treat this type of assignment a bit more seriously. They may go into more depth or spend more time thinking about their answer before writing it.

Explanation Papers. This is one of my favorite assignments to give. The idea is to take a basic, fundamental concept that you expect your students to know and have them explain it for a lay or peer audience. This serves several purposes. First, it gives the students a chance to step back and see the “big picture,” which we often take for granted but the students often miss. Second, if our students do not understand such a topic as well as they should, we will quickly find that out.

Here are some example assignments:

- *Explain the definition of the complexity class NP and what it means for a problem to be NP-Complete. (This is from my algorithms course.)*
- *Explain what the unsolvability of the halting problem means to programmers. (I used this in my theory of computation course, which uses Brookshear’s text.¹⁷)*
- *Explain the difference between one-to-one and onto functions. (I used this in my theory of computation course in the first week, with surprising results. I learned that half of the class was still*

confusing the definition of a function for that of a one-to-one function.)

In the theory of computation course, I asked Dr. Carol Reeves, an English professor and the director of our writing program, to read and make comments on the explanation papers. She and the students both enjoyed it, and it helped the students to understand what it means to write for their lay audience. I recommend letting someone else comment on student papers as a general practice, especially if that person brings a different point of view (such as someone outside computer science).

Depending on the concept, explanation papers can be from one to four pages in length.

Class Discussion Questions. As an alternative to lecturing, I often hold a class discussion. I do this by giving one or more questions, and then have the class break up into groups of two to four in size and assign a question to each group. They discuss the question and come up with an answer. I then have the various groups present their answers to the rest of the class and we discuss them. Each person in each group then writes up the answers to the discussion questions. Grading these half-page papers motivates the students to put forth their best effort in the class discussion, as they will be graded individually on collaborative work. It also directly engages the students in personal interaction with the material in question. They are not simply passive recipients of information. Normally I have them hand these in as part of a homework assignment.

Summary Questions. When we cover a particularly difficult concept in class, I often stop five minutes early and ask the class to write a paragraph summarizing the topic. They are rarely more than a half page long and are quick to grade if you choose not to worry about grammar. This assignment lets you know quickly if the students have absorbed everything.

As an example from operating systems, when we discuss how operating systems service I/O interrupts, I ask the class to describe what happens in chronological order, from when a process signals an interrupt up through when the operating system relinquishes control of the CPU. The student's ability to write this description insures that they understand how interrupts work.

DISCUSSION

There are three more kinds of assignments that I personally have not tried as yet, but are commonly used by other instructors. The first is the *overnight write*, an informal assignment used primarily for writing to learn. It is usually less than a page and due the very next class period, yet much like the summary papers I mentioned above. Its purpose is to make sure the students read the material and think about it in advance of class discussion. The second is the *research* or *term paper*, a formal assignment with which I am sure you are quite familiar. For some discussion of this type of writing, see Cunningham,¹⁸ and for details on how to organize such assignments, see Taylor and Paine.¹⁹ Coté and Custeau²⁰ and Hafen²¹ take the best of their student research papers and publish them in the form of a magazine. The third is the *journal*, an informal, ongoing assignment whereby your students can maintain a continual dialogue with you. Von Holzen²² examined the differences between using regular paper journals and using electronic journals based on e-mail. Sterrett²³ includes a number of articles on various types of assignments for mathematics courses; many of these ideas work with computer science courses as well. Quirk²⁴ shows how computer networks could be taught as writing-intensive.

My focus here has been on using writing in upper-division computer science courses, but you can also incorporate writing in the introductory courses, such as CS1 and CS2. Berque, Singer, and Townsend²⁵ describe how they have used written lab reports in CS1, Brown²⁶ discusses having CS1 students write formal requirements specifications, Curl²⁷ has CS1 students write about their programming projects, and Hartman²⁸ discusses the use of writing in data structures. Fell, Proulx, and Casey²⁹ give lots of examples of different writing assignments, including a number of possibilities for CS1 and CS2.

GRADING

I was very uncomfortable with the idea of grading written work before I offered my first writing-intensive course. As a student in college, I was often mystified as to how my grades were determined. I remember turning in a paper that I thought was quite good that earned a B-, and a paper I wrote the night before it was due that earned an A. The idea of writing a paper and somehow coming up with a letter grade was too ambiguous for me. The answer to this, of course, is to make your grading of writing assignments as objective as possible.

The first step is to make sure that your writing assignments are clear and straightforward. Have a colleague read your writing assignment before you give it to your students. This serves as a safety check to make sure the students will understand what you are after.

The second step is to make sure that your grading criteria are known to the students in advance. This does not mean simply stating that “A is for excellent papers, B is for good papers, . . .” Instead, think about the specific criteria you use to distinguish a fair paper from an excellent paper, and write this down for your students. I use a grading sheet (see Table 4.1). On this sheet I have each of my criteria listed, with room for comments. I give my students a copy of this sheet at the beginning of the semester, so that they know what I will look for in their papers.

**Table 4.1 Sample Grading/Comment Sheet
for Writing Assignments**

Content/Correctness (60%)			
Main Point/Topic Sentence	Strong	OK	Weak
The main topic of the paper should be obvious.			
Organization	Strong	OK	Weak
The paper is well organized.			
Assignment Specification	Strong	OK	Weak
The paper fulfills the assignment.			
Interesting	Strong	OK	Weak
The paper is interesting to read.			
Grammar and Mechanics (20%)			
Sentence Structure	Strong	OK	Weak
Sentences are complete and correct; there are no comma splices or run-ons.			
Spelling	Strong	OK	Weak
Punctuation	Strong	OK	Weak

Clarity and Style (20%)

Clarity The paper is clear and easy to understand.	Strong	OK	Weak
Concise The author gets to the point; there is no redundancy.	Strong	OK	Weak
Audience The paper is appropriate for its audience.	Strong	OK	Weak
Level of Usage The author's language is professional. (This does not mean lots of big words!)	Strong	OK	Weak

When grading student work, I take a copy of my sheet, circle “Weak,” “OK,” or “Strong,” and then make comments in each category where I choose not to give a “Strong” rating. I then give a numerical grade instead of a letter grade. It is tempting to correct every grammatical and spelling error, but unless you only need to do this a couple of times, it is not very helpful. Instead, write comments, in the form of complete sentences when possible, either on the grading sheet or in the margin of the paper. Students learn far more from thoughtful comments than from a bunch of red marks correcting their mistakes for them. They need to learn to find and correct their own mistakes.

If a student makes the same type of mistake several times in a paper, I often will refer them to a section of *Bugs in Writing* by Lyn Dupre.³⁰ I highly recommend this excellent, and very readable book that explains many of the mechanical details of writing well. I have the students in all of my writing-intensive courses buy this book. I recommend they keep it, not only for other courses, but also to serve as a resource to help their writing after they graduate. The book by Knuth, Larrabee, and Roberts³¹ is also helpful.

PEER REVIEW

For most of my formal writing assignments, I have the students perform a *peer review*: they read and comment on near-final drafts of each other's work. There are a number of good reasons to have the students do a peer-review:

- *All of us make mistakes in our writing that we miss when we do our own proofreading. So having someone else read your work is very important. (I had several esteemed colleagues read this article before I turned it over to the editors.) Requiring your students to participate in peer review encourages this healthy behavior, and it helps to teach them how to make helpful comments on another's work. It also can help them to begin to recognize similar mistakes in their own writing.*
- *For some of the formal assignments, and the article reports in particular, the students are not all writing about the same thing. Thus, when reading another's work, a student may learn something. They also get to see examples of writing that is both better and worse; this gives them some motivation to write well. For these reasons, I have had several students tell me that they enjoy doing peer review.*
- *Finally, as a result of peer review, the average quality of the papers is usually higher than it would be without the peer review. This, in and of itself, is sufficient reason to do peer review, but as an added benefit, it is much nicer and easier for teachers to grade good papers than fair or poor ones.*

I normally set aside part of a class period, say a twenty to thirty minute time block, for peer review several days before the formal writing assignment is due. The students come to class and bring three to four copies of a near-final draft of their paper. I make available blank copies of my grading sheets (Table 4.1). The students then break up into groups of two to four. One person in a group will read a paper out loud, and then the group discusses the paper's strengths and weaknesses. They then mark their opinions on a grading sheet, and move on to the next paper. The group tries to read as many papers as possible in the time allotted, so that every person in class has his or her paper read by at least two groups. A group does not read a paper written by anyone in that group; this is important for several reasons. It avoids any direct confrontation or embarrassment for the author. It allows the group members to say what they really think, instead of what they think the author wants to hear. Finally, it forces the paper to stand on its own; if the author were present, she would be tempted to make verbal comments to help explain, clarify, or defend what she wrote.

The first time a class does peer review, they are a bit nervous about the process. To help with this, I may ask peer tutors from our university writer's studio to visit the class and lead the groups. The tutors are students hired by the English department, and they receive formal training. I also walk around from group to group to see that they make progress and to answer any questions they may have. I try to encourage a collaborative, noncompetitive environment.

After the first time, the students are much more relaxed about the process and seem to enjoy it. I think it works quite well. I recall an article report from my database course from the fall 1997 semester. The paper was full of acronyms and technical jargon. During peer review, the group that read this paper commented on how difficult the paper was to read. The author took those comments to heart, revised the paper accordingly, and his final draft earned an A.

Cunningham³² and Hafen³³ also make use of peer review.

REVISION OPPORTUNITIES

One of the frustrations with teaching a course that uses writing is that students often ignore your carefully worded comments. They simply look at the grade, and then file the paper away. One way to get your students to read your comments carefully is to offer opportunities for revision. I have tried two approaches in this area, with some success. Both have focused on formal writing assignments.

My first method is to give each student a fixed allotment of revision chances. A student may take a paper and rewrite it, taking into account any comments. You then grade the revised version as if it were the first one turned in, and keep the second grade. The first grade is replaced. To keep the students from using you as a proofreader, and to limit the amount of grading, I usually set a limit of, say, four revisions per student. I found that some students never bothered with the revisions, even when they had low scores. Some students would revise the same poor paper several times without making any significant improvement. But for most students, this sort of revision opportunity is worthwhile.

The second method is to have the students turn in a paper three to five days before a hard deadline. I would then take the papers, read them and make comments using the grading sheet, but either assign only an approximate grade, or none at all. I would then return the papers two or three days before the hard deadline so that the students had time to make their revisions. I found this method to work a bit better than the first one.

Students are much more likely to come see me to discuss my comments during the few days before the final version is due. This involves a bit more work, as all the papers are read twice, but the second, final grading pass goes very quickly. Also, I need to be very careful to leave time in my schedule so that I can return their drafts on time. I now use this second method exclusively.

I think it is important to offer revision opportunities, but be very careful how you handle this, or your workload will become unmanageable.

CONCLUSION

There are two very good reasons to use writing in computer science: our students need to be able to write well to succeed, and writing can help them learn. I shared some of the kinds of writing assignments I have used, both formal and informal. I focused on upper-division courses, but the ideas apply to any course, including courses in other disciplines. I then discussed my approach to grading written work, and the use of peer review and revision opportunities.

It is possible, with some work, to incorporate writing in computer science courses in a way that is natural. I recall one day immediately after operating systems class, two students approached me as I was erasing the chalkboard. It was about two-thirds of the way through the fall semester of 1996. With a smile, one of the students said to me "I had forgotten this was a writing-intensive course." The other student nodded her head in agreement. Writing does not have to seem like an "add on" to the course, but can be an integral and important part of it.

I consider this article a success if you are interested in using writing in your next course, and you found something useful in what I had to say.

NOTES

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ESSAY 5

Informing Our Values and Sexual Behavior through the Use of Writing Communities

KATHLEEN SCHMALZ

In the introduction to the most recent edition of their college-level textbook *Dimensions of Human Sexuality*, authors Curtis Byer and Louis Shainberg emphasize that the subject of human sexuality is inherently multidimensional in nature. Sex education taught to young adults includes instruction in the biology/physiology of human sexuality/reproduction, but while this body of objective, factual content is an essential course component, the subject at hand is multidisciplinary in scope, encompassing topics and issues that sound within the fields of sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology, history, and, of foundational importance, ethics.¹ The behavioral and moral dimensions of human sexuality courses at the college level require the use of critical reflection by adult learners. As Byer and Shainberg construe it, an important goal of such courses is the further development of students' critical thinking powers and skills.² Human sexuality is a personal matter with an interpersonal orientation. It arises in a social context while sounding within the depths of individual self-conception, identity, and full personhood. As such, human sexuality (sex education) at the college level must actively engage students in a broad, diverse array of instructional disciplines and, at the same time, empower them as learners and as members of a social order which rests upon behavioral norms, requires the exercise of individual choice, and literally depends upon sexual relations for its continuance across generations.

Given these aims and demands, teachers of human sexuality at the college level are obligated to utilize instructional practices that actively engage and empower their students. During the past two decades or so,

educational theorists, researchers and classroom practitioners have increasingly embraced the pedagogical concept of “writing-to-learn” (WTL), and this approach of learning has been facilitated by the initiation of writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) programs.³ As will be discussed at length shortly, the writing-to-learn approach discards the conventional “product” view of student composition as a reflection of knowledge absorbed. It focuses on the writing “process” as a means through which student learning occurs. And as will be brought forth below, the congruence of sex education as a multidisciplinary topic requiring critical thought and writing-to-learn/WAC argues forcefully for its implementation within college-level courses on human sexuality.

Concurrent with the emergence of the writing-to-learn/WAC movement, the “traditional” conception of education as the result of individual students passively ingesting and regurgitating teacher lectures and textbook assignments is now being discarded in favor of a far more actively structured classroom environment. It is one in which student interaction is recognized as a critical source of knowledge, learning, and skill development (including social development). Revolving around the use of small student groups, classroom instruction utilizing this active approach is often referred to as Cooperative Learning (CL). Not only is a CL-orientation especially suitable in an academic course about human relations and morally relevant behavior, its efficacy as a learning approach can be realized and amplified through group writing-to-learn processes. As John Bean has observed, one of the most effective ways “to promote the kind of productive talk that leads to thoughtful and elaborated writing—is a goal-directed use in small groups.”⁴ In what follows, I will discuss the benefits and delineate the means through which teachers of human sexuality courses at the college level can actively engage and empower their students through an approach that combines writing to learn with group or cooperative learning structure. A cooperative WTL approach will help to engage and empower college students especially in a human sexuality course, but also in other health courses. To illustrate the group-learning-to-write approach, I will refer to an actual lesson pivoting around a single key issue in human sexuality, that is, whether nonmarital sexual relations are ever appropriate and, if so, under what conditions.

Education theory stretches back thousands of years to the ancient Greeks and, in fact, Plato himself frequently addressed the topic of sexual relations in the context of civic order and moral development. Nevertheless, as Mel Silberman tells us at the outset of his extremely useful teaching method manual *Active Learning*, it has only been in the

past thirty years or so that clinical research in the field of cognitive psychology has conclusively demonstrated that “merely hearing something and seeing it is not enough to learn it.”⁵ Although the implications of this conclusion have not (yet) been universally acknowledged in American educational practice, the idea that learning is a far more active process than conventional “teacher-lecture” classroom methods can possibly accommodate is rapidly becoming more widespread. It has, however, been in circulation for nearly a century. Thus, near the turn of the twentieth century, John Dewey proclaimed in *Democracy and Education* that rather than being the mere absorption and retention of disciplinary content, the learning process is a “continual reorganization, reconstruction and transformation of experience.”⁶ Dewey’s conception of education as the reconstruction of experience was intended as both the foundation of an “active” learning alternative and as a critique of standard classroom practice of teacher-lecture, rote memorization, and student evaluation based largely on a successful regurgitation of “correct” answers.

The validity of Dewey’s active, contextually grounded approach to education and of his critique of traditional classroom practice has been conclusively proven by recent psychological and physiological research into the ways in which human beings actually learn. Together, this research reveals that learning is not a matter of the passive acquisition of “facts, concepts, and theories,” but instead, is an ongoing, active process in which the human brain “learns” by critically assessing new lessons and integrating them with existing knowledge in a manner that continuously refines the latter and prepares the way for future learning experiences through the ongoing development of cognitive, social, and moral powers.⁷

It is from substantially the same body of research that the writing-to-learn movement in American education takes impetus. Starting with Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer’s seminal study, *Research in Written Composition* (1963), and furthered significantly by the publication of Janet Emig’s *The Composing Process of Twelfth-Graders* in 1971, the field of composition theory has drawn heavily upon the findings of cognitive research to explain how students actually compose written assignments and how writing itself can be construed as a central and active learning process rather than the mere outcome or “proof” of student knowledge/skills.⁸

With increasing frequency, educators at the college, the secondary-school, and even the primary-school level have found that learning outcomes can be significantly enhanced by replacing the traditional or

“product” model of student composition with a “process” model of writing, that is, writing-to-learn. The controlling assumption of the former, as Linda Flower has noted, is that writers (most notably student writers) “get to” composing only after they have formulated a clear-cut idea of what it is they want to say and how best to say it.⁹ By contrast, as Joanna Ambron puts it, the writing-to-learn paradigm of student composition is built on the demonstrated fact that “writing is an act of discovery for skilled and unskilled writers alike: most writers have only a partial notion of what they want to say when they begin to write, and their ideas develop in the process of writing.”¹⁰ Rather than taking place *after* learning has occurred, writing is a process *through* which the student learns via “pre-writing,” successive draft revision, and critical feedback.

At present, there are many variants in conceptualization of the writing-to-learn process. As Patricia McKeague and Elizabeth Reis have described it, writing-to-learn has four generic and overlapping stages: “prewriting to gather and organize ideas, drafting to put the ideas into written form, revising to clarify and polish the draft, and editing to find any problems with grammar and usage.”¹¹ To this, I would add that critical feedback is a feature of writing-to-learn that can be included or construed as a distinct phase in itself, or, in other words, a necessary prerequisite to revision. In either case, all of the stages in the writing-to-learn process are iterative and recurrent. For example, various pre-writing techniques—clustering, cubing, brainstorming, narration of ideas in story form, looping, dialoguing, and so on—may continue to unfold *after* the student has composed an initial draft.¹²

While the potential value of using group or cooperative writing-to-learn techniques in a college-level course on human sexuality will be articulated shortly, at this crossroad in my discussion, I will introduce an actual lesson to illustrate how the topic of nonmarital sex is actually presented to my students at the College of Mount Saint Vincent. First introduced is the issue of whether (and under what conditions) sexual relations are appropriate outside of marriage. Although the teaching approach under discussion is student-centered and involves the classroom educator assuming a role resembling that of a coach (rather than an all-knowing authority), I begin by directing students’ attention to some relevant concepts and facts. In this instance, through teacher-lecture and course readings, the students would first be exposed to such background material as the historical evolution of norms governing sexual behavior in Western culture, comparisons to correlative norms in other cultures, and the legal and moral responsibilities entailed in human sexual rela-

tions. The aim is to furnish students with a range of information that does not lead in a deterministic manner to a single, "correct" view in response to the issue at hand. I am careful about the selection and presentation of such materials because I want to encourage a diversity in opinions that can be supported by cogent reasons or arguments. I provide procedural guidelines in order to (1) facilitate group discussion; (2) maintain an orderly, safe and comfortable classroom environment; (3) provide a thoughtful environment (which minimizes embarrassment in some cases); (4) encourage students to respect diversity of beliefs and opinions; (5) enable students to understand (not judge); and (6) evoke a full interchange of student ideas. Students are reminded that what individuals or groups reveal in class is confidential, and that some of the topics are controversial. Ideas and opinions may be challenged, but individuals are to be respected and all students have the right not to participate. I do not (in most cases) reveal my own values, morals, or opinions to the class so that the students' own value system can emerge. Students are aware that I am available to them (before or after class, during office hours, by appointment or via e-mail) if they want to discuss anything of a personal matter.

Composition researchers are divided on the question of whether student compositions should conform to what has become the customary school essay format, that is, the so-called five-paragraph essay in which a thesis statement or a "hypothesis" is introduced in the opening paragraph; the body of the essay (three paragraphs) is dedicated to "arguments" in support of the writer's position; and the last paragraph sums up the case presented. Some writing-to-learn composition scholars, Thomas Speer, for instance, have suggested that this holdover from the product model of writing is mechanical, restrictive, and therefore contrary to the "open-ended" nature of writing as a broad, iterative learning process.¹³ Nevertheless, both Speer and Marie Foley have noted that as an initial exercise presented to students with variable levels of writing ability and experience, many of whom have been exposed to the five-paragraph essay in high school, the format may offer a structural anchor.¹⁴ I assume that the suggested length of the assigned student paper on nonmarital sex is about one thousand words, that is, that it could be structured along the lines of the "five-paragraph essay" format. In any case, the format of the assignment must be made clear before introducing the cooperative learning dimension. (In almost all cases, Mount Saint Vincent students have already taken their required writing classes before taking Human Sexuality [Health 308]. However, if a student has problems with writing, then I

refer him or her to the Writing Center for individual tutoring. There is no cost to the student.)

With these preliminary considerations so set, the writing-to-learn process begins long before the students have committed a single word of their thoughts about nonmarital sex to paper. Whether they are submitted as the work of individual students or groups of students, these compositions start with pre-writing activities, for example, brainstorming, dialoguing, and/or storytelling, undertaken in student groups. More particularly, as John Bean expresses it, the learning approach described here entails the “goal-oriented use of small groups aimed at giving students supervised practice in disciplinary thinking under the tutelage of the teacher as coach.”¹⁵ This “tutelage” for me, consists of observing the students’ methods of arriving at conclusions and solutions, and when necessary, directing that process.

This usage is, in fact, a variation on cooperative learning (CL). As mentioned above, the principles and premises of CL have been generated from the same broad corpus of clinical research as their counterparts in writing-to-learn theory. With its stress upon the activation of student learning in and through peer groups, cooperative learning departs from the conventional instructional format of teachers “pouring” a body of knowledge into their students through instructor lectures and reading assignments.¹⁶ As such, it is completely congruent with writing-to-learn practices and can be employed in conjunction with writing-to-learn techniques.

Since the emergence of cooperative learning in the late 1970s, researchers have consistently found that the use of student groups yields learning (and social) outcomes that are superior to those of the conventional practice of students learning as individuals facing the classroom teacher in isolation from their fellow learners.¹⁷ Through their active engagement in learning groups comprised of their peers, students not only develop broader, deeper and more accurate factual knowledge than that supplied solely by lecture (through discussion which yields understanding rather than rote memorization); they also enhance their analytical/problem-solving capabilities, their social/interpersonal skills, and their sense of social identity.¹⁸ I have seen how participation in small groups increases self-esteem as students begin to develop trust and establish a rapport with their peers. Indeed, given the diversity of backgrounds from which today’s college students are drawn,¹⁹ and the fact that interpersonal communication is a key dimension of human sexuality,²⁰ the social interaction benefits of a CL approach to a college-level course in human

sexuality are especially prominent. The CL approach allows the students to interact with one another; they may explore different cultural aspects and integrate others' thinking with their own rather than simply taking notes derived from a unilateral perspective. Lastly, as James Holden and Kelly Bunte have recently stated, the use of a CL environment is particularly useful in exposing students to "controversial" topic areas.²¹ The CL approach here helps students to generate ideas; they have the opportunity to be more open and forthright. I have observed students encouraging group members to take an active role, and with my guidelines in place, students are able to speculate with no fear of inappropriate criticism.

As with writing-to-learn strategies, there are numerous variations in CL designs. Nonetheless, as Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec state in their widely cited text, *Circles of Learning*, all of these variants include the following distinctive features: (1) students' individual responsibility for task and learning outcomes; (2) extensive interaction among learning-group members; (3) development of students' task-oriented social skills; and, (4) outcomes and rewards which are contingent upon group performance.²²

At this point, it is essential to underscore that while CL uses "peer teaching" and relies upon a learning process that unfolds outside of the classroom educator's control, group learning requires that teachers take on modified instructional roles rather than simply "leaving" the learning process to student groups. Although the teachers' roles in this group learning appear to be less salient than those in the customary lecture-discussion format, they (instructors) nevertheless retain critical functional responsibilities in this alternative educational strategy. These include the responsibility for devising clearly defined academic objectives for instructional units and explaining them to students, monitoring student performance as both individual learners and group members, and arranging groups and individual group-member assignments.²³

The CL approach outlined above has been broken down by Davidson and O'Leary into a sequence of operational steps.²⁴ The classroom teacher first divides the class as a whole into working or "home" groups, with Bean recommending that each group consist of five to six students.²⁵ Groups can be formed by the teacher, who may seek to include a mix of students within each group in terms of such variables as perceived ability, leadership characteristics, and so forth. I occasionally form the groups for other reasons than the ones mentioned. At Mount Saint Vincent, we have a cooperative agreement program with Manhattan College (MC). Students from MC take their health classes on the Mount Saint Vincent

campus. Therefore, I encourage students to interact with someone they may not know because students are sometimes more apt to exchange opinions and ideas on sensitive issues if they are not in a group comprised of friends who may respond inappropriately at a later time, outside of class. Alternatively, the distribution of class members into groups could be determined solely by chance, for example, by random drawing. Each group would then select a “chairperson” who is responsible for maintaining order during group discussions and ensuring that all group members are given the opportunity to take part, without forcing reluctant members to do so. I circulate, checking on each group to see who is selected or who volunteered to take on the role of chairperson or leader. Later on, I observe the chairpersons to make sure that they are not dominating the group and that they maintain order without being inhibiting.

The next step entails the assignment of a task for each of the groups to complete. I ask each group either to form a consensus about whether, and under what conditions, nonmarital sex is appropriate or to “agree to disagree” with the group dividing itself into two or more divergent positions. Here we note that whether the group coheres around a single stance or divides into dissenting factions, *all positions are to be supported in writing by a set of supporting reasons/arguments*. After the discussion, the chairperson records the ideas expressed. As facilitator, I explain that each student has five minutes in which to record his or her own ideas and supporting arguments, the groups have fifteen minutes for discussion, and the chairperson has five minutes to report his or her summations to the class as a whole. I provide a two-minute warning so that the group members can quickly sum up if they haven’t already done so. Davidson and O’Leary suggest that while this is taking place, the teacher circulate from group to group, seeking to assist with (but not to authoritatively resolve) any problems experienced by the learning groups.²⁶ Each group then appoints, or someone may volunteer to be, a recorder or a spokesperson, who briefly tells the class, as a whole, what consensus, or differences of opinion, was generated by the group discussion along with the supporting reasons for that view.

As an alternative to group discussion, the teacher could utilize the group structure to enact partially-scripted (by the student) role-playing exercises. In this case, the teacher might ask one student in the group to perform the role of the sexual “persuader” seeking to convince his or her partner to engage in sexual intercourse. A second member of the group could be cast in the part of the persuader’s target; this role might include offering objections to the persuader’s arguments. Other group members

could be cast in ancillary roles, for example, as parents or as yet unborn progeny. These types of group role-playing exercises fit beautifully into a CL classroom structure and, at the same time, are especially suited to the study of human sexual relationships in which behavioral “scripts” determine individual and interpersonal behaviors.²⁷ This exercise provides an opportunity for students to clarify personal values/norms related to their own sexual conduct. Additionally, role-playing provides a forum in which students may feel less threatened since they are “actors”; I have observed students surprising themselves by becoming engrossed in their role. In essence, the discussion that has already taken place in classroom groups represents a form of pre-writing in the learning-to-write approach. By interacting with others, being exposed to the views of their peers, explaining and defending their positions to the group, the students initiate the writing process even before they have been given a composition assignment. At this juncture, I ask all the students in the class to write a five-paragraph essay on the subject of nonmarital sex. Utilizing the knowledge that they have gained during pre-writing discussions, the students submit a working draft of their papers to their learning-group members at the next class session. (Note: This course is scheduled once a week for three hours.) At that time, the group would read and critique individual essay drafts. They are asked to check each other’s papers, seeking the writer’s position articulated in a clear thesis statement, a logical transition between paragraphs, appropriateness of word choice, and grammatical and structural correctness. This process provides suggestions for revision which students are encouraged to consider before they subsequently revise, modify, and polish their essays. Again, I circulate to see if any students are having problems with the writing assignment or feedback process; if they are, I ask those students to see me after class to discuss the difficulty. And again, if a student needs more individual attention to the writing process then I am able to provide, I refer that student to the Writing Center. I provide comments on the paper for the student to address together with the Writing Center tutor.

While it is difficult to evaluate the educational efficacy of peer writing groups vis-à-vis “individual” writing, most researchers have concluded that “collaborative peer writing groups do benefit the student.”²⁸ Granted, this strategy is initially somewhat more time-consuming than “standard” classroom procedure. Nevertheless, when utilized in concert with a writing-to-learn approach, collaborative peer writing generates significantly greater contextual learning.²⁹ Often the writers of the papers cannot attain the distance necessary to recognize their own errors or to

see in which direction the paper should logically go. As I walk around the classroom, I can see how peer editing has increased communication among the students and clarified their ideas. (The students submit their peer-edited corrections along with their final version.) At the same time, students learn practical techniques from their peers along with social/interpersonal interaction skills. Additionally and contrary to popular belief, in the end, collaborative writing saves a lot of time and frustration since this technique generates better papers; that is, they are more organized, focused, and free of surface errors.

One reason for the reported superiority of cooperative learning or peer group approaches to student composition is that while the “standard” approach concentrates on writing addressed toward an unknown, “general” audience, the use of writing groups to critique drafts and suggest revisions furnishes student writers with a much stronger sense of “who” their readers are.³⁰ As Wendy Bishop has noted, the use of collaborative writing methods in college courses provides student writers with a heightened and particularized awareness of their audience.³¹

More broadly, Mary Hayes and Donald Daiker have observed that under the traditional approach, students simply hand in assignments and are then handed back their papers with the teacher’s criticisms in the margins.³² Moreover, according to Hayes and Daiker, “when a teacher’s written comment is not immediately clear, students...spend considerable time and effort trying to understand it—and frequently fail.”³³ By contrast, when peer writing students submit their drafts to group members for feedback, what they receive is far more relevant and understandable than a series of red pencil markings.³⁴ In essence, the use of peer critiques creates a multidimensional “dialogue” in which all students engage in the tandem learning experiences of having their work constructively criticized, and constructively criticizing the writings of their peers.³⁵ This arrangement eliminates the anxiety and sense of inferiority that student writers often experience when submitting their work to a single reader who has complete control over the “rating” which they receive in the form of an essay grade. Among others, Muriel Harris has observed that when student drafts are evaluated by their classmates, negative comments are “invariably perceived as less threatening by students.”³⁶ I have discovered that students are apt to be more honest and participatory when not in a student/teacher relationship. They know that they will not be penalized or appear unprepared if they challenge the reviewer’s comments or ask for clarification. Consequently, peer-writing-group evaluation of both drafts and final texts fosters collegiality in the classroom and

builds student self-confidence; both of these results are beneficial in a course in which individual and social identity are necessarily entwined with the personal nature of its content.

According to many proponents of cooperative learning, the approach requires that individual rewards (e.g., superior grades) are contingent upon group classroom performance so that “members encourage each other to do well and to help each other meet their goals.”³⁷ Thus, for example, Robert Slavin has noted that “almost every study of cooperative learning in which the cooperative classes achieved more than traditional control groups used some sort of group reward.”³⁸ In this instance, the teacher could grade students on the basis of their individual compositions; alternatively, the group could be asked to submit the “best” of the essays that its members have written, with all group members receiving the grade for that paper. In any event, the teacher can develop a means through which rewards are influenced by group performance while allowing for some variation in grades among members of each group. The students may receive two grades: one for the best of their group’s essays, and one for their own paper.

While I am convinced that a group approach to the writing-to-learn process is a very effective instructional strategy when used with young adult learners, and that it is particularly appropriate for use in a collegelevel course on human sexuality, I do not always use the group approach. I do, however, use other active-learning approaches to get the students involved, and believe that any subject can be taught by implementing strategies other than, or in addition to, straight lecture. Some interactive strategies initially involve more creativity, time, and effort on the teacher’s part, but given that current and future student sexual/reproductive conduct is likely to be influenced by lessons learned in a course of this kind, an active approach which requires critical reflection on the part of students (including personal value clarification) and which actively uses social action among peers in the learning process is clearly appropriate, more effective than lecturing, and worthy of recommendation. Writing is an important basis for the critical-thinking skills which are necessary and valued in any academic setting. To write well, students must write often. In my course, this approach provides students with the knowledge and the faculties/skills that they will require to make truly informed choices about sex in their lives outside the classroom. However, and just as importantly, a group writing-to-learn approach activates, engages, and empowers students as learners and critical thinkers in the broadest sense of these terms.

NOTES

¹ Curtis O.Byer and Louis W.Shainberg, *Dimensions of Human Sexuality* 4th ed., (Madison, Wise.: William Brown, 1994), 4.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ Joanna Ambron, "History of WAC and Its Role in Community Colleges," in *New Directions for Community Colleges, No. 73: Writing Across the Curriculum in Community Colleges*, ed. L.C.Stanley and J.Ambron (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 3.

⁴ John C.Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 149.

⁵ Mel Silberman, *Active Learning: 101 Strategies to Teach Any Subject* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 2.

⁶ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916), 50.

⁷ Silberman, 3.

⁸ See Stephen North, *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1987), 3 ff. for an extended discussion of the writing-to-learn movement's "roots" in clinical psychology.

⁹ Linda Flower, "Cognition, Context, and Theory Building," *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 40, no. 3 (1989), 283–284.

¹⁰ Ambron, p. 4).

¹¹ Patricia M.McKeague and Elizabeth Reis, "Serving Student Needs Through Writing Centers," *Community/Junior College Quarterly*, vol. 16 no. 2 (1992) 199.

¹² Sheila Thorne, "Prewriting: A Basic Skill for Basic Writers," *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1993), 33.

¹³ Tom Speer, "Reconceiving the Five-Paragraph Essay in an Era of Uncertainty," *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1995) 21–22.

¹⁴ See Speer, 28 and Marie Foley, "Unteaching the Five-Paragraph Essay," *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1989) 234.

¹⁵ Bean, 150.

¹⁶ David W.Johnson, Roger T.Johnson and Edward J.Holubec, *Circles of Learning* (Edina, Minn.: Interaction, 1990), 4–5.

¹⁷ See, for example, Lawrence W.Sherman, "A Comparative Study of Cooperative and Competitive Achievement in Two Secondary Biology Classrooms: The Group Investigation Model Versus an Individually Competitive Goal Structure," *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, vol. 26 no. 1 (1988), 62.

¹⁸ Neil Davidson and P.W.O'Leary, "How Cooperative Learning Can Enhance Mastery Teaching," *Educational Leadership*, vol. 47, no. 2 (1990), 33.

¹⁹ For a discussion of CL in relation to student social diversity and equity issues, see Nancy Karweit, "Diversity, Equity and Classroom Processes," *The Social Organization of Schools: New Conceptualizations of the Learning Process*, ed. Maureen T.Hallinan (New York: Plenum, 1987), 71–102.

²⁰ Byer and Shainberg dedicate an entire chapter of their textbook to "Communication and Sexuality" 54 ff.

²¹ James Holden and Kelly Bunte, "Activating Student Voices: The Paideia Seminar in the Social Studies Classroom," *Social Education*, vol.59, no. 1 (January, 1995), 8–10.

²² Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 18.

²³ Ibid., 20–21.

²⁴ Davidson and O'Leary, 29–30.

²⁵ Bean, 160.

²⁶ Davidson and O'Leary, 31.

²⁷ Byer and Shainberg, 25.

²⁸ Wendy Bishop, "Helping Peer Writing Groups Succeed," *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1988), 120.

²⁹ Ibid., 121.

³⁰ Geoffrey R.Kain, "Writing as Dialogue: The Composition Student as Writer, Audience, and Critic," *Community/Junior College Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1991), 439.

³¹ Bishop, 120.

³² Mary F.Hayes, and Donald Daiker, "Using Protocol Analysis in Evaluation Responses to Student Writing," *Freshman English News*, vol. 13, no. 2, (1984), 2.

³³ Ibid., 3.

³⁴ Bishop, 120.

³⁵ Muriel Harris, "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors," *College English*, vol. 57, no. 1 (1995), 27–42.

³⁶ Ibid., 29.

³⁷ Robert E.Slavin, *Student Team Learning: An Overview and Practical Guide* 2nd ed., (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1988), 56.

³⁸ Robert E.Slavin, *Cooperative Learning: Student Teams* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association 1987), 89.

ESSAY 6

Students Writing the Ghetto into Short Fiction

An Experiment in Teaching (Literary) Analysis

GLENN D.KLOPFENSTEIN

When a particular teaching method, regardless of past experience, no longer yields very encouraging results, it is, of course, time for honest reappraisal. The following essay describes the theoretical and practical steps I have taken to become more effective in teaching literary analysis at an urban community college.

A BACKGROUND NARRATIVE: FROM SUBURBAN MIDDLE CLASS TO URBAN UNDERCLASS

As is the case for so many English TAs and journeymen adjuncts, I received my on-the-job training almost exclusively in the composition classroom. My limited chances to teach lower-division literature courses became for me golden opportunities to feel and act more like a “real” college professor. Thus, to perform well as a lecturer, to be able to think on my feet and orchestrate class discussions by imitating the standard professorial model of Socratic heuristics—further, to do this with an easygoing combination of tolerance and good humor (those outstanding and manifest qualities I had so admired in my own favorite professors when an undergraduate)—were the primary talents I sought to develop as a neophyte instructor in the literature classroom. And I confess that I enjoyed the authority, the aboveness of it all, the novelty of respectful distance my students (most students, that is) automatically granted me. I gripped the lectern and it felt good.

Meanwhile, I was a very different teacher and person in the composition classrooms of my suburban university (SUNY-Stony Brook, 1986 to

1993). Initially, as a new teaching assistant under the tutelage of Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, the writing program directors there at the time, I dutifully adopted their “expressivist” philosophy of teaching composition and the array of interactive methodologies which animated that philosophy. I did so because I had little choice and no experience. (And no role model to speak of, either: my vague recollections of my 101 instructor in the early 1970s are not flattering. I remember clearly, though, her irritability and that I could never quite figure out what she wanted. I remember very well the C I got, too.) While the Elbow/Belanoff model of an effective writing instructor seemed odd and “unteacherly” at first, I soon felt like a real teacher nonetheless amid the convivial workshop atmosphere I had helped to create. In a word, it was fun just being a director, offstage most of the time. Every once in a while, of course, I would try lecturing, especially when we would get to the unit on literary analysis, but I could see I was impressing no one.

After the first year of the teaching practicum coordinated by Elbow and Belanoff and teaching 101 within their guidelines, second-year graduate students at Stony Brook were given a fair degree of autonomy to develop on their own as composition instructors. I went on to experiment a great deal in course content, usually experiments of a conservative bent which reflected my own growing skepticism for expressivism taken too far. For example, over time I drastically reduced the weeks of class time at the start of a semester that I had originally devoted to personal and creative modes of writing. Instead, I accelerated the process that led to more “academic” writing projects. By the end of my fourth year of graduate work, still teaching mostly 101s, I stopped using the Elbow and Belanoff text, *A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing*, and experimented for a while with not using a main text at all, except a reference guide for specific lesson plans (e.g., the research process).

But out of all this trial and error, I felt little need, little desire actually (unlike my narcissistic agenda in the literature classroom), to abandon in the long run the teacher-as-writing-coach relationship with my 101 students, even though my composition syllabi had changed in a number of ways from my first year course. Even so, I was never tempted to eliminate the teaching methods that worked. I continued to reserve ample class time for such clearly effective signature activities of the expressivists as “freewriting,” “process writing,” and various group exercises which never failed to energize a class in pleasant ways (e.g., collaborative writing or peer feedback sessions). In short, the “work-shop”

atmosphere of my writing classroom had (and has) changed hardly at all since my first semester in graduate school.

It never occurred to me, however, during my seven years of being sequestered at Stony Brook, that there could be any meaningful contradiction between the traditional way I aspired to teach literature and my comfort with interactive techniques in the composition classroom. Ron McFarland, a creative writing teacher, puts it this way: "Teachers of writing—and this includes those who teach composition courses as much as it does those who teach creative writing—often do get 'closer' to their students than do those who teach literature."¹ In both settings, then, I was doing what I thought most effective and, safe to say in regard to the majority of students and faculty at Stony Brook, what was most expected.

And if I thought that becoming an English professor, when and if I ever did get a real job, meant leaving behind the need to teach composition, I was soon disabused of any such notion as I first prepared in earnest to enter the prohibitively competitive job market of the early 1990s. Theoretical compositionists were in high demand. I could make no such claim. As for my speciality in American literature, the few entry-level positions advertised also required strong credentials in teaching freshman composition.

It was not until I landed my first full-time teaching position in 1993, when I moved from the relatively ordered universe of suburbia to the chaotic-seeming realities of an inner-city campus, that my learned and somewhat schizophrenic approach to teaching "English" began to have its inevitable repercussions. What worked well in middle-class suburbia where academically acculturated students were still more or less the norm was not about to go over very well in an open-access college.

PASSAIC COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND ITS TWO-SEMESTER FRESHMAN WRITING REQUIREMENT

Passaic County Community College (PCCC) is a small urban campus situated on three adjacent city blocks in the heart of downtown Paterson, New Jersey (twenty miles due west of New York City). Established in 1972, PCCC now attracts over three thousand students, the majority of whom reside within the congested urban-residential sprawl which extends outward from the downtown district. For many of PCCC's students, especially those drawn from Paterson's sizeable urban underclass, the college represents their best and sometimes last chance at a better life.

PCCC, moreover, is truly a modern-day American prototype of cultural diversity. Students identify themselves as originating from as many as forty-four different countries. To serve this extraordinarily diverse community, PCCC's English-as-a-second-language (ESL) program has expanded over the years into the largest in New Jersey—indeed, into one of the very largest in the United States (PCCC's ESL enrollment is a distant second, according to Dr. Stassis, to Miami-Dade CC's ESL department, by far the country's largest).² On average, over one third of PCCC's registered students (twelve hundred per semester) are enrolled in the ESL program. These students must pass successfully through ESL, some individuals often taking more than two years to do so, before they can begin mainstream course work toward an Associate's Degree.³

Independent of the ESL program, PCCC's English department administers a large precollege developmental program in basic reading and writing skills for native speakers. (The Math department has a comprehensive developmental program as well.) Consequently, more than half of PCCC's students are enrolled in precollege course work.

Further, it should be noted in depicting the academic milieu of this hard-edged commuter campus, about half of PCCC's students who do attain college-level status pursue vocational track degrees in business-related fields, in nursing, radiography, and other health care jobs, and in various criminal justice programs. Conversely, about half of PCCC's college-level students intend to transfer to four-year institutions. The majority of PCCC students, adults and young adults, hold down full-time jobs. In short, the so-called nontraditional student suggests a rough composite of what is overwhelmingly typical for PCCC.

With so many students coming up from the developmental ranks or out of ESL, it is not unusual to hear professors in the traditional academic disciplines complain, sometimes publicly, that they are not "high school" teachers. Yet the reality must be conceded that some remedial work remains to be done by many students who nominally achieve college-level status. My own Janus-like approach to this salient feature of teaching at PCCC precipitated in short order the first significant crisis of my teaching career. As intimated above, my idealized previsions of what being an English professor "ought to be" needed a major overhaul if I were to be effective, much less enjoy, teaching at PCCC.

In my first year, being low person on the seniority totem pole in our English department, I was assigned a full slate of composition courses. I taught a couple of sections in developmental writing and four sections each of Composition I and Composition II (a fifteen-credit-per-semester

teaching load). While my experience and confidence in teaching the standard 101 course held me in good stead for that first year, the unusual course objectives behind Composition I and II at PCCC, a hybrid composition/literature course, challenged me in ways I was not prepared to anticipate.

(I will note here that in subsequent years I have regularly taught at least one introductory literature course a semester, but the problems I met with in Composition II generally apply to those courses as well. For reasons of simplicity, then, my primary focus will henceforth be restricted to the specific adjustments I made in teaching Composition II. This, in turn, has altered to a significant degree the way I approach teaching literature.)

Now, as in most open-access two-year and four-year schools, the bottom line initiative toward students acquiring genuine college-level proficiency in writing, reading, and math has devolved into an all-consuming mission. Thus, the institutional impetus toward establishing and certifying student proficiency in these basic skills is a marked feature of teaching freshman-level writing courses at PCCC. Consequently, both English 101 and 102 at PCCC are standardized writing courses to the extent that all students in all sections must take the same in-class, holistically graded, final essay examination.⁴ In 101, students write expository or argumentative essays in response to a shared topic. In 102, students compose short literary analyses prompted by a leading question on a preassigned short story.

COMPOSITION II AND THE VALUE OF LITERARY DISCOURSE IN AN “OPPOSITIONAL CULTURE”

In place for over a decade as the second semester college-level writing requirement at PCCC, Composition II focuses exclusively on students learning the most basic writing protocols of literary analysis. This specialized objective is even further restricted by genre; students read and respond to short stories. (All 102 sections use the same text, an anthology of short fiction.)⁵ Naturally, individual instructors at their own discretion often supply poems to add to their reading lists.

Given my heavy course load in composition, perhaps it was understandable that I would first approach Composition II as an opportunity to teach a watered-down literature course. Of course, in theory that is exactly what it is and is intended to be, a specialized literature course, on top of its rhetorical emphasis on students incorporating rudimentary literary discourse into their writing. In any event, I felt up to the challenge

of contending with a significant percentage of students, as I had been warned, who would be generally resistant to the course objectives. I had faith that my enthusiasm and energy would somehow carry the day.

Yet I tried little that was new in that first year. My lesson plans and assignments for 102 followed conventional lines; that is to say, I was hellbent on instructing my students by gradual steps in the sophisticated art of close reading. I lectured passionately and long. The general response I received left me only slightly uncomfortable. Although I was doing all I could—putting a great deal of time into lecture plans, marking up their papers extensively with corrections and suggestions, and constantly urging at-risk students to come to my office (to little avail)—something was seriously wrong with these 102 classes. Yet it was all too easy to rationalize this away, that the “something wrong” probably had more to do with them, *their* marginal entry skills, than it had to do with me.

In characterizing a typical class that first year, my lectures were met with a passive resistance (or, I could also say, a kind of passive acceptance) that lulled everyone into predictable routine. When I would get little response from rhetorical questions, I would go ahead and answer them myself. On the surface, I confronted classrooms of apparently thoughtful and respectful students; and this in turn gave me little incentive to reconsider my predilection for the lecture mode. (In this regard, I saw little of the active resistance I was warned to expect.) It was as if during many classes the connections I made were all the wrong sort, as if I was performing some mildly interesting song-and-dance: they heard the cadences, watched—even appreciated—my performance, but the words were as meaningful as the sublimated lyrics of some popular song on the radio. Occasionally, if it so happened that some aspect of a story we were discussing struck a common nerve, the class would break out into heated and prolonged debate, and I would gladly retreat and let the class go—to everyone’s relief.

The interpretative essays my 102 students produced, both in-class essays and their typed, formal papers, were more or less on a par with other classes. That is to say, they were not very good. What I call the book-report mentality prevailed, in spite of my semester’s worth of warnings and examples which illustrated this cardinal sin of literary analysis. Bizarre and funny grammatical concretizations of abstract concepts prevailed as well (e.g., on de Maupassant’s “The Necklace”: “She had a lot of irony loosing [sic] that fake necklace at the ball.”) But where my literature students at Stony Brook had been more responsive and attuned to

the rules of the question-and-answer game in the English class, and where, too, many students—enough to support the illusion that my teaching was making the real difference—had been thoroughly schooled in the kinds of *formal* papers English teachers expected (even if most were not that much better in terms of critical thinking skills than PCCC students), by and large PCCC students had never been much exposed to these genteel decorums in classroom behavior and academic writing. But most disturbing, I could not avoid the fact that by the end of two semesters at PCCC I had some very bored and still bewildered Composition II students.

While my 102 student evaluations of my teaching performance were not that bad, I had that first summer to think over some pointed comments which a few of my former 101 students—students who had specifically sought me out for 102 for that first spring semester—had to say, with all the best intentions, about their disappointments with 102. These students, whom I knew to be dedicated and bright, the kind of students that make 101 so rewarding to teach, not only had great difficulty in making the intuitive leap that must first occur in writing literary analysis, they were equally perplexed by my changed teaching demeanor.

In this way Composition II at PCCC brought about a much-needed personal and professional taking of stock. I had not only to face with some reluctance my own bifurcated identity as literature professor, erstwhile practicing compositionist, but look also more carefully at the community college's own schizophrenic mission in higher education. Unlike most open-access four-year schools, the community college ostensibly, actively, embraces both vocational and academic agendas, often hopelessly confusing the two—an institutionalized situation which led Kevin J. Dougherty to coin the apt phrase, "The Contradictory College," for the title of his book.⁶ By extension, I would only continue in serious denial of this "contradictory" mission if I persisted inflexibly to pretend in Composition II that I stood before a traditional literature classroom. Was it possible, then, to be an effective teacher for both student types, the pragmatic-minded vocational student and the aspiring academic, in the same classroom? At this point, the only things I had to lose (besides, possibly, my job) were some long-nurtured pretensions. I decided it was time for me to experiment and to treat 102 more like a composition classroom.

But there is far more to this than just this simple resolve. It was not merely a matter of simultaneously dealing with vocational- and academic-track students; it was more to the point that I was dealing with

mostly nontraditional students who have come from what McGrath and Spear have described as “an oppositional culture.”⁷ To be insensitive, even snobbish, about this—that is, to blame the students and the besieged school systems which produced them—is to miss this point entirely.⁸ In order to teach what is preeminently an academic discourse, I had to come up with methods that attempted to break down the general distrust of all that is purely “academic.” Certainly, lecturing was not the way to do this.

McGrath and Spear examine this difficult and touchy issue elegantly:

Even very bright community college students, and there are many, are nontraditional in the sense that they carry a spectacularly non-standard repertoire of behaviors and attitudes with which to cope with the traditional requirements of college life. Overwhelmingly, they come from backgrounds which have not prepared them to identify with, or even to recognize the central values of academic life, and which have not provided adequate models of intellectual activity. They do not take themselves seriously as learners of something worth learning, but rather view themselves as engaged in a certification process in which credits are accumulated; and requirements are unreasonable obstacles placed in their path.

...To protect their self-worth and dignity, students adopt a defensive stance. Then they are caught in a double bind. The students suspect their own ability to do intellectual work, to handle ideas and language, yet still they hold them to be important, indeed as indicators of personal worth. The ability to engage in abstract reasoning, and to handle language carefully are, they believe, essential for success in the world and for entry into the middle class, and failure to master those abilities is potentially crushing to their sense of self and their hopes for the future.⁹

Most open-access schools which have the two-semester writing requirement in their curriculum limit the second semester’s instruction exclusively to the research process. At first I questioned the wisdom of PCCC’s setup and wondered why this standard model was not used. But when the insights McGrath and Spear offer above are taken at face value, Composition II as PCCC teaches it can be appreciated as more empowering for students than extended instruction in the academic protocols of the research term paper.¹⁰ (At PCCC for the last two years, a strong departmental initiative has been to insure coverage in the research process at the 101 level.) The enormous implications of nontraditional students successfully “cracking” the mysteries of at least one academic discourse

like literary analysis and the confidence this success can instill in such marginally academic students to decode other discourses became the practical and theoretical bedrock on which I structured 102. Of course, this is easier said than done.

In my second year I wrote into my 102 syllabus changes that reflected this shift away from the lecture model. I made time for more mandatory one-to-one conferencing during class time, I resolved to do more group work, and I incorporated such isolated experiments as having my students engage in a holistic grading process of their own by using sample 102 student essays from previous semesters. All well and good. But the major revision I made in my syllabus was a semester-long process assignment which had my students “writing the ghetto” (true enough for a good portion of PCCC’s students) into fiction.

STUDENTS WRITING THE GHETTO INTO SHORT FICTION: AN EXTENDED LESSON-PLAN IN SUMMARY

The actual inspiration for the following experiment in teaching literary analysis came not so much from any careful theorizing or sensitive soulsearching, but from exasperation. If so many of my good as well as poor students were going to persist in passing off the retelling of a story’s plot as analysis, perhaps there was a way to turn this to some advantage. As in creative writing where the beginner consciously strives to imitate a writer’s style he or she admires—all to good advantage—why not, I speculated, have students rewrite a story that I knew they enjoyed, like Bambara’s “The Lesson”?

In a way, my students had been telling me all along what might work through the habitual way they went about trying to identify with and understand the stories through subjective summary. Perhaps they needed this process to happen in writing as an important step to take before any genuine gestures toward formal analysis. Theoretically, this insight is nothing new in the composition classroom where it has become commonplace to assume that students learn *through* writing. Nor is it new any longer in the literature classroom where keeping a reader-response journal has become a standard practice. But this writer-based approach alone, as I knew from experience in 101, never consistently promoted very sophisticated results in literary analysis—quite the contrary could be said, in fact. (In 102, I had been requiring my students to maintain a reader-response journal all along.) To co-opt the difficult metalanguage of literary discourse, to make it their own at a novice level, more structure, more

direction had to be infused from the start in their discovery of what a story means through writing about it.

On one end of the scale there was the reader response journal; on the other, formal literary analysis. And so, rather than blame myself and my students for a futile exercise in failure, I decided we all deserved a little more credit. By retelling stories, I simply conceded that my students were on the right track, just as I was on the right track some of the time by lecturing. As a bridge between these so-called subjective and objective modes of writing, if students could get engaged in an imaginative retelling of a story which also required some formalized observance of the basic elements of fiction, perhaps this might serve as the middle ground they had to negotiate before they were ready to take on the abstractions and highly stylized conventions of literary analysis.

The roundabout, sneakily conventional objective of this process assignment, as it took shape, was to get students involved firsthand in *using* the elements of fiction in a creative retelling of a story—all this before any tedious introduction of these theoretical concepts as architectonic and tropological abstractions in literary discourse. After holding a class discussion of the selected story (Bambara's "The Lesson") and providing an intentionally oversimplified review of the basic elements of fiction, I gave them the following directions for the semester's first major writing assignment. In about three typed pages, students were to "retell" the story using the following guidelines and ground rules:

- *Setting: Students were to recreate in some detail the story's setting into their own most familiar locale or locales (e.g., the mall, their own neighborhoods, etc.)*
- *Characters: I asked my students to search among their own families and acquaintances for people they knew (or have known), who more or less share a dominant personality trait or traits with their fictional counterparts (e.g., Sylvia's brassy street smarts with a former friend, Miss Moore's no-nonsense compassion for children with a local activist or relative, etc.)*
- *Plot: After reviewing the major episodes of the plot as a class, students were to recast a similar plot line, using their new characters and settings (as a class we intuitively divided the story into three or four manageable segments, which roughly approximated the beginning, middle, and end of the story, else many would have gotten lost or written too long a paper—God forbid!)*

- ***Point of view: Students were to use the real-life character they chose for Sylvia to narrate their recast story in the first person.***

I immediately followed up these assignment directions with various pre-writing and group exercises. For their “settings” I simply asked my students to freewrite descriptions of their neighborhoods and an expensive toy or novelty store they have visited. For the “characters,” small group discussions seemed the best way to get them started in finding acquaintances and relatives who would serve as the models for corresponding characters in their retellings of “The Lesson.”

Since first teaching this unusual assignment, I have been very flexible in using the large repertoire of interactive techniques I normally use in 101. Whatever seems to work best for a particular 102 class, I adopt. Or I try something new. In researching for this article, for example, I came across one inventive and playful approach to teaching writing in the literature classroom that seems especially productive for this creative stage that prepares students to retell a story—that is, James E. Seitz’s use of “role-play” to provide students “an entry into the social, rhetorical, and performative dimensions of reading and responding to literature.”¹¹ Seitz offers a variety of thematic writing exercises in this vein, but asking students to freewrite dialogue in a character’s persona (similar to, but less formal than, Seitz’s exercises in “parody”) and then having them share their freewriting in intimate groups seems as if it would be a more productive and enjoyable class activity than any I had yet discovered.

The retold stories my students wrote were encouraging, and a few were surprisingly original in spite of the superficial similarities with Bambara’s story. Often, the slight changes in the main character and an essentially new setting necessitated a plausible reordering or shift in the basic plot. This did not worry the more confident students at all. Others stuck religiously to the story line. While few distinguished themselves as potential creative talents, most did understand and successfully complete the complicated requirements of the assignment. Perhaps more important, almost all my students said they actually enjoyed and got caught up in the writing process.

After constantly referring to and illustrating the concepts they used in their retellings throughout the semester in discussions of other stories, after illustrating, too, through well-written student essays the formal demands of literary analysis (selected from the mock holistic grading session), I reserved the last couple of weeks before they took their final to finish what we had begun.

Thus the second and final major stage to this lesson plan was to return to "The Lesson" near the end of the semester in order to analyze it. By now, they had a clearer grasp of the centrality of theme in most of the short stories and that literary analysis basically involves using details in a story to support their interpretations of what it "means" to them on some abstract level. Once this is clear, it is not hard for students to appreciate that literary analysis is merely a specialized form of argumentation or exposition. What students think the story's "theme" is (almost always decided with guidance from me during class and group discussions), is their essay's argumentative or expository "thesis."

I would be dishonest if I claimed that my pet experiment proved a panacea for getting students conversant in the highly sophisticated language skills of literary discourse. Yet there was improvement. I observed that my students more readily, less clumsily, took to writing analytically about stories. With more confidence they used relevant plot details in writing a story instead of sabotaging their essays with associative or subjective digressions. Nor did the process of this assignment magically erase extant problems with basic grammar and sentencng skills, vocabulary deficiencies, or promote dramatic improvements in writing style where there was little to begin with. That only comes with years of reading.

Nevertheless, I now see this semester-long assignment as a genuine beginning, for them and for me. They are more easily *coached* into the possibility that these stories have hidden below the surface, as it were, layers of meaning worth their effort to discover. I ask them to consider these stories in the same way they think of real people and real friends they deal with every day. What often deeply impresses my students is the observation that literary analysis is much like figuring out these friends and acquaintances. For example, I ask who hasn't been "fooled" by someone they thought they knew really well until some moment of stress, of "conflict," revealed the person's "true nature"? I say to my students that we are all mysteries with surface as well as deeper, less accessible, levels of meaning that may be concealed, or revealed, by what we say and do in certain circumstances.

I have since changed the feature story I use for this assignment, and in so doing, have come to the understanding that much care must be exercised in the selection of an appropriate story. After using "The Lesson" for two semesters, I decided it would be more instructive to enlist a story further removed from students' urban experience. Their appropriation of this new selection into an inner-city setting would then be all the more instructive in terms of breaking it down into its basic elements.

I chose Guy de Maupassant's well-liked story, "The Necklace." As a result, students have had real difficulties in their retellings. Many had trouble maintaining a limited omniscient point of view throughout. But more problematic, they were hard-pressed to make their plots plausible in a familiar and contemporary setting. (After all, it is hard to recreate in this day and age the kind of character motivation Mathilde exemplified in her taking ten long years of deprivation to pay off the replaced necklace.) Nevertheless, a few of my students were extraordinarily resourceful in substituting for a piece of jewelry, say, a borrowed car or mink stole. Withal, however, their creative efforts generally were not as exciting or stimulating for them as their co-opting of "The Lesson." Yet a not-sourious thing happened. Their literary analyses of "The Necklace" proved (again generally speaking) more sophisticated than those produced for Bambara's urban story. So my hunch paid off in the long run.

For the next semester I plan to use Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," an ambiguous coming-of-age story far removed in place and time (the rural and depressed South of sharecroppers), but, I believe, exceedingly relevant and contemporary in theme for PCCC's street-smart students. In my students' more sophisticated gestures toward literary analysis, I am most curious to see how thoughtfully they will penetrate the overt "message" of the tale that it takes more than owning a gun to achieve "manhood." For embedded in this subtle narrative are some easily overlooked cultural and domestic influences (racism and parental ineptness) which conspire to keep the seventeen-year-old young man an uneducated farm "boy."

CONCLUSION

It did not surprise me in the least when I recently came across the article by Peter Elbow which theoretically resonates with the adjustments I made in teaching Composition II at PCCC. In his article, "The War between Reading and Writing—and How to End It," he suggests that literature instructors make "writing as important as reading" so that we can "help students break out of their characteristically passive stance for school and learning."¹² This thematic suggestion to use "reading as a springboard" for imaginative student writing is close to what my lesson plan sets out to do. Thus, in more expansive terms, Elbow can predict that students will "come at purely analytic discussions of texts in a much more shrewd and energetic way when they have had a chance to try out

some of the same kinds of writing in an experimental, playful, ungraded way.”¹³

Like Elbow, Seitz suggests that engaging students in various forms of exploratory writing through literary models (not necessarily imaginative literature by any means, in Seitz’s view) correspondingly enhances analytic thinking skills: “The pleasure of parody, for instance, is an experience which all students should have the opportunity to explore, for parody is a cunning means to forging simultaneous distance and intimacy with a particular discourse.”¹⁴

The postmodern debate as to the value of teaching traditional literary analysis continues. While the favoring of the close reading of texts—canonical texts, especially—has been attacked as theoretically naïve, or worse, as insinuating some disguised, hence sinister, agenda in reactive conservatism or elitism, it remains, nevertheless, vital for teachers to develop a student’s ability to co-opt the language of any academic discourse and to emphasize in their assignments the alert critical faculties students need to do that co-opting well. Such abilities can make a huge difference in a student’s success in the academy. These traditionally exalted language skills will endure, in spite of ivory tower theorists, as subtle, but powerful, credentials in academic, professional, and corporate gatekeeping for a long time to come. We do our students, *especially* our nontraditional students “caught” in the “double bind” imposed on them by an “oppositional culture,”¹⁵ a grave disservice if we are blind to these extant realities of a competitive society.

NOTES

¹ Ron McFarland, “An Apologia for Creative Writing,” *College English* 55 (1993): 17.

² Bassel Stassis (Chairman of ESL Department at PCCC), interview by author, Paterson, NJ, 22 November 1997.

³ Ibid.

⁴ This “holistic” grading process conceptually follows the model adopted by the Educational Testing Service—that is, the use of selected “range-finders” as a standards control prior to actual grading, each final exam receiving the scrutiny of two readers (in PCCC’s English department, two “outside” readers other than the student’s professor), and so on.

While all this may seem “high schoolish,” it is worth commenting that this one standardized exit requirement is actually less restricting to the individual in-

structor's freedom in overall course planning than, say, "portfolio" assessment practices in place at many schools.

⁵ Charles H. Bohnner, ed., *Short Fiction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994).

⁶ Kevin J. Dougherty, *The Contradictory College: The Conflicting Origins, and the Futures of the Community College* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

⁷ Dennis McGrath and Martin B. Spear, *The Academic Crisis of the Community College* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 5.

⁸ Further, this is no longer a "problem" confined to junior colleges where the nontraditional student has been historically, conveniently, less visible. More is at stake for these students, thankfully, now that economic and political forces have converged since at least the early 1990s to create a massive trend toward democratizing access to virtually all places of higher learning. In this light, the community colleges, which enrolled 36 percent of *all* college students nationwide in 1991 (Dougherty, 117), should be respected by their institutional "betters" as a place where educators have had a long record of trial and error in educating nontraditional students.

⁹ McGrath and Spear, 24–25.

¹⁰ See Earl Shorris, "On the Uses of a Liberal Education as a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor," *Harper's*, September 1997, 50–59.

This recent article explores the value of teaching the humanities to volunteers recruited literally from off the streets of New York City. The heart of Shorris's experiment resonates with my position on the value of teaching literary analysis as a well-targeted means of empowerment within the "oppositional culture." Shorris paraphrases the central message he delivers during the orientation for these students in the following political terms: "Having failed in the South Bronx, I resolved to approach these prospective students differently. 'You've been cheated,' I said. 'Rich people learn the humanities; you didn't. The humanities are a foundation for getting along in the world, for thinking, for learning to reflect on the world instead of just reacting to whatever force is turned against you. I think the humanities are one of the ways to become political...in the broad sense..."

'Rich people know politics in that sense. They know how to negotiate instead of using force. They know how to use politics to get along, to get power. It doesn't mean that rich people are good and poor people are bad. It simply means that rich people know a more effective method for living in this society..."

'Rich people learn the humanities in private schools and expensive universities. And that's one of the ways in which they learn the political life. I think that is the real difference between the haves and the have-nots in this country.'" (53)

¹¹ James E. Seitz, "How Literature Learns to Write: The Possibilities and Pleasures of Role-Play," in *Critical Theory and the Teaching of Literature*, ed. James F. Slevin and Art Young (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996), 338.

¹² Peter Elbow, "The War between Reading and Writing—and How to End It," in *Critical Theory and the Teaching of Literature*, ed. James F. Slevin and Art Young (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996), 283.

¹³ Ibid., 289.

¹⁴ Seitz, 338.

¹⁵ McGrath and Speer, 5.

ESSAY 7

Teaching Literature As/Is a Process

KEVIN RAILEY

I would like to use an anecdote about the Oprah Winfrey show to begin this discussion. This story embodies certain assumptions and expectations, which I want to discuss further, about reading and literature. In 1997 Oprah Winfrey interviewed Toni Morrison via telephone. The conversation went something like the following:

Winfrey: Are you aware that some people find your books difficult? They can't just go straight through the books. They find they have to go back to certain passages, back and forth between sections at times in order to find connections they feel they have missed, in order to try to make sense of things.

There was this rather long pause, then:

Morrison: That's called reading, my dear.

Many of us within the field of English studies quickly identify with Morrison's comment, implicitly bemoaning the lack of reading ability our students seem to manifest. We understand that reading is the kind of process Winfrey, perhaps unwittingly, describes and wonder why our students do not seem to see it the same way or seem to appreciate and enjoy this process. Students just don't seem to read in the same way we do: they don't seem to understand its complexity. Ah, what to do.

To my mind another question lurks silently in the midst of this conundrum, and a different puzzle emerges if we hold a mirror up to ourselves

and our usual classroom behavior. Why are we so amazed at the way our students approach the reading of literature? After all they have witnessed in most English classes, how could they possibly understand reading in any other way? Have they ever seen the reading process modeled for them in all its gory and imperfect detail? Have their teachers and professors shown them how they come to understand a book, how tentatively the process begins, and how much professional training serves to direct this process? Has anyone ever discussed with these same students the difference between reading and reading like an expert/critic?

When we look into the mirror of our professional behavior in front of the classroom, I think we will have to confess to a very simple bottomline: reading literature for us really means coming to class with impressive interpretations of that literature. How we come to those interpretations, however, almost always remains a mystery. Thus, though in our writing classes we utilize a process approach that includes preliminary writing, drafting, revisions, and peer critique, in our literature classes we continue to focus on the product—the insightful interpretation. Though Morrison is right in her naming of a complex process, Winfrey's remark is really a comment on the pedagogy of the literature class, a pedagogy, I suggest, in need of change.

Let's face it, most professors of English have a stake in the professional field of English studies. We are committed to the *study* of literature, to understanding the ways literature gets studied, and to teaching others to appreciate the complexity and profundity of this enterprise. We also tend to have a stake in the professional knowledge acquired while pursuing a Ph.D., and to the degree of status earned through this process. All of these factors come to influence our teaching methods and our professional persona in front of the classroom. Intensive interaction between professor and student, between text and student, are not essential to this persona; demonstrating our expert abilities, our knowledge, maintaining an aura to the process are.

On the other hand, my students constantly reveal that the reason they are intrigued by literature and motivated to take English courses has little to do with the professional study of literature. They are motivated by something much less tangible, much less academic. If we observe our students closely, they will (re)teach us and make us vividly aware that reading literature is an intensely developmental process. The professorial persona pretends, and only pretends, otherwise, and this pretense has led to classroom methods that do not help students learn to engage with and to study literature. Most students, in fact, learn about and come to love

literature *despite* many of their professors. The reality of the reading process and the reactions of my students have caused me to begin to implement many different types of strategies in my literature classes. I have come to understand that the process of moving from the deeply private and personal to the public sphere is not just a process applicable to writing. This common insight in composition studies has become a powerful analogy for me as I think about teaching literature. As a teacher I now try to involve students in all stages of the whole process, and I constantly utilize methods and tools of composition in my literature classes. (Specific examples will be mentioned throughout and examples can also be found in Tables 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3.)

The shift I have experienced and which I recommend here for all of us can and perhaps should be seen as significant as the now famous “paradigm-shift” that occurred within composition studies approximately thirty years ago. This shift was initiated by an entirely new set of assumptions about writing and how to get students to produce good writing; these new assumptions radically altered pedagogy. Now, as we think about producing “good reading,” I think we need to consider our assumptions about literature and understand how various assumptions encourage and sustain certain types of pedagogy in the literature classroom.

Though it has been the strawman of many an argument, I want to claim that the assumptions underlying most teaching of literature stem (still) from New Criticism. The basic aspects of this legacy include the following: (1) a focus on the work (text) itself—its structure, complexity, expressiveness, beauty, significance; (2) a sense that art imposes a meaningful order onto the chaos which characterizes the world; (3) a belief that art holds a mirror up to the significant aspects of universal human experience; (4) an image that the artist is a seer who has the perceptual ability to see into life and the creative ability to reveal life’s mysteries; and (5) an idea that literature records the best that has been thought and said throughout the ages.

Most importantly for my purposes, this legacy has had some definitive effects on reading and literature pedagogy. First, the task of reading here is to discover the artist’s version of order, the artist’s significant insights, and to determine how carefully and beautifully the artist has constructed these. Second, thinking of literature in this way also implies that certain people are needed to determine the artist’s order, that certain people (and only certain people) can, in fact, decipher the artist’s insights and methods. This attribute of New Criticism established a sense that certain read-

ers' perceptions could match the artist's, even if their creative abilities were different, and further, that these folks were the best readers of literature. Finally, critics and professors were seen, then, as the best readers of literature, the adjudicators of what, in fact, was literature.

The ramifications of these beliefs on pedagogy meant that critics/professors were responsible for showing the rest of the world how to decipher *the* order and *the* meaning to literary works. They knew it, and they could explain the pieces of the puzzle known as their interpretation. The pedagogical model still dominating most literature classes stems, I contend, from this matrix of beliefs and assumptions. Much the same way in which composition pedagogy was dependent on a currenttraditional rhetoric for so long, literature teaching has been mostly dependent on this model for some time.

A new set of assumptions and beliefs has been articulated during the last twenty-five years or so under the influence of poststructuralist and postmodern theory, one branch of which—reader-response—has the most potential for guiding an entirely new kind of pedagogy. The basic aspects of these new theoretical approaches include: (1) the breakdown of a one-to-one relationship between a word and its meaning (the sign and its referent), so that meaning now is always seen as ultimately indeterminate; (2) the language of a literary work stems from the languages of the world in which the writer is immersed; thus, artists cannot achieve objective relation to their worlds, and their insights, by necessity, come from a perspective; (3) no objective knowledge or perception of the world or the literary text is possible; (4) meaning—whatever the literary work comes to mean—can no longer exist exclusively *in* the work itself. The two incredibly multi-faceted branches of this new legacy can be described roughly as cultural criticism, which focuses more on the universe surrounding the text, and reader-response, which focuses more on the audience and the transaction between text and reader.¹

Reader response has the most potential for a productive effect on pedagogy because it approaches the activity of reading as if it is a complicated and complex process, which it is, and a process in which one can engage in increasingly articulate ways. Just as the process approach to writing pedagogy assumes that all students (people) are writers, inherent writers at least, and offers productive strategies to become a better writer, reader response assumes that all students are readers and offers its own set of strategies to become better at the reading process.² It does not assume that reading is a god-given talent that one either has or does not

have. It breaks down the reading process into components and seeks to move students through the various stages of productive reading.

Before we can focus on this process, both here and in the classroom itself, we need to work to demystify the kind of reading and interpreting most of us do as teachers and professors. We can only do this by sharing with students the conventions which guide much of our thinking about literature. Patricia Bizzell articulated for process approaches to writing instruction the guideline which we must follow now in literature: "To help poor writers...we need to explain that their writing takes place within a community, and to explain what the community's conventions are."³ We need to do the same for "poor" readers. Thus, in my classes I share with my students the following conventions:

1. The rule of significance—a literary work expresses a significant attitude about people and the world
2. The convention of metaphorical coherence—metaphors should always be consistent
3. The convention of genre—offers stable sets of norms with which to evaluate and label works
4. The rule of totality—requires works to be coherent on as many levels as possible
5. The convention of thematic unity—indicates that semantic and figurative oppositions fit into symmetrical binary patterns
6. A code of poetic tradition provides a stock of symbols and types with agreed-upon meanings

Almost all of the interpretations that teachers and professors offer to their students, knowingly or not, derive from a certain commitment to these conventions. They, in fact, enforce our minds to think and our eyes to see in particular ways. Rarely, however, do we share these with students or explain how students' own tentative interpretations, voiced in class or in a paper, do not strike us as valid (when they don't) because they do not stay tuned to these conventions. We maintain a certain professional aura to the study of literature when we do not share and explain these conventions, and we maintain the distance between the students and ourselves, but we do not help students improve their reading or their study of literature. If and when we do explain them, students begin to see how and why their professors talk about literature in the ways they do and can produce the kinds of reading we may require more productively.

Beyond this simple step, which will help students become more like “one of us,” so to speak, literature pedagogy also needs to help students become better independent readers and to develop their own sense of the reading and interpretive process. Reader response claims that a text simply does not exist in itself, that it is only brought into existence by the transaction between reader and work. That transaction will necessarily be different depending on the individual reader, and as professors we need to come to accept these differences. Texts will/do have different meanings for different people, and this diversity, rather than a unity of readings, should be encouraged and developed in the classroom. Reader response reactions to literature are also seen to be always rooted in personal responses, in the broad sense of that term, and within this pedagogical approach reading encourages exploration of both one’s self and the world of the text. Meaning, as some skeptics may contend, is not thrown out the door, nor is the whole process of interpretation, but multiple interpretations are expected, and self-knowledge is as important as knowledge of texts and authors. Ultimately, a text is seen as a system of response-inviting structures that the author has organized according to a repertory of social, political, philosophical, moral and aesthetic codes, and readers are seen to possess, consciously or otherwise, their own set of these codes as well as a certain level of knowledge about each one of them.⁴ Meaning is thus dependent on the interaction among these various levels and can be affected in many ways by many factors. Pedagogy needs to focus on the ways in which to develop various types of students’ responses, to determine valid and invalid interpretations and to understand the forces affecting the various interpretations.

Reader response is defined in various ways by various people and is often misunderstood, but I see it as a developmental approach to reading rooted in students’ personal responses to literature, moving through a topical realm of response to an interpretive and a formal realm. These responses have to be articulated developmentally in order for students to choose or to identify with a particular theoretical or analytical approach to a text. Whether students see a text, eventually, through feminist, Marxist, or liberal humanist eyes has much to do with their preliminary personal response, and reader response is the only approach that allows and encourages a developmental process in which students can move from an articulated personal response to a theoretical interpretation. This process occurs according to students’ own perspectives, their own set of values, and our tasks as teachers of literature should be to give them the tools and the guidance to move from the one to the other.⁵

The developmental approach I utilize and implement focuses on taking students through a variety of stages, ones which relate to various stages of the writing process. As mentioned above, these stages include the personal, the topical, the interpretive, and the formal. These can be described in the following ways:

The personal—Whether students like the book or not; why they feel the way they do; positive or negative reactions to various aspects of the book including scenes, characters, resolutions and the reasons for these; ways in which students identify with parts of the book (if any); ways in which students feel the book spoke to their own personal experience and what they derive from the book's perspective.

The topical—Most books present or are concerned with various topics—friendships, romance, family, betrayal, trust, responsibility, morality, sensuality, alcoholism, drugs, suicide, murder, adultery, and on and on and on; naturally, then, we have reactions to the book based on our opinions/feelings/attitudes about and experiences with these topics; therefore, students should talk and think about the topics themselves and how their own feelings about these topics affect their reactions to the book.

The interpretive—Here reactions center upon explaining/deciphering/inventing (if you will) the meaning of the book; what the book means for students personally can be included within this category though the discussion needs to be more about the book and its relation to students than strictly about their lives; more traditionally, reactions here focus on the meaning of the book as it is derived from close transaction with the words on the page—the scenes, characters, descriptions, connotations, metaphors, etc, and what conclusions students draw from these.

The formal—These responses focus on the technical means used by the author to convey the story; closely related, usually, with interpretation, formal reactions attempt to explain how the author used literary devices and techniques and to what effect.⁶

As is probably obvious, most traditional English classes focus on the second two forms of response, overlooking or ignoring the first two. All of these types of responses are necessary, however, if we want students to become better at the overall process of reading—if we want them truly to learn.

As many, if not most, of my students reveal, signification itself—naming that which one knows—cannot occur at all without an experiential anchoring. In order to learn and to grow, students need to start where they themselves are in relation to a text. They need to fill the space between

them and a text with their own words, their own reactions, their own guts, if you will. For professors to step into that space and to fill it for the student is an exercise of expertise, our “superior” knowledge, but it is not a pedagogical strategy which will improve the reading and interpreting of literature. As teachers we must resist this step, though our training makes it a strong temptation. Students must bring their own intelligence to bear on their reading experience, to consider and complicate it in order to develop an attitude to bring to the analytical tasks required of them.

So, where do we begin? As with writing pedagogy, we begin with freewriting. One of the best ways for students to explore the personal realm of their response to literature is to utilize the method of freewriting. Freewriting does not mean writing without thinking; to use a Peter Elbow phrase, it means writing without teachers. Students should try to forget all their teachers have told them about literature when they freewrite about books. The ultimate goal here is deeply personal writing, writing that is engaged, thoughtful, meandering, and nearly profound. Almost all writers comment on how they became good writers by focusing on themselves or on the smallest details and turning off all the voices ringing in their heads. Students should focus on their own minute and complex reactions to texts as a first step toward understanding what they are reading. The more they do this, the better they will become at articulating what they think and feel about a book. Like becoming a good writer, becoming a reader means beginning with vague impressions, tentative ideas, queries that will be answered later in more definitive ways; students need to experience this process, need to see it unfold, and we must offer the means through which they can accomplish these processes.

Of course, journal writing has become simplistic in many of its uses, and teachers need to be wary of previous experiences students may have had with it. We need to articulate again and again what we think good personal responses are, give students examples, model the performance for them. Personal responses can be silly and trite, but that does not mean that responding on this level is by definition silly and trite. We cannot simply expect students to know what we mean or want; we must help them enact it. Moreover, journal writing is only one means through which students can explore the personal realm of response. Teachers can continually encourage this type of response in class and in discussion. We can articulate a whole series of personalized issues that will channel students into such responses; we can give time in class for discussion along these lines, thereby sponsoring such investigation with the authority of our professional persona; we can be very tentative about giving our

interpretation and explain how our interpretation is affected by our original personal response to the book or how it has transcended that original response; we can make time in class for students to talk to one another about their reactions to the book, making that activity normal. Here, students' own experience with texts is validated and allowed to enter the classroom—much as it is in the process-writing classroom. In these ways—by not simply focusing on the expected product of reading—teachers can normalize the process in which all readers engage—much the same way process approaches normalized our sense of the various stages of the writing process.

These kinds of explorations of the personal realm have another significant potential for students engaged in the reading process, I believe, one which relates both to the process of freewriting and the topical realm of reader response: they offer the opportunity for students to expose, to recognize, and to work through the voices ringing in their heads. It has been theorized how one's language, especially at early stages of self-awareness, always overflows with other people's words, how we as human subjects are largely identified, at first, by various influences which have come to us through the languages of our sociocultural world. When students write about their deepest personal responses during freewriting, they record on the page both their ideas and, implicitly, the way those ideas have been shaped by other influences. When students are then asked to examine their own journal and/or freewriting, they can investigate their ideas and consider where they might have come from. In these ways students can become more self-conscious about their reading process and more self-aware of the influences shaping their thoughts. Freewriting serves, in one sense, as a process revealing the voices inside the mind, an indication of the sociocultural influences which speak loudly to us. In essence, people objectify the ideological voices by which they have been identified and constructed and create for themselves a vantage point. From here they can begin to become aware of how they are associated with cultural voices and to separate themselves from the "unconscious" authority these voices have held. In the literature classroom, teachers can direct students to examine their most intense reactions, those places in the book where something "hit home," whether in a negative or positive fashion, and can ask students to consider why they reacted as they did.

To encourage this process I often utilize a dialectical notebook in my literature classes. A technique created by Peter Elbow, the dialectical notebook requires that people look back over their writing process in

order to learn about themselves as writers. I use this same idea for the reading process. Here, I want students to begin a conversation with themselves about their own reading style and interests, the questions and concerns they have about books and themselves. I tell them that the objective in this notebook is to develop their awareness of their own reading habits, style and taste, and how these developed. I also want them to explore how their reading and personal development have affected their taste in books, how these and their teachers have affected the way they interpret literature. The reasoning behind this writing centers on the implicit request for them to try to analyze their own reactions and responses, to look back at them and think about them. It is useful in many ways, especially in making students more aware of reading as a process, and it opens many a door when we move to the topical realm of response.

When moving to topical responses, students discuss the various “topics” embedded within a given piece of literature as well as their own feelings about these. Within this realm students really can begin to investigate how their personal worlds have been shaped by the social, cultural and historical forces around them and how their sense of particular books derives, at least in part, from these other forces. Inevitably, there are various ideas and opinions voiced by different students about any number of topics and issues raised by the work under discussion. If students are left to their own devices, these discussions can be extremely unproductive as they try to prove that their opinions are right. Rather than explicitly or implicitly siding with one opinion or another, teachers need to allow the diversity of opinions to be voiced and considered but not put into opposition to one another. Teachers need to turn students back onto themselves to examine why they think the ways they do, encouraging them not to answer that question with a simple, “Because I’m right!”

Isolating the topics and issues embedded in a work of art and allowing students to discuss them—outside the literary context—might seem a waste of time to some literature teachers: what does it have to do with literature anyway? In one sense, this type of discussion does not have much to do with literature, *per se*; however, it does have much to do with the ways real people read literature. This step emphasizes the developmental approach of reader response. It most definitely opens the possibility for students to realize many important aspects of reading and interpretation: (1) that literary works do contain issues and topics to which we react whether we realize it or not; (2) that our reactions to these issues affects the way we read, understand, and possibly how we interpret the work; (3) that different people will have various opinions about these

issues. All of these developmental steps open students to recognize that there are various ways to read, that their insights may be valid but are not simply right. This approach encourages the development of self-knowledge along with the articulation of literary interpretation. With this work behind them students can approach interpretation and formal analysis without feeling, on one hand, that they have to regurgitate the teacher's view and, on the other hand, understanding that they will need to explain why they think as they do and where their ideas originated. In the interpretation process students who have moved through the topical level can more easily separate which of their reactions came solely from their personal experience and which have come from their transaction with the words on the page.

And, of course, within interpretive responses we want students to articulate what their transaction with the words on the page happens to be and what sense they make of it all. We cannot, however—and I want to stress this point—expect students to learn to perform this particular skill well without moving them through all the stages. The students who do learn to perform this skill have somehow gone through these processes to understand that they must explain their insight to a skeptical audience, and we cannot simply reward those who have learned already what we should be teaching them in the first place. Moreover, though it might seem as if the first two stages are easier or less important, I don't think we can see them in that way at all. As the history and spectrum of literary criticism itself reveals, many different types of criticism/interpretation exist, spanning a range that includes personal/autobiographical forms of criticism to intensely formalistic styles, and we should not enforce a limited style in our classrooms. Yes, there is a difference between good and bad analyses, valid and invalid interpretations, but I don't think we can draw a hierarchy between the personal and the formal: they are both valid types of responses to literature and part of the sophisticated, intelligent, and educated reading process.

The interpretive realm of response also poses another challenge to teachers because here we need to balance a fine line. On one hand, we need to admit and announce loudly that there are any number of interpretations to a text; on the other hand, not just anything is an interpretation. There are valid and invalid interpretations. So, while we must try not to require a unity of reading, we do have to enforce standards. Students, sometimes based on previous experience, do not always believe we mean what we say when we announce that interpretation can be a varied enterprise; other times, they don't know what we mean—they have been told

before that there is only one way to see a text. Here, modeling the difference between valid and invalid interpretations is essential as is offering students examples of different ways to see the same text. Moving through the first two stages, the personal and topical type of response, will greatly assist teachers in explaining the difference between invalid and valid interpretations because almost always students will use or produce these types of response and think they are interpretive responses. Having a vocabulary to explain how a particular response is personal or topical and another interpretive can be most productive.

Obviously, the biggest difference between those first two realms and the interpretive is the way in which students deal with the actual text. That they all have to contend with the same words but might see these in different ways sounds like a trick to many of them. To help, I often give them a number of mini-interpretations of the same text. I purposely use all the same details from a given story or novel or poem, but I explain them from different vantage points—feminist or Marxist or liberal-humanist or new historicist. I don't usually label these for students, but I explore with them questions about the interpretations: which do they most identify with? how does each use the same information and details? how does each one engage with the text in a similar fashion? This exercise becomes fruitful in many ways. First, because different students like different interpretations, they begin to see how their personal reactions to a text do affect reading and how they can lead to interpretations. Second, students see that indeed different interpretations do exist; they don't have to guess what the teacher wants; they have to explain themselves well. Lastly, they get a sense of what makes a valid argument. (See Table 7.1 for an example of one of these exercises.) Despite all of this work, writing interpretations remains a difficult task for students, and I also always give them a set of guidelines about what makes good writing, whether interpretive or other. (See Table 7.2 for these guidelines.)

Table 7.1 Mini-Interpretations

Assignment and procedures in relation to John Updike's "A & P"

1. Read the story. Write down the scenes of the story which you feel are crucial to its development. Write down any other aspects which you feel important—narration, symbols, characterization, whatever.

2. Very briefly, answer the following questions. (Review the story when necessary; maybe note specific words, phrases that could support your ideas.)

• What kind of neighborhood is this A&P located in? What kind of neighborhood is Sammy from? What is Sammy's relationship to Stokesie and Lengel? How does Sammy feel about them? How does Sammy feel about the people who shop in the store?

• Where are the three girls from? Would you say they are similar to or different from Sammy and the people in the store? In what ways are they similar or different?

• Do you like Sammy? How would you characterize his action at the end of the story? noble? stupid? misguided? necessary? what? How do you think Updike feels about him?

• Do you like the three girls? Are they innocent? stuck-up? stupid? what? How do you think Updike feels about them?

• In the conflict between Sammy and Lengel, who do you feel is right? Why? Who do you think Updike thinks is right? Why?

• Why do you think Sammy feels the world will be hard to him from now on?

3. Simply respond yes or no to the following:

• Sammy is just a normal guy fed up with his job and his life; the girls give him the excuse he's been waiting for.

• The drab and uninspiring nature of Sammy's world justifies his reaction; he should leave.

• Stokesie and Lengel are small-minded people who deserve our dislike.

• Sammy's gesture, though unrecognized by the girls, possesses heroic qualities.

• The girls should have known better than to walk around like that.

• The A&P is a sorry comparison to the world of the girls.

• Sammy is an immature and foolhardy boy whose actions are controlled by his libido.

- *Sammy gets blinded by a glamorous illusion and rejects his world because of it.*
- *Sammy stands at a type of crossroads in his life, and his decision represents a coming of age.*
- *Sammy yearns to become part of a higher class than the one he was born into.*
- *Lengel has every right to chastise the girls for the way they are dressed.*
- *All of the male characters in this story ridiculously over-react to the simple sight of three girls in bathing suits.*
- *The girls are not queens, as Sammy implies, or sluts, as Lengel implies; they're just girls shopping for herring snacks.*
- *Through the various types of attention they receive from the male characters, the girls reveal how silly men can be.*
- *Though it seems like a light story, and in some ways it is, "A&P" also reveals how males need to control women as well as how much males desire to please women.*
- *Though I liked this story and could identify with Sammy to some extent, I am not really sure what to make of the whole thing.*

4. NOW LEAVE ALL THIS STUFF FOR A WHILE, IDEALLY OVERNIGHT, AND COME BACK TO IT. READ THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTIONS OF THE STORY AND DECIDE WHICH ONE BEST DESCRIBES YOUR OVERALL SENSE OF THE STORY. IF YOU FEEL AN AFFINITY FOR MORE THAN ONE, PLACE THEM IN SOME KIND OF HIERARCHICAL ORDER OF PREFERENCE. a. Overall, the story, "A&P," depicts a turning point in a young man's life. The store itself epitomizes his past and present life. In this uninspiring world people are seen to be either dependent and slavish sheep blindly minding their own business or shallow and close-minded hoi polloi arbitrarily using their meagre positions of power. And the main character, Sammy, has secretly yearned to escape from this milieu.

With the chance visit of three upper-class and somewhat mesmerizing girls, Sammy's chance to escape appears. For Sammy,

the girls' presence clearly reveals the drab and absurd life in which he has lived and toiled. This life has been confining, restrictive, and hopeless, and the girls' near naked innocence indicates another world where dreams become realities. When his boss, Lengel, chastises the girls for their attire, Sammy can no longer hide his contempt for his surroundings. He quits his job, defending the girls' rights, and he leaves the store to face the future alone. Though Sammy has left what he has known behind, and for this will suffer somehow, he also has chosen to seek independence, a path unconfined by the A&P. b. Though in a relatively contemporary setting, a suburban grocery in late 20th-century America, John Updike's story, "A&P," tells a universal, even archetypal tale—that of the coming of age of a young man. All coming-of-age stories depict a young person coming to terms with his childhood world, judging it, and making some kind of choice. The choice generally occurs during some crisis in which the character's values come into conflict with those of his childhood world. "A&P" certainly contains these ingredients.

Sammy's opinion of his surrounding world has been determined even before the advent of the story. His vivid descriptions of the customers and his somewhat less harsh though not altogether sympathetic descriptions of his fellow workers reveal his distance from the world of his youth. The conflict of values occurs when the three girls enter the store.

These represent another life for Sammy, one which he has only imagined and longed for. When Lengel criticizes the girls for their manner of dress, Sammy feels that his longings and dreams have been rejected by the world in which he exists. Thus, he must choose: his dreams and hopes or the world of his parents and Lengel. His choice reveals his rejection of the limitations of his childhood world, and his hope for a future more bright and productive. He leaves the A&P, claiming the right to pursue his own life lived by his own values. Thus, he enters the world of maturity and adulthood.

c. John Updike's "A&P" shows the power and allure that the vision of an upper-class life has on the mind of an articulate, intelligent working-class boy. Because the life of those around him seems, on the surface, so hard and frustrating, the main character, Sammy, becomes easily influenced by the world three rich girls seem to represent. In a moment of haste, Sammy re-

jects his whole world, identifying with a life and a set of values he knows nothing about. In this move, Sammy isolates himself from family and friends alike, choosing a world of loneliness and cynicism.

The narration of the story, a first-person account by Sammy himself, clearly reveals Sammy's ability with words and his intelligence. He makes comments about the customers, summing their lives up in clever, if not kind, ways. His insights and thought processes separate him from his fellow worker, Stokesie, whose mind seems filled with sex and lust, and from Lengel, his boss, whose judgments and actions seem based on a strict and unthoughtful adherence to religious and moral standards. Sammy's life also contrasts with Stokesie's in that he has chosen to remain single while Stokesie has a wife and kids; thus, Sammy has not fallen into the usual, stereotypical pattern of working-class life—high school, job, marriage, children. Thus, though Sammy is definitely a working class kid, he does not feel totally comfortable with the life around him.

When three girls dressed in bathing suits enter the store, Sammy's dissatisfactions with his own world really become obvious. Because the physical presence of the girls, one of them in particular, contrasts so sharply with the appearance of his own world, Sammy comes to identify with the girls and the life he thinks they represent. Without ever talking with them, or finding out anything about them, Sammy projects that they must be wealthy, living a completely different and better life than the one he presently lives. Compared to the women customers in the store, and the sad, depleted mothers he sees everyday, these girls seem so special to Sammy. Thus, he chooses to side with the girls in a rather minor and silly dispute with Lengel; he quits his job and turns his back on the world which produced him.

The sadness and irony of this story centers on Sammy's inability to see anything beautiful in his own life and to imagine that beauty and hope only exist "on the other side of the tracks," so to speak. Certainly, Lengel and Stokesie are not exactly role models; however, Sammy also projects 1) that the girls are indeed from another part of town—as if this beauty, by definition, could not exist here, and 2) that their life is indeed better than his own. These two conclusions of his young mind are fantasies, glamorizations of the life led in an upper class family, and through these

glamorizations we can see just how much power this vision of this life has on a relatively inexperienced mind.

Finally, Sammy's choice to reject his family and friends reveals also a severe lack of sympathy for the daily life of those around him. Even if the girls are from the upper class, the reasons for their physical beauty and for their mixed attitude of innocence and arrogance stem from the amenities, creature comforts, and insulation from harsh realities that money can buy. Sammy gives these girls too much credit, as if their beauty is intrinsic to their nature. He is blind to the hard work, the overcoming of obstacles, the difficulties inherent in working-class life, and he has no appreciation for people's lives. In short, he thinks he is better than others, and since being better for him means being richer, he identifies with those whom he feels have money. His lack of sympathy can also be said to come from inexperience with the workings of the world,

d. Whatever else "A&P" might be, it also is a story which reveals social attitudes toward women. As much as the main character's narration reveals about himself, his story can also be seen to uncover the underlying attitudes he and others have toward the three girls who enter the store and toward women in general. Typical for this type of society, women are judged according to their looks, are seen as both mindless and dangerous, and are either idealized or controlled through power.

What usually gets lost in any discussion of this story is that there are two groups of women represented—the group who generally shop in the A&P and the three girls. Sammy judges the first group—across the board—negatively. Whether they are called sheep, or described as having no minds of their own, or as frazzled by their children, all of the women associated with the world of the A&P are harshly condemned by Sammy—and primarily for one reason: they're ugly. In contrast, the three girls, and especially Queenie, are seen in much more positive terms because of their (supposed) beauty. Typical chauvinistic claptrap.

Beyond this superficial distinction, however, Sammy also identifies the three girls by the body part with which he is most intrigued. The one girl is not that good-looking but has a nice "can"; the queen has breasts of vanilla ice cream. In these descriptions he dehumanizes the girls, making them seem important purely on the basis of physical attributes. Further, he even

questions whether there is a mind at all in a girl's head. His attitudes are deeply chauvinistic, rude, and obviously based on a kind of conditioning that places supreme value on a woman's physical looks. On the surface, Sammy seems to idealize these girls, but his attitudes are deeply disturbing. If he is so affected by the sheer flesh of women, by their actions and behavior, who knows what he might be capable of doing? How can he manage any self-respect when his life is turned inside out by three girls in bathing suits?

Finally, Lengel's reaction to the girls reveals the implicit need for some men to control the dress and behavior of women. Whether based on religion, which can be said to be deeply patriarchal and chauvinistic, too, or on his unconscious motivation, Lengel chooses to assert authority over the girls' actions; his insult—telling them they are indecent—is cloaked in moral terms, but it is an insult nonetheless. Lengel is indeed a pawn within the overall structure of society, but this society allows men to tell women how to dress, encourages women to look beautiful, and demeans women's personality and character by reducing it to the most attractive physical feature.

e. Written in the context of the early 1960s, amid the backdrop of the cultural, sexual, and youth revolutions, Updike's "A&P" can be seen to be an expression of the conflict between the old, dying world of authoritarianism and the new, emerging world of freedom and youth.

At the beginning of the story Sammy reveals that he has been mired in a dispirited world; later, we see that this world has been controlled by the likes of Lengel, a close-minded, authoritarian Sunday school teacher/boss who reacts negatively to expressions of childhood innocence and expressions of freedom. Both Lengel and Stokesie can be seen to be traditional and conservative in their approach to life—sex should be part of marriage, church and family should be the ruling force in our lives, and all should respect policy. No questions asked. In contrast, when exposed to the forces of freedom, innocence and sexual expression, Sammy reacts favorably, gladly leaving Lengel's world behind.

The attitudes of freedom and sexuality, of course, are epitomized by the three girls who enter the store, shake up the customers' daily existences by their rebelling from decorum, and inspire

Sammy to rebel from stultifying authority and to seek his own individual expression and sexual identity,

f. Though the plot of the story, "A&P," is simple enough, its meaning seems ultimately to be shrouded in confusion and uncertainty. Updike offers little information at times about essential aspects of the story and the characters; other times he seems to be either purposefully vague or contradictory. At the end of this story I am left with more questions than answers. Thus, "A&P" is a story about life but only in an odd manner: we can never know literature or life completely; human knowledge can only go so far.

Clearly, Sammy narrates this tale about his experiences on that fateful day one summer. On one hand, from his ongoing commentary Sammy seems insightful; on the other hand, I am not sure if he is simply sarcastic or downright cruel. If he is only a sarcastic person, maybe his words at the end of the story are also sarcastic; maybe his claim to stand up for these girls is a sarcastic comment on the absurdity and impossibility of heroic action. He does seem to know no one will be there to witness his actions; thus, maybe in the end, they are meaningless, even for Sammy. If Sammy is downright cruel, how are we to understand his altruism toward the girls? That's a contradiction. If he becomes nice to them because they are rich, beautiful, and nearly naked, can we take his actions at all seriously? Finally, since his descriptions of Stokesie and Lengel are filtered through his own somewhat unreliable perspective, how do we know Sammy's rebellion is justified? The narration of the story does not seem to help us come to terms with these questions.

In trying to come to terms with the end of the story, we are left with more mystery. This story could be seen as a coming of age story, a journey to maturation; however, that possibility seems weakened by the ending in which we find out nothing about Sammy's thoughts and possible future. We don't see how he confronts his parents—a topic briefly mentioned earlier in the story but never resolved. We also never know how Sammy will negotiate his new relationship to the world in which he grew up. The answers to these questions may be implied by various words and comments in the story; however, ultimately the story seems simply to be a slice of life with perhaps no order and no point. It's hard to tell.

Often we are confronted by the inability of language to describe fully what we wish to communicate. Somehow language seems to come up short when trying to encapsulate fully the complexity of lived experience. Updike's story only heightens this reality in vivid detail.

Table 7.2 Writing Guidelines

Criteria for all papers

1. Clarity of Purpose/Topic/Theme.

It should be clear to me, your reader, what you are specifically discussing. Unlike fiction writing, analytical writing should be explicit and focused. Be wary of having only a general sense of what you want to discuss, or of developing two different themes in your paper.

2. Coherence.

All sections/paragraphs of your paper should help develop the topic/theme. Coherence means that there exists a unity of purpose and focus throughout the paper, that you don't meander to some other interest and that you don't lose track of the specific theme of your paper and "just talk about stuff."

3. Cohesiveness.

There should be some sense of transition from one paragraph to the next; some relationship should exist between the paragraphs of your paper, especially in terms of how they forward/continue the discussion of your theme/topic.

4. Substantiation.

With literary analysis papers there should be a clear sense of how the ideas in the paper developed from your interaction with the specifics of the book. This requirement helps you clarify your insights and helps someone else, like me, see your perspective more clearly. Substantiation can take the form of referring to specific scenes, conflicts, resolutions, images, and so on, and using quotations.

5. Grammar/Language/Expression.

The way in which you form your sentences, your use of the English language, and the way you express your ideas are also taken into consideration.

Source: Though they have been greatly reduced and interpreted, these guidelines were originally adapted from Louise Weather-bee Phelps, professor of composition and rhetoric at Syracuse University, New York.

As we move to the formal stage of response, we move to the most teacher-directed area within reader response. As they come to writing classes with certain levels of knowledge about grammar, students come to our literature classes with various levels of knowledge and awareness about literary devices, formal structures, and elements of style and technique, and we need to help them develop their abilities to respond on this level by offering them tools and guidance. I have found it useful to articulate guided questions about the various elements of literature, whether it be fiction or poetry, and so forth. This level of response rests on the awareness that literature, like all forms of art, has structure to it, and many students have never understood or analyzed literature in this way. Interpretation entails, in part, recognizing the specific structure of the work and attempting to determine what that indicates and means. Students need to be made increasingly aware of the structure of literature and asked to examine how its structure relates to its possible meanings, but again, they need to be able to recognize this in a developmental manner. (See Table 7.3 for an example of a sheet about various elements of fiction.) Putting them through these steps helps them to focus on the art behind the writing.

Table 7.3 Guides for Fiction

An example of a set of questions that I have found useful in getting students to focus on the formal level of response in relation to fiction.

A. CHARACTER

1. What are characters' origins, choices, destiny? Who or what has controlled this destiny?
2. What are the character's traits? How are these revealed—through words, actions, descriptions? How are they related to decisions and outcomes? What do the particular outcomes tell us about author's attitude toward character?

3. How does the character's class position, occupation, gender affect choices and outcomes?
4. Who seem to be heroes? villains?

B. PLOT

1. Though the events of the plot should seem natural, why do you suspect the author has chosen these particular events? How do they reveal the author's concerns?
2. What are the basic conflicts/struggles/tensions of the story? Between whom do these conflicts exist and what do they represent? What might the resolutions tell us?

C. BASIC STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS— REPETITIONS AND OPPOSITIONS

1. What ideas, events, words, relationships are repeated, mentioned more than once? Are they used in the same context each time? Is there a sense of development about the usage? What conclusions can we draw from the repetitions themselves?
2. What words, images, scenes, people stand in opposition to each other? How do these oppositions connect/relate to the general conflict of the book? How do resolutions of conflicts connect ultimately to these oppositions?

D. STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

1. Is there a relationship between style and content?
2. What aspects of humanity, knowledge, interest does this particular style highlight or emphasize?
3. Is there a purpose to the style itself?

E. THEME

1. Theme should grow out of the resolutions of the conflicts and oppositions; it should be based on those areas of interest and concern that are repeated and focused upon. What kinds of conclusions do these items lead us to draw?

2. Are there comments within the book—general comments about people, life, insights—that can be seen to underlie the entire novel? (Make note of comments that strike you as you read and ask about their significance after completing the book.)
3. Novels can be seen as a vision of reality from a particular viewpoint. What is the vision of reality depicted in this book?

Reader response, as I have described it here, is a teaching method for the literature classroom which I believe improves literature pedagogy in much the same way process approaches to writing improved writing instruction. Its method rests on solid theoretical assumptions that expose and explain how making sense of what one reads is a complex and developmental process composed of constantly recurring activities. This approach does, at times, change the structural relationships between student and teacher by giving more authority to students' own discourses and processes. However, this shift is necessary if we sincerely wish to engage students in the process of improving their reading and interpretive skills. Process approaches to writing instruction were in some measure a response to new populations entering colleges and universities; a similar response is necessary within literature pedagogy as new literatures and new populations fill our English classes. A stable set of assumptions cannot exist or completely guide all we do in literature classes because there can be no stable expectation about the students we will experience. The diversity of the reading experience must be accounted for in our pedagogical approaches. On one hand, reading is a diverse and multifaceted enterprise, and on the other hand, we will continue to experience students from all sorts of educational backgrounds. Like process approaches, reader response resists monolithical determinations of quality, involves the interaction and interrelationship of individuals, emphasizes the necessary constituent feature of process in the acquisition of knowledge, and enables people to develop their own insights while learning the skills to become members of an educated community. Encouraging a range of responses to literature from the personal, to the topical, through the interpretive and formal helps involve students in processes that develop both self-knowledge and an increased ability to read, in the broadest sense of that term. To my mind, awareness and articulation are the essential cornerstones to the educational process, and the need to engage students in activities that will develop these is perhaps more important than inculcating them into a traditional canon of interpretations which is constantly being changed and revised anyway. Teaching is an

absolutely self-defeating act unless those involved find the means to enlarge their particular lifeworlds, and the teaching of literature—through a reader response pedagogy—still holds the most potential for this inspirational aspect of education.

NOTES

¹ I assume many are familiar with the basic model for the various components affecting literary interpretation which can be found in M.H.Abrams *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953). They include the “Work,” “Universe,” “Artist,” and “Audience.” See Abrams, Chapter I.

² There is no one way to understand reader response as a theoretical perspective. My understanding and application of it are my own but have come through the reading of various people and books, especially those interested in how this approach affects teaching. These books include Robert E.Probst, *Response and Analysis: Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High School* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann/Boynton Cook, 1988); Nicholas J.Karolides, *Reader Response in the Classroom: Evoking and Interpreting Meaning in Literature* (New York and London: Longman, 1992); J.A.Appleyard, S.J., *Becoming A Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Richard Beach, *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993); and Alan C.Purves, Theresa Rogers, and Anna O. Soter, *How Porcupines Make Love III: Readers, Texts, Cultures in the Response-Based Literature Classroom* (New York: Longman, 1995). I must thank Buffalo State College for a minigrant that gave me release time and money to develop a course about teaching literature.

³ Patricia Bizzell, “College Composition: Initiation into the Academic Discourse Community,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 12 (1982), 191–207.

⁴ This definition stems from my reading of two books: Probst's *Response and Analysis* and Karolides' *Reader Response in the Classroom*.

⁵ Those familiar with composition theory and writing pedagogy will most likely have heard already obvious relationships between process-approaches to composition and this reader-response approach to literature. Activities like freewriting are clearly linked to beginning the study of literature with personal responses; having students become aware of themselves as writers in order to understand their own process better and determine possible interventions to improve the process links directly to attempts within reader response to have readers become aware of the forces affecting the ways they read and respond; having

writers become aware of themselves as part of a community links to similar attempts within the reader response approach to literature. I have come to realize that my interpretation and utilization of reader response in the literature classroom has much to do with my original initiation into composition pedagogy and, significantly, that I am a better teacher because of it.

⁶ These descriptions come from a sheet I hand to my students and are an adaptation from Probst.

ESSAY 8

Role-playing in the Interdisciplinary Classroom

BARBARA SMITH

With an eye toward the sharing of knowledge from various disciplines, and in the belief that knowledge is best produced through exposure to diverse sources and mind-sets, the College of Mount Saint Vincent's core requirement includes an integrated course in the junior and senior years. The course is team-taught by two, three, or four instructors, each bringing an approach from his or her discipline to bear on the topic of the course. Some course titles are A Nation of Immigrants (history/sociology), Ethics and Health Care (philosophy/psychology), Science and Religion (chemistry/religious studies), and the one I teach along with a psychology and health education professor, Women's Lives, Women's Voices. We each use our own texts which we select after several meetings during which we choose the topics to be covered. As the director of the writing program and a teacher of writing, it is my challenge to encourage students both to analyze the work of the writers on the syllabus and to use writing to understand the concepts of the course and their connection to the students' lives. Additionally, students must learn to envision this gender-studies-based course as interdisciplinary. The course usually has upwards of forty-five students in it, so teaching strategies involving writing necessarily differ from those used in writing classes in which the "cap" is twelve for developmental courses and fifteen for freshman composition and creative writing courses. Interdisciplinary courses are scheduled as weekly three-hour sessions. Sometimes each instructor teaches for one hour, and sometimes, depending on the nature of the lesson, one instructor may use two or all three hours of the session.

What seemed to work exceptionally well in the attempt to combine the disciplines, understand the literature, make the connections personal, and produce knowledge collaboratively was role-playing in small groups. Collaboration produces more than the gathering of knowledge and experience; it produces argumentation as a result of reasoning processes in order to engage and convince the group. Kenneth Bruffee asserts that knowledge is constructed by negotiation in a community of knowledgeable peers.¹ John Bean voices the objection of some of his colleagues (with whom he differs) who see socially constructed collaborative learning as “nonfoundational” and promoting “a dismaying philosophical relativism.”² Foundationalists, for Bean, regard “a course’s content as a body of objective testable material that students can learn at various levels of depth and subtlety.”³ Role-playing can encompass both of these viewpoints. Foundational knowledge takes the form of learning the principles, theories, approaches, and assumptions of literary analysis, gender studies, and other disciplines, and of doing research for the term paper. Collaborative learning adds the dimensions of diverse experience, articulation of feelings, motivations, and the hidden assumptions of the self and other. Successful roleplaying relies on both foundational and socially constructed knowledge.⁴

ROLE-PLAYING A CHARACTER

In order for students to understand given situations such as those presented in poems, short stories, and case studies, I ask them to assume the role of the speaker or of one of the characters. I ask them not to act the role, but to try to *become* that persona. Students take turns reversing gender roles and victim/victimizer roles as well as identifying with characters whose culture may be different from their own. After a discussion of the theory of role-playing and the benefits of small-group work in large classes, I ground the theory in a text in which role-playing has worked particularly well. One such text is “A Jury of Her Peers” by Susan Glaspell.⁵ Role-playing grounded in this text will be discussed on pages 128 and 130–32. At this point I’d like to mention that role-playing enhances the multidisciplinary approach while providing deeper insights into a character’s psyche, culture, and motivations in that it allows students themselves to take on various professional perspectives in relation to a topic. In this course, students approach a text from the perspective of the literary critic, writer, psychologist, and health professional some months after their initial experience with role-playing characters.

THEORIES OF GENDER DIFFERENCE

Identification and Mental Processes

Elizabeth Flynn, in her essay “Composing as a Woman” quotes from Nancy Chodorow’s *The Reproduction of Mothering*:

Masculine identification processes stress differentiation from others, the denial of affective relation, and categorical universalistic components of the masculine role. Feminine identification processes are relational, whereas masculine identification processes tend to deny relationship.⁶

Carol Gilligan, Flynn points out, takes Chodorow’s theory a step further. Gilligan holds that

women tend to define morality in terms of conflicting responsibilities rather than competing rights, requiring for their resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. Men, in contrast, equate morality and fairness and tie moral development to the understanding of rights and rules.⁷

The final study to which Flynn refers is Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule’s *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, which asserts that

the mental processes that are involved in considering the abstract and impersonal have been labeled “thinking” and are attributed primarily to men, while those that deal with the personal and interpersonal fall under the rubric of “emotions” and are largely relegated to women.⁸

She ends the section by paraphrasing Belenky, et. al.: “...women at the phase of constructed knowledge begin an effort to reclaim the self by attempting to integrate knowledge they feel intuitively with knowledge they have learned from others.”⁹ To what extent, I ask my class after a discussion of the meaning of the above quotations, has this been true in your own experience? of yourself or of people you know well? in “A Jury of Her Peers”?

“A JURY OF HER PEERS” SUMMARY

“A Jury of Her Peers” lends itself well to role-playing because of its inherent tensions, innuendo, and complexity. The story is set in a poor, agricultural region that is depressed and isolated. Two women, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, the sheriff’s wife, accompany their husbands and Mr. Henderson, the county attorney, to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wright, now the scene of the murder investigation of the death of Mr. Wright (who “died of a rope around his neck”),¹⁰ for which Mrs. Wright is being held in the county jail as a suspect. As the men proceed with their investigation, the two women piece together the scenario from domestic clues which the men have either overlooked or dismissed as “trifles.” The women conclude, convincingly, that Mrs. Wright had for twenty years endured her husband’s psychological abuse culminating in his killing—snapping the neck—of the one ray of light in his wife’s life, her pet bird. When the dead creature is discovered, the women conclude that Mrs. Wright finally snapped, and had in all likelihood and irony killed her husband as he had killed the bird. Mrs. Hale, sympathetic to Mrs. Wright’s plight from the outset, and Mrs. Peters, who begins the story with a narrow identity—the sheriff’s wife, “married to the law”—and who broadens her perspective along with her growing comprehension as the story unfolds, must decide what to do with the damning evidence, the dead bird. In a moment of revelation and solidarity, both women attempt to hide the evidence, Mrs. Hale succeeding by snatching the bird and putting it in her coat pocket.

Students have mixed reactions. All sympathize with Minnie Foster Wright, but not all agree that she should get away with murder. The battered wife defense usually is mentioned in the large-class discussion, but students are uneasy about assuming an equivalency between physical battering and psychological abuse. In addition to gender and moral issues, there are socioeconomic ones. Most students at Mount Saint Vincent are from urban or suburban communities, and most can only imagine what life in a remote agricultural region might be like. In order to role-play, students must be reminded of these components of identity formation. The class as a whole discusses these factors as well as their own (sometimes hidden) assumptions and agendas about them before role-playing in small groups.

A PRELIMINARY EXERCISE

The role-playing exercise begins with a homework assignment: Women are asked to choose one of the male characters in the story while men are asked to choose a female character, then to write their reports of the findings as they believe their characters would, and to integrate how the character's interpretation conforms to or differs from the theory discussed in class. In the following class, the role-playing is acted out in small groups, in character.

PROCEDURE

There is no one correct procedure for role-playing. I have found that the following works well in my classes in groups of four:

1. *Plan*—Determine the purpose of the session, subsequent sessions, and of the total exercise.
2. *Assign Roles*—Person A role-plays a character; person B records responses; person C asks prepared questions (interviews); person D analyzes responses.
3. *Enactment of the Session*
4. *Discussion*—Persons B and D read their responses to the group which relates enactment to theory; person A explains her responses in terms of her character's feelings and motivations.
5. *Writing Assignment*—Process piece done after the session for homework on how the session went, how the exercise relates to theory, and to what extent the exercise enlarged or changed (if it did; if it did not, the student should speculate on why not) their previously held conception. Some prompts are provided. For the person assuming a character's role: when did your argument conform to your own way of thinking? when were you forced to think differently? what thoughts or feelings interfered with your role as this character? And further, to what extent was your character's thinking contextual? rational? abstract? narrative? feeling-oriented? rule-oriented? intuitive? fact-based?¹¹

When the next texts are introduced, students will rotate their functions in the group so that all four students take on all four jobs.

At the end of the semester, in order to put some distance between the roles assumed in the previous exercise and those assumed in the follow-

ing one, “A Jury of Her Peers” is again the focus of role-playing. This time however, students approach the text with the adopted persona of a professional in one of the disciplines of the course, or if they prefer, as a professional in their major. Students do research in their area, define the scope and focus of their discipline, and approach the situation in the text from that perspective. This is the topic of an eight-to-ten-page paper which is submitted to the instructors, and is also presented in small peer groups of three or four students in various disciplines in which writers take on the role of professionals in their field. Differences and similarities in approaches—their methodologies, focuses, objectives—are discussed in a highly structured environment, and again, a process piece is written on the various roles and their perspectives as articulated in the groups. How does approaching a situation from various perspectives enlighten the problem solver? Investigator? Can you think of a “real life” problem in your field that would benefit from an interdisciplinary approach? The goal of this exercise is to develop a more thorough understanding of one’s own discipline through role-playing, and to gain a broader understanding of other roles and perspectives in order to see a fuller picture of a given textual situation, and ultimately to include interdisciplinary knowledge in the investigation of a problem in the student’s professional field.

When students record their own reactions to a given situation, roleplay in order to gain another perspective, then reflect on the various approaches in a process piece, they enable themselves to experience the conflict inherent in a complex textual situation more fully. The integration and acceptance of both (or more) perspectives will ideally result in resolution, but more commonly in at least a broader conception than the one previously held.

ROLE-PLAYING IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

As early as 1961, role-playing was used in business and industry as a way of training personnel to interact with clients. In order to make their point, employees needed to become aware of their clients’ needs and expectations. Corsini, Shaw, and Blake define role-playing in this context as “a method of human interaction that involves realistic behavior in imaginary situations.”¹² They recognize that human beings are complex:

[We] think, feel, and act at the same time. [We] may not have the three in focus: [We] may think one thing, say another, and do a third. We must deal with an individual as a totality—a thinking, feeling, behaving individual. It

is precisely this that roleplaying accomplishes. Role-playing resembles life more closely than other procedures...[Lectures, films, or case studies are often] too abstract, too general, or too much focused on problems of the typical or hypothetical person. [Roleplaying, on the other hand] creates an active approach to...significant problems.¹³

Writing about the process of role-playing adds yet other dimensions, those of reflection and analysis.

Role-playing in business and industry was designed to give the businessperson an understanding of the Other. In the 1960s this understanding included a client's business needs, and role-playing would allow the businessperson to assume the identity of a trainee, manager, or client so that once the goals and desires of those persons could be established, they could be met. In subsequent decades, role-playing had to become more complex as women entered the workforce in large proportions, and businesses became international. Gender and culture issues required an insight, the importance of which was previously ignored, or was at least absent from the list of goals of role-playing. In transferring the principles of role-playing to education in the 1990s, the issues of gender, culture, and socioeconomic groups have become crucial in order to better understand the Other. "Otherness" is no longer limited to professional affiliation. These issues are the focus of role-playing in the first part of my interdisciplinary course's semester. The disciplinary or professional issues become the focus in the latter part of the semester.

ROLE-PLAYING IN VARIOUS DISCIPLINES

The benefits of gaining alternative perspectives are not limited to business, literature, or interdisciplinary courses. John Bean suggests "alternative formal assignments" that include role-playing in the areas of psychology, religious studies, and history, to name a few. Psychology students write poems from the perspective of a schizophrenic. Religious studies students are asked to write a dialogue between a believer in God and a nonbeliever. The persona of each must be adopted in order to meet the objective of the assignment which is "not to have a clear victory for one side or the other; rather the point is to engage the issues in an active and critical manner."¹⁴ History students rewrite a historical narrative from a different point of view. Introducing his section on "Assignments Requiring Role-playing of Unfamiliar Perspectives or Imagining 'What If' Situations," Bean quotes from Flavell on the pitfalls of the egocentric

thinker who “sees the world from a single point of view only—his own—but without knowledge of the existence of [other] viewpoints or perspectives and...without awareness that he is the prisoner of his own.”¹⁵ For Bean, role-playing encourages decentering in the Piagetian sense, “getting students outside of the assumptions of their own world view.” The primary goal of role-playing is to empower students to take on unfamiliar perspectives in order to enlarge their thought processes. The purpose of writing in roleplaying exercises is to enable students to analyze, synthesize, and ultimately conceptualize in new and more productive ways, to see knowledge as both foundational and socially constructed.¹⁶

ROLE-PLAYING A PROFESSIONAL ROLE

It becomes the job of each student to approach a text—for the sake of convenience I’ll again use “A Jury of Her Peers”—from the viewpoint of a discipline of his or her choosing. I asked a psychologist, sociologist, and philosophy professor what the key issues in “A Jury of Her Peers” would be for them.

For psychologist Dr. Mary Fuller, the key issues were: the effect of isolation on an individual; the causes and effects of despair and repressed anger; events that trigger “snap” conversions (Mrs. Peters from a “sheriff’s wife” to an individual); evidence of a “cycle of battering,”¹⁷ other patterns of battering that exist that are yet to be discovered.¹⁸

Sociologists look for social patterns and structures to explain human behavior. Dr. Dale Patrias expressed his concerns as questions in relation to “A Jury of Her Peers”:

What are the patterns in our society which allow men to think they can abuse their wives? Do poverty and isolation contribute to violence? If so, how and why? What social aspects encourage women to put up with this situation for so many years? What structural changes are needed in the broader society to reduce instances of domestic abuse? Under what circumstances do women decide that they “have had enough” and decide to end such relationships? What prompts women in situations of domestic abuse to kill their husbands? What happens to such women? Why?¹⁹

Another interesting point he raises is that when a group “is confronted with hostility and discrimination, this group will unite and recognize a common bond and similar interests and act accordingly.” Hence, the

“solidarity of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters when they united to hide crucial evidence.”²⁰

Dr. Elizabeth Beirne, philosophy professor, contributed the following about her approach to the story:

- I. Logical/Factual Issues
 - A. What constitutes evidence?
 - B. Are the “sleuths” using deduction and/or induction?
 - C. How solid is the backing for their conclusion? Consider for example: Is the dead bird the only clue against Mrs. W.? Is it sufficient to convict her? How do they know that Mr. W. killed the bird?
 - D. Consider the other explanations for the evidence.
- II. Ethical Issues
 - A. Is there a moral issue? Mrs. H. and Mrs. P. have “tried” Mrs. W. and found her guilty: they are also deciding on her “sentence.” They are taking the law into their own hands, acting as judge and jury.
 - B. Do they have sufficient facts to justify their verdict on Mrs. W. *and* their verdict on Mr. W. (i.e., that he deserved to die because of how he treated his wife?)
 - C. Is this a case of Right versus Wrong? Consider if Mrs. H. and Mrs. P. are doing something that is wrong. It is possible, especially because they are breaking the law. However, we could apply other tests to this: That is, how would they feel if what they did was exposed, say, on the front page of the newspaper? While there may be some problems with the sheriff, they might even be proud of what they did.
 - D. Is there a moral dilemma, that is, Right versus Right?
 1. Justice versus Mercy: Is it more important to give Mrs. W. mercy than to follow the law?
 2. Truth versus Loyalty: Is it more important to be loyal to Mrs. W. than to stick to the full truth?
 - E. What moral resolution theories apply here?
 1. Rule-Based Ethics: Kant would say to act on principle with no concern for consequences. The rule is to “act always as if what you do should become universal law.” Justice and truth are ultimate rules here and so Kant would not agree with what the women did.

2. **Ends-Based Ethics:** Mill would say to do whatever will result in the “greatest good for the greatest number.” In this case what “good” would follow from sending Mrs. W. to jail for killing an abuser? Perhaps she already did what was a “greatest good” by getting rid of him. On the other hand, not allowing due process here may be going against what Mrs. W. wants. They have not consulted her.
3. **Care-Based Ethics:** Gilligan would say to follow the golden rule and do what you would want someone to do for you. The women put themselves in Mrs. W.’s shoes, but they are not sure what Mrs. W. wants.²¹

Peer response groups of three work better in this case because of time concerns, that is, the papers are rather lengthy, and only one should be addressed per session; the assignment makes large demands on students’ critical faculties. A strategy that works well for responders here is Peter Elbow’s “Believing and Doubting.”²² After the first student reads his paper (copies should be made for the group), the two responders don the role of believer. They assume that what the presenter says is credible and valid, and offer suggestions for expansion of the presenter’s point of view. The presenter takes notes on the responses, or she may use a response sheet provided by the instructor and distributed to all group members. When this task is completed, the responders become doubters. Their job as skeptics is to point out where the argument is weak, where the singular approach is limited, what it does not consider, and what objections might be raised in respect to its validity. Again, notetaking or a response sheet is used. The presenters may decide that the objections raised are irrelevant, and beyond the scope of their discipline, or that, even if beyond the discipline’s scope, they should be addressed in some fashion. In other cases, objections raised might be relevant: For example, the psychologist may see a mental disorder that could impact a legal decision; a sociologist may view an attitude or behavior as systemic or cultural rather than as a flaw or abnormality in an individual.

Students then consider all responses and revise the papers. A process piece including the rationale for revisions made on this basis is submitted along with the paper. All instructors see all papers and provide comment, although one may be responsible for assigning a grade.

In a large-group discussion students agreed—almost unanimously—that role-playing a character whose gender and cultural background are

different from their own is more difficult than role-playing a professional in their field. I believe that this is true because we can never really become a member of another culture or gender (except perhaps in very rare circumstances, for example, transexualism or adoption into another culture at a very young age); we can only be a guest in it. Students who have learned to see themselves as professionals in their field more easily adapt to that role, but have trouble switching to the role of professional in another field. I am not sure if the limits of human objectivity allow for giving equal weight to the perspective of the Other. However, through role-playing, students are made aware of differences in approaches, mindsets, attitudes, and assumptions, and learn to consider, respect, and integrate them in their formative years of problem-solving skill development.

NOTES

¹ Kenneth A.Bruffee, *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

² John Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 165.

³ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴ For more on the educational value of collaborative learning, see Kenneth A.Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" *College English* 46.7 (November 1984): 635–52.

⁵ Susan Glaspell, "A Jury of Her Peers," in *Great Short Stories by American Women*, ed. Candace Ward (New York: Dover, 1996), 153–73.

⁶ Elizabeth A.Flynn, "Composing as a Woman," in *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*, ed. Victor Villanueva Jr. (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1997), 553.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 554.

¹⁰ Glaspell, 158.

¹¹ Adapted from Raymond J.Corsini, Malcolm E.Shaw, and Robert R. Blake, *Role-playing in Business and Industry* (New York: The Free Press, 1961).

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴ Bean, 94.

¹⁵ J.H.Flavell, *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1963), 60, quoted in Bean, 127.

¹⁶ These are cognitive functions that develop more extensively and intensively with written language. See Lev S.Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, trans. Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vadar (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1961); and Jerome S.Bruner, *The Relevance of Education* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1971) on writing as heuristic. See also Bean for role-playing assignments in art history, history, philosophy, and physics, 127–131.

¹⁷ Professor Fuller refers to Margaret W.Matlin, *The Psychology of Women*, 3rd ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 521.

¹⁸ Mary Fuller (Assistant Professor of Psychology at the College of Mount Saint Vincent), Interview by author, Riverdale, N.Y., 2 October 1997.

¹⁹ Excerpted from the notes of Dr. Dale Patrias, sociology professor at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, with his permission, October 1997.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Excerpted from the notes of Dr. Elizabeth Beirne, philosophy professor at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, with her permission, October, 1997. Dr. Beirne would like to note that the ethics terminology is from Rushworth M.Killer, *How Good People Make Tough Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

²² Peter Elbow, “Sharing and Responding,” booklet accompanying Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, *A Community of Writers*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995), 41–44.

ESSAY 9

Performing Politics: Poetry in a Writing Classroom

AMITAVA KUMAR

Shall we agree to the erasure of our beleaguered, heterogeneous truth?...
Or shall we become 'politically correct' as fast as we can and defend and
engage the multifoliate, overwhelming, and ultimately inescapable actual
life that our myriad and disparate histories imply?

—June Jordan, "Toward a Manifest New Destiny"

Standing in front of my students, I am performing my identities. As a male teacher in a position of authority who will grade them, as a person of color from the Third World who is the bearer of news from the other side of the global divide, as a cultural theorist who asks his class why is it that the bull from Merrill Lynch can cross borders at will and the Mexican peasant cannot....

I can come to class on the first day and show the slide of a postcard from a decade or more ago. It shows a billboard with a corporate logo and a child kneeling beside a dirt road in the Central American countryside. Above the child's head, the advertisement reads, "He knows only three words of English: Boy, George, Uniroyal." A line of black paint cuts across the last three words, and, thanks to the ingenuity of a graffiti artist, the new message reads "He knows only three words of English: Go Home Yankee."

When I show my students this, I want to teach them that multicultural education in the United States might be nothing more than propaganda—or worse, advertising—if it doesn't hear, or even amplify, those voices all over the world who are talking back to power. But, they are

right to wonder, *how* does one talk back to power? And how does one know, for sure, *when* one is doing that?

At that moment I choose to present the example of political poetry, and the Third World invoked—in tension with it—in that poetry. Here my appeal to that poetry and that world is a pedagogical tool; and even when what I'm touching upon refers to violence, its shock is an occasion only for deeper scrutiny of its material conditions and the other questions that surround it. The postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has, I believe, such a use in mind when she writes: "When I speak of art specifically, away from the scene of crisis, my take is a schoolteacher's take: art and literature and music for me are audiovisual aids in the construction of cases."¹

Twelve women and eight children were killed in the fields. When you protested, the policeman took the thin strip of your poetry, spread it out the way he did his underwear, and washed himself with the water from the well.

You, dear poet, were little more than the puddle at his feet.

When the goons of a landlord-army murdered twenty people on the night of 11 July 1996, in Bathani Tola in eastern India, the functionaries of the central as well as the state administration made appropriate noises. Not much more was done because to do more would be to sanction the power of the so-called ultra-left in the region. A month later, the state government announced several literary awards, some for writers who for long have been allied with the left. The activists of the *Jan Sanskriti Manch*—the People's Cultural Front—called for these writers to refuse the awards, and to come to Bathani Tola instead to listen to the voices of the people who were unable to shake off the memory of the massacre. None of the writers agreed to this demand, though several of them did make statements about how their acceptance of state support was not for themselves but for the sake of art.

As I think about the massacre at Bathani Tola, it seems to me less important to say to an indigent poet whether he or she ought to take a few thousand rupees handed out by the government. I'd rather make a lot more noise about the fact that the state that engages in acts of brutal neglect needs in its service the idea of poetry and poets. And that while none of the twenty butchered by the feudal goons will return because verses are being written about them, the meaning of their deaths and the proportion of their lives are being fought over by different parties *also* on the terrain of poetry.

In a liberal-left magazine in the United States, I read an old review of a book of poems. There are three lines from a poem by Mary Campbell quoted on the page open to me:

Has it ever occurred to you
That the people who write
On walls are organized?²

The people who in my home-town write on the walls "*Barabari ka haq/ Barabari ka dawa/Nahin to/Muthbhed aur dhawa*" [Right to equality/ The challenge of equality/If not, assault and struggle] are all left-literary folks who can quote very well, even on an empty stomach sometimes, the lines of the poet Muktibodh. However, has it ever occurred to you that the people who do not write on walls are also organized?

The people who were killed in Bathani Tola, poor and perhaps illiterate, were murdered because they were becoming a part of a movement. The Muslim inhabitants of the village had defeated an upper-caste landlord in the election for the headman. Many of the villagers who, at the time of the massacre, were settled in Bathani Tola had earlier organized to protect public lands from takeover by the landlords. Some of those attacked that night were openly recognized as sympathetic to the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Yet, their organization or revolt bears sometimes a very remote relation to writing and to poetry. Not because poems aren't being written about the revolution, but because, so often, writing remains a privilege for the few. The Latin American writer, Eduardo Galeano has written that we must speak of illiteracy as an oppressive practice of "indirect censorship."

What does it consist in, this censorship which dare not tell its name? It means that the ship doesn't sail because there's no water in the sea: if 5 per cent of the population of Latin America can buy refrigerators, what percentage can buy books? And what percentage can read them, feel the need for them, receive their influence?³

In the United States, in recent times, I have heard about and witnessed the explosion of the spoken word. In bookstores and cafés, in theaters and clubs, even on MTV, ordinary people who have thought of themselves not so much as unlettered as unliterary, have given tongue and rhythm to their daily lives and dreams. In the work of Guillermo Gómez-Peña, the word crosses several borders, including those of cultural literacy and

public perceptions of performance and art. This mestizo-form and its—we could perhaps call—“border pedagogy” is performative: it is active, it enacts, it stages the contradictions that condition it. It is effective, affective, and certainly excessive. Gómez-Peña’s *New World Border* is a long way from Bathani Tola, but it is there that I want to present to us a new mapping of public performance.

You too, dear cultural subject, it doesn’t matter in what corner of this planet you went to bed, are probably just waking up and sipping your cappuccino in America’s multicultural morning where the sun shines on Benneton ads that show racist Los Angeles cops kissing Rodney King’s ass and Americans of all races putting all their differences aside to sing happy jingles pledging allegiance to the flag of unchecked consumerism.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Mexico-born cultural-criticism-hustler now unsettled in Los Angeles, slips into this scenario with the rudeness of a pirate-radio-hack, bringing in news from across the border of mainstream propaganda and understanding. The other night at the Harn Museum, in Gainesville, Florida—otherwise famous for serial murders and tourist killings—I watched Gómez-Peña present “The New World Border,” a show that broadcast in a mixed tongue the presence of the Other amidst us in a world that can no longer sing the anthem of love for family, country, and white-bread values. Citizens of mainstream-white, securely male, and middle-class, complacently heterosexual America, in Gómez-Peña’s hilariously hyperbolic prophetic announcements, were seen as illegal aliens in a reinvented universe, the “wasp-backs” in a culture where the museums would conceivably be overflowing with the rotting bodies of purists and puritans, exoticizing anthropologists, elitists, supremacists, palefaced custodians of privileged knowledge, and, what’s the same thing, bad taste.

“The New World Border,” scripted by Gómez-Peña, was presented in collaboration with Roberto Sifuentes. This electric, bizarre performance closely resembled the new world announced in it: reality that looks and feels “like a cyber-punk film directed by Jose Marti and Ted Turner on acid.”⁴ Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes appeared on stage as exuberant, irreverent graffiti artists, impatient as much with the patronizing liberalism of the right as with the solemn pieties of the left. This wasn’t intended to be a show that dished out the “We are the World” theme song of the Coke commercial; neither was it prepared to mime the tame puppetry of public television. Instead, it asked the question that when Gringostroika happens, who will still be dictating the terms of the debate?

This question fell into the lap of the audience, quite literally, like a dead chicken. The performance had proceeded with two dead chickens hanging at the front of the stage. At one point, Gómez-Peña hit one of the chickens with his gloved fist and then, in a ritual where he intoned the words “Chick...chick...en...oh...no...Chicano...Power,” drawing attention to the racist name for Mexican migrant workers in Texas, he severed the chicken’s head. The few members of the audience who protested what they felt was an abuse of animal rights were asked by Gómez-Peña why they hadn’t asked any questions about the human skeleton that had also hung from the ceiling. Unlike the chicken, that question remained hanging after the performance was over. Yes, under a pretext of a specious universalism that equates all forms of life, why is it that animals take precedence over humans—especially when those humans happen to be of another color? (Guess what? It’s called liberalism. Look into it.)

Postperformance, when this multicultural-self stepped out of the Harn, I thought I had walked into another theater. In the parking lot, all the cars had pink sheets on their windshields. “Need Insurance?” was the question on the top. Printed beneath was a phone number and the assuring message “Se Hablas [sic] Español.” So, what did the folks at Sleazeball Insurance think? Probably that they’d find a captive audience of ethnics at this performance. I’d like to think that capitalism, savvy and sordidly multicultural, got tripped here. It was not migrant workers that needed Gómez-Peña in their midst that night. Rather, it is those with two houses, two cars, two dogs, probably also two insurance policies, but only one language, who should have come out to find pink slips that asked, with the crassness that only capitalism can manage, “Need a Multicultural Education?”

Let us now take up the question of multicultural education in the classroom. In the opening pages of *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*, the reader is introduced to what is called there “a defensible mode of creative education.” The Introduction announces that the book “documents the meaning of impassioned embrace of language, the meaning of that highest calling: the difficult, fabulous pursuit of the power of the word/the voice/the poetry, of people who live and die together, mostly unknown to each other: mostly seen, but not heard.”⁵

I have been using this book this semester in my undergraduate course that I have entitled, using the title of a useful book by my friend Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature*. I was touched by the sense of power that

the collective that produced *Poetry for the People* located in the written and the spoken word, and, equally important, the manner in which they linked this power to the creation of a true foundation for a democratic society. In introducing the book to my class, I was very emphatic about drawing my students' attention to June Jordan talking about "how to overcome the fixed, predetermined, graveyard nature of so much formal education."⁶

I was excited about using *Poetry for the People*, and the students have in many, sometimes unforeseen, ways, responded productively and provocatively to the book. *Poetry for the People* is a manual that provides guidelines for wannabe poets. It makes available examples of folks going through this process, as well as their writings and manifestos. As an organizational handbook, the book offers detailed tips on how to develop a syllabus, raise money for readings or publicize them, and even publish an anthology. In our own case, the class has been involved in writing and collective workshops; we have organized poetry readings and performances at the local Civic Media Center; the students are bringing out an anthology; and we have visited high school students, both to perform and to respond to the younger students' work.

This has not been easy, and no one in the class has in any sense accepted that this is the revolutionary blueprint. The responses of my students cover a wide range. One student, Don Undeen writes:

Poetry for the People and dominant capitalist paradigm cannot cohabitate. They cannot agree to disagree and play nicely together, anymore than a slave can negotiate his freedom. As more diverse people find their voice, they will find that they don't want to shut up, that the dreams they express are goals that can be achieved. Their demands must be met, and the conflict won't be friendly. Them rich folks ain't just steppin' down, givin' someone else a turn at bat. The discomfort they feel at multiculturalism, P.C. or whatever else you call it, is justified. It is the train of change coming. It's got a lot more people getting on, and it's picking up speed. Our whistle is loud, and if they refuse to step aside we will run them the fuck over. Poetically."

Donna Sewell informs me in a note: "While I'm not planning on forming a poetry workshop, some friends and I want to start a women's art co-op (which will include writing). Jordan's tips on organizing and publishing have given me some ideas of where and how to begin." Lydia Moss commented: "IT IS DISTRESSING THAT THIS BOOK IS MORE A

BREEDING GROUND FOR THE HYPER-P.C.RANT OF THE BITCHING OPPRESSED.” Another Student, Noah Kaufman, had this to ask:

Even though I have always been taught not to judge a book by its cover, I’ve just got to say that the cover of *Poetry for the People* makes me laugh (at first) and then makes me want to vomit. These kids look like something straight out of Aaron Spelling’s market of television waste. Who dressed these kids? Is this book for the sophisticated and the beautiful people? What about the ugly and the uneducated? Not to mention the poor, what about them? What about those people who couldn’t get into Berkeley? Do these unfortunate bastards get a voice?”

Noah’s classmate, Nicole Beaulieu, wrote: “After taking four poetry workshops at UF, I was very excited that someone was finally talking about writing political poetry.” This too wasn’t without its particular problems. Nicole added that when she wrote a poem that was “political, personal, and truthful,” her group in the class seemed “to be looking for something more outspokenly angry, more conversational.” She went on: “What is interesting to me about this is that I have BIG ANXIETY about writing, mixed with small and confused joy. When you asked us if we were afraid we’d be leaving the factory, I mean university, more dead than alive, I was trying to decide...sometimes it seems like they got to me, you know? I guess I’m going to have to write about it...”

Of course, what I want to say to my students—and what, I guess, I’m saying to you—is that they *are* writing about it, thinking about it. As, for example, when someone puts in my mailbox the xeroxed copy of a poem by Dudley Randall called “Black Poet, White Critic.” It reads:

A critic advises
not to write on controversial subjects
like freedom or murder,
but to treat universal themes
and timeless symbols
like the white unicorn.
A white unicorn?⁷

My experience in the past two semesters with my students led me to demand more public space for this work. Let me share with you a letter I wrote to the editor of the local newspaper:

Dear Editor:

I read with great interest your report on the poet laureate of the United States, Robert Mass's campaign for public literacy. As your report states, Hass argued that "poetry belonged in newspapers as much as comics or advice columns did."

I invite the *Gainesville Sun* to give serious thought to the poet laureate's contention and provide public space for the poetic responses to the world that we inhabit and the lives that we lead.

What makes such a space especially important is that it would address issues, and often also in a manner, that is elided in ordinary news.

As a recent prize-winning book *Spreading the Word: Poetry and the Survival of Community in America* by Ross Talarico attests, a program of public literacy that is willing to make every man and woman a poet can give new meaning both to creativity and the idea of a community.

Talarico was the poet laureate of the city of Rochester, New York, and he put into practice an innovative pedagogical principle: kids wrote poetry for an hour if they were interested in playing basketball at the recreation center later on.

One of the poems Talarico quotes in his book was written by Chris Tuck, among the most talented young players to come out of the Rochester area. Tuck was shot to death shortly thereafter and the poem expresses well his longing for another environment that, with its river and tall grass, was different from the one that claimed him prematurely:

Fast Break

When I let go
of the ball I hear
the swish of the river
as it flows behind my back.
The stars and the moon stick
like knives in a mirror.
On a fast break I stumble
into the tall grass,
and I hear my voice
getting shaky.⁸

A program of public literacy and writing will unleash the power and poignance of people's voices and their often ignored lives.

In my own efforts at teaching, I have been taking my undergraduate students at the university for visits to high school classrooms and open-mike readings at the Civic Media Center.

Students who have sometimes never thought of themselves as poets or writers end up speaking eloquently about their lives, their losses, their ambitions, and their anxieties.

More than that—and this is another argument in favor of community programs—my students also discover that they are teachers.

Last month, when my undergraduate class visited Eastside High, this is what one of the students, Lori Young, had to say to the younger kids in the school:

“If I don’t write my story, the best thing that will happen is that it won’t get written. The worst thing that could happen is that someone else will write it.

“Look at this guy here. Baggy pants riding low, gotta beeper somewhere? Unlaced hightops. Sitting back in his chair wrapped in his arms and his attitude.

“Probably deals drugs.

“Do you see the problem here? I just wrote his story. And if he doesn’t write it then mine’s the only one out there, and no one’s ever gonna know about how pissed off he was the last time he walked into a Lil Champ on the west side of town and the clerk got nervous because he looked like he was gonna do something dangerous—like buy a Dr Pep-per or a pack of cigarettes or something.

“I write because no one’s *ever* gonna tell my story.”

When our kids begin writing poems that tell their stories—when our adults, in factories, in old people’s homes, in offices, in kitchens, write poems that tell their stories—will they find public spaces of expression?

Amitava Kumar

If my student writes about the limits of private and public expression, how can I also not recall the line that divides poetry for the people from the poet without a people? It is the division that haunts migrant, postcolonial lives; it is also the solitude that Roque Dalton is talking about, I think, when he writes:

While I’m listening to a rector’s talk
here in the university
(grey cops are at every door
contributing to the culture),

nauseous till I'm pale, I remember
 the sad peace of my native poverty,
 the sweet sluggishness with which
 everything dies in my town....⁹

I recall these lines not to immerse myself in nostalgia, though I do think that nostalgia, like poetry, has its uses. Rather, Dalton's particular site, the academy, serves for me also as the point at which I want to bring together—as a way of recovering from the isolation that is fatal—both poetry and pedagogy.

I read about the poetry workshops run among the peasants of Solentiname by Ernesto Cardenal, an experiment inspired by Paolo Freire's insight that "Learning to read and write ought to be an opportunity for men to know what *speaking the word* really means: a human act implying reflection and action."¹⁰ The question of Bathani Tola in India comes to the fore here as a question of addressing critical consciousness through collective attempts at literacy—including the calm, confident assumption of poetic voices.

In my own case here, poetry for the people is most simply translated as a project of political pedagogy; and that, through the example that I want to provide you, is made available through the practice of a poet and an activist in India.

One June night, my father had telephoned me from India to give me the news of Comrade Maheshwar's death. Maheshwar was the commander of the new cultural struggle inaugurated by the Indian People's Front; a singer, poet, editor, and organizer, he had turned his illness into an occasion to mount another critique of life under capitalism, calling for a radically new culture. Lying on his hospital bed in Chandigarh, he wrote:

My friends do not want to stick by my side
 beyond the ritual exchanges about our well-being.
 It is right at this point of time
 that my loneliness descends
 and like the dusk spreading in the sky
 fills the corners and the insides of my brain.
 This loneliness alone is my strength
 in its womb
 takes birth my desire to live....

You will be finished—
 you will be killed

because—
when did you learn in life
the politics of sharing with someone
someone's loneliness.¹¹

While he lived, Maheshwar led multiple, varied assaults on the conditions that limited all aspects of our lived experience: his thinking touched and transformed every aspect of the lives of both literate and illiterate folks in the IPF-fold. Poetry as much as the parliament was for him a zone of struggle and a site for building an inventory as well as a new history. Where his comrades had given attention exclusively to debates about peasant-industrial workers alliances, Maheshwar widened his canvas to include questions about, for example, love and commodification: "After all how can anyone be in love/if in your heart vast as the sea there isn't space enough for a Kelvinator fridge?"¹² That is why, in the obituary I wrote for him, I had this to say about the criticism I practice here:

And yes, in the end, I must express a resolve. Do you recall those words of Maheshwar when he says: "I understand that inside the politics of bourgeois democracy, those people that we send inside the bourgeois institutions, should be tried and tested communists, the most experienced, the most selfless." Here I am in America, in what Che Gueverra called "the belly of the beast." The U.S. academic institution is a bourgeois institution par excellence. Maheshwar forces me to ask how am I going to be the alert, active intellectual who will undertake the initiatives to expose the Western bourgeois hegemony. Dear Maheshwar, I am not being the least bit sentimental when I say that when next I pick up a piece of chalk and begin to teach, I'll think of you... and I promise you that my pedagogy will be a bullet that stops the oppressor in his tracks, it will be a song that will add its note to the many songs that you left in our midst.¹³

The gesture of resolve announced in that obituary is not always enough, however, to blind one to the other need, the need to approach through one's writing imagined communities. Mixing together aspects of the performative and the pedagogical, this writing appears, as in the case of the following poem, in the form of *writing about* and a building of alliances between marginalized groups: workers, communities of color and immigrants, women, gays and lesbians.

Trotsky in the Park

I

She screams into the microphone, lips hitting
 thin wire mesh of this thing that wants to take in every sound she makes,
 and her voice rises, she says I'm not violent, I read poems in public places,
 I had promised I'd hold nothing back
 in my poetry,
 so this is her name, and she lives on First Avenue near St. Marks Place,
 I know dykes, she is no dyke,
 and when she moved out she also stole the red lip-liner
 that belonged to my room-mate.
 This poet calls herself Pubic Enemy and we cheer her performance,
 forever glad
 that poetry can offer such sweet revenge.

Poetry gets numbers here. And like Olympic judges

from former East European countries five people in the audience
 mark poems on a scale often: for that somersault
 in the air, 7.8, that shaky-start in the cloud of chalk-powder,
 the score can't be more than a 5.6, for your relentless display
 of open vulnerability, risking failure with words,
 landing somewhere
 between the sixth and seventh stanza on your feet,
 you my darling will get a 9.8. Tell me again
 of the time
 you heated the olive oil for your pasta
 and then rubbed it softly—I think you used the word slowly—
 you forgot the pasta and rubbed the oil slowly
 on your guest's willing body.

A black woman
 wearing a Crooklyn baseball shirt proudly like a red dashiki
 breathes softly her delicate words about moons bathed in melancholy
 the many moons of unwanted pregnancies and deaths
 in poor homes. And even those who tonight have their cars parked
 in the suburbs, and if they don't their parents do,
 begin to clap and applaud this performance, we're glad,

I guess, that poetry can extract such sweet revenge against white suburbia.
When we come out my friend says it was kind of predictable. Well,
why doesn't America do something new then to black people
so that this woman in the red shirt can start sounding like Woody Allen
—or not?

II

Beneath the green statue in the Tompkins Square Park, a carpenter
writes

a letter to put in a packet for his two nieces in Poland, a Madonna tape
and a rubber eraser in the shape of the Statue of Liberty for the younger
one.

On the next bench, an art-student is learning about an outsider in Paris:

"Picasso was a vertical invader. He came up from Spain
through the trap-door of a Barcelona on to the stage of Europe."

The Psychic Palm Reader half a block away sits behind that red eye
of neon all-seeing and unblinking like fate. Her shoulders are square
like those of the women Picasso drew; she has had her imagination
stretched

across barbed-wire fences that divide rich nations from the poor.

Two girls walk out of an MTV video and step past with lots of grunge
sounds

and an old black guy shouts "I'll give you thirty-five dollars. Fuck
you should marry me for that...hey, I know women better-looking than
you."

I am writing a note for the Voice personals, a public display of affection:

"Hey babe: Let's snuggle in bed and read the poetry
of the future or even the missionary-position Marxist writing
you so greatly admire. XOXOXO"

There is someone reading Trotsky in the park. He is a Pakistani student,
away from home for five years now, thinking of Lahore's streets, the
brown,

burnt ancestral land, the men on bicycles as he reads in his book the words:

"Yet every time a peasant's horse shies in terror before the
blinding lights of an automobile on the Russian road at night,
a conflict of two cultures is reflected in the episode."

Puerto Rican kids come out of the laundromat with a ball
and while the ball thrown from one hand turns and turns in the bright
air,

the rest of the city that I know so little hurtles inside a subway car;

the white men in dark suits reading the New York Times, eyes lingering over the bodies of humans of a certain gender who've taken off their clothes for these men, in a row of ads for Bloomingdale's. A man, class negative, color negative, makes an awkward entry into the car singing hoarsely about a rainbow, holding in his hand the 2X3 cardboard sign:

"My mother has multiple sclerosis
and I can't see out of my left eye.

Will you help me?"

and there's a middle-aged woman who, having carefully rubbed moisturizing cream on her hands folds them in her lap, and looks away from the man even though she's on his sightless side. Before her station comes, she'll have time enough to quickly read half of the poem on the orange poster above the door:

"Thank you my dear
You came, and you did
well to come. I needed
you. You have made
love blaze up in my"

III

The man who begins reading
a poem about queer love and clear rage
is clean-shaven and bald, a little
like a Hare Krishna with a Kalashnikov.
This is not poetry for beginners. To his party,
you bring your own anger.
Then someone with Bobby Kennedy's smiling face
printed on her trousers
finishes reading her poem, and an Indian woman in the audience
says she wants a 10 for that one. She says, "I love poems
which have nipples in them."
The emcee tilts his bearded face
and says, "Let's have a tête-à-tête about that, ha-ha."
He is wearing a tweed jacket one size too small
for him, but his satire is in good form
and he knows the audience well.
He quotes Williams Carlos Williams
and says "He had a Puerto Rican mother.
Now, they didn't tell you that, did they?"

Poetry is about nipples and Puerto Rican mothers.
It is about being butt-fucked.
It is about Trotsky going mad in the park
because they took it back from the homeless.
Poetry is about the hat that Theolonius Monk wore.
It is about poor nations protecting their land and their languages.
Poetry is the hiss you make
when you don't like the poem someone else is reading.
Poetry is the hiss you make. Period.

I read in a book, baby, that this is the hour
of the immigrant worker—
after the milkman and just before the dustman.
With his immigrant love, the poem that he comes seeking
is not the hiss you make, but a stammer
at your doorstep at dawn,
a terrible, trapped-up hope in this hour of becoming.
It has nothing
of the certainties of those who give names
to bottles of wines in the languages of Europe.

A woman just into her twenties, from Shanghai, alone
at an underground train station
in the middle of New York at night
after working overtime in a garment factory,
looks at her hands
for a long moment
in the bluish light of the station.
Around her is the silence of Trotsky's tomb.
In that silence is born
the silence this poem makes.

Amitava Kumar
from the author's collection
No Tears for the N.R.I. (Calcutta:
Writers' Workshop, 1996)

How does this silence speak to other disciplines?

In closing, I want to address very briefly the question of the role of political poetry and performance in venues other than the writing classroom. How might these issues that have been developed and sharpened in a writing classroom translate across the disciplinary borders?

The answer to the above question lies in examining a bit more closely the nature of the silence of the sweatshop worker looking at the bones of her hands in a subway station. Her silence—which is related to, but not identical with, the silence made by the poem—is one that illumines the limits of dominant discourses that erase the labor as well as the protest of that worker. That question, which we would not be wrong to call “the Other question,” is one that is not limited to the writing classroom. To teach students to hear other voices, those that I described at the beginning of this paper as the voices of those talking back to power, is a practice that might not indeed be the highest on the agenda of other disciplines. Nevertheless, a self-critical attention to the limits of dominant discourses, and also an explicit acknowledgement of the Other question, is a particularly helpful way in which all disciplines might train students to challenge the stiff complacencies of patriarchal, Eurocentric discourses.

On one of my course syllabi, I provide the following public service announcement:

On a friend's car, there is a bumper-sticker given out by an NPR-affiliate radio station in Salt Lake City: “I brake for long-form, in-depth, issue-oriented news.” The role of modern criticism, especially when given the catch-all name of theory, is often that of resisting the commonsensical, easy-to-swallow, recyclable wisdom that can be poured down the throat of Ted Turner's CNN. One of the strategies of dismissing such a critical approach, then, is that of calling it difficult, elitist, and impractical. One goal of this course is to engage you in the task of making meaning that is indeed difficult because it cannot be produced with the flick of a remote control; that is elitist, if indeed that is a word we want, because it requires labor and leisure (not to mention the money to buy expensive books) which is not available to all; and finally, that is impractical because it is a necessary meditation on practice, ever asking questions about the goals and ends of unexamined, instrumental practicality.

In a course like this, our students do not regard culture as a fine object of discriminating study, nor do they limit their interest only to objects and

events considered aesthetic. Instead, they examine culture and its artifacts as sites where meaning in a deep sense is given form so that resulting political identities impact on such questions as our paychecks and our most ordinary pleasures. *In performing* these identities, our students not only come to understand their various selves as *constructed* ones; they also begin thinking in very active ways about their audiences or their publics. To confront students in, say, a history classroom with such issues would be very useful in prompting queries in the students' minds about the public role of writing history and its role in the contest over culture. I am thinking, for instance, of a history teacher who decides during Black History Month to let her students read James Baldwin or Alice Walker, Toni Morrison or Amiri Baraka, Henry Louis Gates Jr. or Angela Davis...and then encourages her students to produce poetry and plays that give voice to their own identities, and to their fears and desires in relation to the formation of black and white identities in this culture. In such cases, I'm arguing here, performativity is not only about deconstructing identities, it is about entering a pedagogical process of coming to recognize and own one's voice.

Of course, a teacher might object that this is not the goal of the history classroom. The burden of this paper has been to demonstrate the contrary. And to suggest that immigrants, who have been called "the prophets without papers," are indeed challenging not only the borders between nations but also, through the interjection of other voices and other concerns, the borders between disciplines.

NOTES

¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Acting Bits, Identity Talk," *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Summer 1992), 782.

² Mary Campbell, "Poem," quoted in Robyn Selman, "Eyes on the Prize," *The Nation* (October 29, 1990), 496-99.

³ Eduardo Galeano, "In Defense of the Word," in *They Shoot Writers, Don't They?* ed. George Theiner (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 190.

⁴ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 1996), 29.

⁵ Lauren Muller and the Poetry for the People Collective, eds., *June Jordan's Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

⁶ Muller, 5.

⁷ Dudley Randall, "Black Poet, White Critic," in *Understanding the New Black Poetry* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1973), 234.

⁸ Ross Talarico, *Spreading the Word: Poetry and the Survival of Community in America*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 82.

⁹ Roque Dalton, *Clandestine Poems*, trs. Jack Hirschman, ed. Barbara Paschke and Eric Weaver (San Francisco: Solidarity Publications, 1986), 33.

¹⁰ Paola Freire, quoted in *Nicaraguan Peasant Poetry from Solentiname*, ed. David Gullette (Albuquerque, NM: West End Press, 1988).

¹¹ Maheshwar, "Aatmalaap," in Maheshwar, *Aadmi ko Nirnayak Hona Chahiye* (Allahabad, India: Neelabh Prakashan, 1996), 22–23. Translation is mine.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Amitava Kumar, "Trotsky in the Park" from the author's collection, *No Tears for the N.R.I.*, (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1996), 31–36.

ESSAY 10

A Pedagogy of Community and Collaboration: A Beginning

BILL BROZ

I think this class is going to be fun because so far you seem to be a good teacher. When you were describing yourself I found out you had some of the same hobbies I have. I also noticed that you are the first professor that actually talked about himself.

—A Student

Currently I am teaching two sections of English 100, the basic writing course at Western Illinois University, and one section of English 384, composition pedagogy for English education students. Both courses were in their ninth week of the semester, just past midterm when I wrote this essay. Throughout this article I share comments and experiences of these students. For example, at the end of the first class period in English 100, I asked my two groups of mostly traditional freshmen to write three short anonymous journal entries to the following writing prompts: “What do you think this class is going to be like? What do you hope this class is going to be like? What do you fear this class is going to be like?” One student’s response given above is an *I/eye-opener*.

Pedagogy is the art of teaching. Scholarship is the systematized knowledge of a learned person and the ability to create and acquire such knowledge. Accepting the validity of the first premise of this book, that we in composition studies have learned something about pedagogy in the last thirty years, then what we have learned has something to do with enhancing this relationship between pedagogy and scholarship. In that light I want to assert that this enhancement does not, as many scholars fear,

threaten or diminish scholarship. I am not less of a scholar because I know something about the art of teaching. This assertion is an important foundation for the second premise of this book, that some of what compositionists have learned about enhancing the relationship between pedagogy and scholarship can be of value to scholars in other disciplines as they practice the art of teaching. My contribution to this collection is to offer a blueprint for setting up a collaborative classroom based largely on peer response to writing and to show that, through the calculated agencies of community and collaboration, my students acquire high-quality academic knowledge. I also illustrate how attention to community and collaboration as a teaching strategy applies to teaching in many disciplines.

While we often think of pedagogy as being about the things teachers do in the classroom—selecting and presenting material, constructing assignments, and evaluating learning—much of my scholarship in both composition and pedagogy deals with more fundamental issues. Two of those issues concern ways students learn and the kinds of relationships students can and should develop with the teacher and with each other in order to optimally support that learning. My intention in this article is to describe how teachers should “be” in the classroom in order to optimally support student learning. As background for my arguments readers from disciplines other than composition or English education may need a short epistemology of the learning theory my pedagogy attempts to support. Briefly, the kind of learning that my methodology is designed to support is experiential, exploratory, individual, interpretive, and collaboratively constructed.

I believe that students learn from meaningful, largely active experiences in which they individually interpret the content of their learning.¹ I also believe that the process by which students acquire knowledge and abilities is developmental. Students progress from knowing nothing at all about some phenomenon

- *to getting a notion that some new phenomenon with which they are engaged is “kind of like” something they already know*
- *to gradually fleshing out that understanding through more use and experience*
- *to finally knowing the new phenomenon in some mature way that we might recognize as scholarship*

Students fit this new knowledge into the unique context of their past learning.

This philosophy of learning does not allow teachers to think of their role in terms of the “transmission of knowledge”² or the “banking” metaphor for teaching and learning.³ We cannot directly transfer our knowledge to students because their acquisition of knowledge will be gradual and developmental and because what students end up knowing is a personal and individual interpretation of the learning experience teachers structure for them. But scholars who formerly viewed themselves as professing their scholarship need not despair. This theory of learning offers us a more active, interesting, and rewarding role to replace that of “information giver.” That role is “teacher-as-collaborator,”⁴ actively supporting each student’s attempts to interpret and make meaningful the content of the learning experience.

Other scholars would construct other roads through this territory, but I believe most scholars constructing pedagogies based on current learning theory would eventually reach the same location on the map. As teachers, we need to create classroom learning environments rich in opportunities for active, experiential, interpretive learning and to maneuver ourselves into a position where we can support and collaborate with students’ attempts to make sense of their learning experiences.

From Vygotsky⁵ and Britton⁶ we also get a special and all-important twist for this process: learning and knowledge are social constructions, phenomena peers experience and interpret in groups, activities that benefit greatly from social interaction. This means that students not only need to collaborate with us, but with each other.

Kenneth A. Bruffee in “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’”⁷ identifies the collaborative teacher as one who helps students enter what Richard Rorty calls the “normal discourse” of an academic community.⁸ Bruffee’s collaborative teacher constructs the classroom as a “social context in which students can experience and practice the kinds of conversation valued by college teachers.”⁹ And Bruffee reports that “Besides providing a particular kind of conversation, collaborative learning also provides a particular kind of social context for conversation, a particular kind of community—a community of status equals: peers.”¹⁰

Based on these theories, compositionists came to espouse a collaborative pedagogy focused more on supporting groups of students in their attempts to use the processes of writing instead of focusing on the written products of individual students. Further, and importantly, we began to

view some components of composition scholarship as being expressed through the craft of writing. We began to regard students engaged in writing processes and students engaged in developing their own writing abilities as being, in fact, “emerging composition scholars,” learning a craft that both contains, develops, and expresses knowledge about writing. I want readers to think of students in my E100 writing class as a community of peers engaged, at some level, in the conversation of the discipline of composition studies. I also want readers to think of students in their own classes in their own disciplines as potential emerging scholars in biology or consumer science, beginning to engage in the conversation of those disciplines.

Consider this artifact. In an eighth-grade English classroom a few miles from where I now sit there is a large bulletin board that contains the heading, *Real Writers Really Write*. Covering most of the board are individually matted statements about writing that support that heading such as, “I hate to write, but I love having written” and “Writing is like a curse, until it is finished.” What kind of statements are these? They aren’t poems, short stories, or essays. They aren’t factual, short answers to objective test questions or grammar rules. To me, they seem to be bits of knowledge about composition expressed by writers who gained this knowledge through writing. This is a kind of knowledge-making enacted by the naming of experience, what Berthoff calls the “hypostatic aspect...of language as a means of meaning making.”¹¹ The first statement is by the well-known author Dorothy Parker; the second statement by eighth-grade writer Robin Keifer. The teacher of that class believes that those eighth-grade writers are learning about the nature of writing from writing and sharing their own work in the class. Their “junior scholarship,” if you will, is right up there on the board with the knowledge about writing produced by more established people in the field. This bulletin board is itself a kind of collaboration between eighth-grade student writing scholars and “distant teacher[s]” mentors.¹²

In 1976 Shaughnessy¹³ offered a metaphor of the progression of composition scholarship through the 1960s and 1970s—a progression from product to process—and a transformation of composition teachers from information givers to collaborators. The need for a new pedagogical stance arose, in part, because schools and colleges were admitting new kinds of students with a greater variety of nonstandard language backgrounds. But trying to serve more diverse students was just the acute and immediate impetus for the change. The “new” composition teacher that emerged from the transformation proved to be more able to support the

learning of all students and can serve as a model for instructors in other disciplines.

The metaphor goes like this: facing a clamoring hoard of open enrollment students bringing new and exotic writing problems to the classroom, Shaughnessy observed that many teachers first saw themselves in the defensive position of “guarding the academic tower” against the foundational erosion of lowering standards through the inclusion of people with such underdeveloped composing abilities. From this reactive position, some teachers progressed to attempting to “convert the natives,” by using traditional “transfer of information” pedagogies to squeeze these students into narrow, acceptable profiles of what college language users should be. In eventual frustration over the ineffectiveness of such traditional practices with these new students, teachers began “sounding the depths” in an attempt to discover the real nature of the abilities and deficiencies these new students embodied. Finally, these teachers concluded that they had no choice but to “dive in,” to become collaborators with the students in their individual and unique quests for language facility. This role for the teacher, arrived at out of necessity, is also, neatly, the necessary role for the teacher within our new learning theory.

“Diving in” is the move I want to offer teacher-scholars in disciplines beyond composition—a way to get down off the dais, away from the podium and into the potentially collaborative world of your own classrooms. The scholar who dives in and swims with the students is a collaborative teacher. Of course, this diving in could be a futile and scary proposition if the scholar did not know what to do in that aquatic environment. But we do know what to do: view students as developing scholars and be scholars with them. We can begin to view students in our classrooms not as receivers of discreet bits of mature knowledge, but as potential scholars in our disciplines developing the ability to enact the craft of our scholarship, creating with us newly interpreted knowledge. We can shift from simply telling our students about the scholarship of our field to helping them develop into scholars themselves.

A compositionist example of being scholars with our students comes from the classroom of retired University of Iowa Rhetoric Professor Cleo Martin. About the ninth or tenth week of her first-year writing course, when students were significantly engaged in revision of their essays, Martin’s classes would collaboratively generate a “guide to revision strategies” that contained and described the group’s scholarship about revision. This collaborative interpretation of what revision is and does

became part of what students “knew” about revision—became knowledge taking its place prominently beside knowledge of revision acquired from textbooks or classroom instruction. This is an example of local community knowledge entering the academic conversation of the larger discipline.

I speculate that cross-community conversations of this kind are facilitated by collaborative teachers who not only invite students into the academic communities but who are willing themselves to step part way into the student community. Such teachers behave in ways that incline students to accept the teacher’s cross-border explorations. For teachers in any discipline, sharing their own writing with their students is such a step.

Writing teachers, as a way of collaborating with our students, have for two decades supported the necessity of teachers writing with and for their students and sharing with students their process of writing and their struggles to become writers. Sharing our own writing with our students is a way to be scholars with them, especially if the content of the shared piece is about writing. I started all three of my classes this semester by reciting a poem I wrote years ago about my most hated high school English teacher. I wrote this poem when a poet-in-residence visited my high school classroom. I did the writing exercises offered by the poet right along with my students. I wrote about my eleventh-grade teacher at a parochial high school. The exercise was to write a “letter poem” to someone to whom you would never talk in real life.

The Good Padre

Alvarez Kelly,
you little Nazi.
Priest, what a joke;
English teacher,
what a sacrilege.
You hated everything
I ever wrote, read, or said
in the eleventh grade.

Football was all you loved.
You taught English like
calling plays out of
Warriner’s Grammar;

every move prescribed,
every idea your own,
and you incapable of thought,
with nothing but
pigskin between
your ears.

For my contemporary students, hearing me read this poem declares that I am moving off the dais, that I will try to see things as a student and that I remember what it was like as a less experienced writer. This poem is my diving in.

Diving in is necessary for students as well because our learning theory constructs students as actively engaged with the content of the classroom—no safe, passive sitting back and taking notes here. Students need to take the risk of making individual interpretations and having personal learning experiences. And these behaviors need to be experienced in the process of social interaction with the teacher and peers. This is risky business, but everyone in the classroom needs to dive in.

Clearly, diving in with the students is not the traditional teacher role recognized by college professors. In his article “The Liminal Servant and the Ritual Roots of Critical Pedagogy,” Peter McLaren¹⁴ cites his own anthropological research and the work of Victor Turner¹⁵ and others to construct a role for the collaborative teacher much like the role of a priest at a religious service. McLaren’s teacher as “liminal servant” aids the members of the learning congregation in engaging with the beliefs of the community. This engagement is enhanced through the teacher’s calculated and purposeful manipulation of symbols and rituals. For McLaren, classroom instruction is viewed as ritual. Comparing an audience at a play with a religious congregation at a service, McLaren uses the work of Rappaport to construct an active role for the student in the collaborative classroom: “an audience merely watches....a congregation participates, usually in some degree actively.”¹⁶

When students respond with a sense of immediacy or purpose, either verbally or gesturally, to the teacher’s performance, when for instance, they [become] the primary actors within the ritual of instruction—then they are engaged in an authentic pedagogical rite...and the students [become] cocelebrants in the learning process which [is] characterized by intense involvement and participation. In this case, the teacher achieve[s] the role of liminal servant.¹⁷

Functioning in the role of “liminal servant,” the teacher helps create a community characterized by “liminality” and “communitas.” “Liminality...refers to a homogeneous social state in which participants are stripped of their usual status and authority. It is a process of mid-transition—sometimes known as ‘betwixt and between.’”¹⁸

The importance of this state is that students experiencing liminality feel as if they are changing and being changed by their learning. And they are being changed if they are really learning. “Communitas,” a kind of community feeling between students that attends liminality, is easier to overtly observe in a classroom. “‘Communitas’ refers to the temporary camaraderie which occurs when roles or statuses are suspended between fellow liminals. A deep foundational and fundamental bond is established.”¹⁹ The usefulness of these concepts is that they help the teacher identify, articulate, and promote the kinds of peer and student/teacher collaboration that optimizes learning. Students can only be the “primary actors within the ritual of instruction” if they are actually doing something that interactively engages their peers through shared writing or discussion.

According to McLaren, the “intense involvement and participation” of students in these classrooms can lead them to a level and quality of learning represented by fundamental change in understanding and self-concept. I admit that the role of teacher/priest attempting to change students’ basic conceptions of the world and themselves makes me somewhat uncomfortable. But fundamental personal change is, in fact, the predictable result of the most significant kinds of learning.

The following excerpts from my English 100 students’ first-day, anonymous journal comments shows students inclined toward liminality and toward community and communitas. The first comment shows a student looking for a fundamental change in his views of writing and in his view of himself as a writer:

I don’t want to think negatively right off the bat, but I’m not a good writer or speller so it’s hard to be optimistic...[But] I also hope this class will change my view of writing.

These additional comments show students seeking community.

I hope that this class will give me the opportunity to meet new people and hopefully make new friends.

I personally would like to know each individual from this class, and I wish them good luck!

I hope that this class will be easy...and that I get to know a lot about the people in this class.

I hope this class will be a great learning environment and a place to develop friendships. I hope the class will have well balanced student/ teacher relationships which will help students understand how writing works. I also want us to learn from each other and to ask questions without being embarrassed about it.

I hope and think that the teacher and all of the students in this class are nice and have good senses of humor. I hope that I can relate to what the teacher or anybody else in class is saying.

I hope this class...will have a familylike environment where we try to support each other.

This class will be like a new adventure full of all kinds of new experiences through which we will be able to develop new friendships.

Even after many years of using this teaching style, I still take significant note of the number of students who expressed a desire to find friends in the class—to find a homogeneous social state and camaraderie.

After I read my poem about Alvarez Kelly to my English 100 class, I spent about ten minutes telling the students about myself. I covered my age, my education, and my teaching background relevant to that class. I view this as checking out the doctor's diploma on the wall of the examining room when I am looking to make sure it does not say University of Grenada. As soon as possible I want students to feel confident that I know what I am doing, so I share with them my credentials. I keep in mind that many students are hard to convince on this point. They have had a lot of teachers whom they have judged, correctly or incorrectly, to be fools and fakers. Bruffee says:

Insofar as collaborative learning inducts students into established knowledge communities and teaches them the normal discourse of those communities, we derive our authority as teachers from being *certified representatives of the communities of knowledgeable peers* [emphasis mine] that students aspire to join, and that we, as members of our chosen disciplines and also members of the community of liberally educated public at large, invite and encourage them to join. Teachers are defined in this instance as those members of a knowledge community who accept the responsibility of inducting new members into the community.²⁰

Establishing my competence as a writing teacher is an essential first step toward becoming a collaborator myself.

Next I tell students about my family. I always try to remember to bring a family picture, one that includes Lucy, the springer spaniel. Really, you can see it in the students' eyes as they pass the photo around the room—this professor has kids! A reasonably intelligent looking woman is willing to live with him! And dog ownership does wonders for student perceptions of your humanity. I also tell students about my vegetable garden and my dedication to the music of Bob Dylan, all in less than ten minutes.

My goal here is not for the students to think I am a great guy and invite me out for beers. I am their writing teacher. I am going to ask students to take risks in their writing and to trust me to collaborate with them on that writing. Jim Bates, a writing teacher colleague of mine puts it this way, "I want to make students feel comfortable in sharing their writing with me, a stranger." This is a useful way to think of the 35 or 135 people in your classroom on the first day of a new term—you are all strangers. It is an important move if, through my ten-minute introduction, I can become less of a stranger to students in whose development I will be investing hours and hours over the next three months. At least that is what students like the one quoted at the head of this article report. "This class is going to be fun...you are the first professor that actually talked about himself."

Many students are also veterans of failed small-group activities in which they sat embarrassed and sometimes frustrated with three or four other students wondering what to do. Therefore, in a very short time, I also need to convince students that I have the expertise to set up meaningful, safe, group-work situations. Just because my syllabus advertises small-group work doesn't mean that it will be pleasant or fruitful.

Laying the groundwork for peer collaboration is next on my first-day agenda. I use up to twenty minutes of the first day's class for get-to-know-you activities among the students. Every student says his or her name several times along with information like the name of their hometown and their major. Then I often do an introducing activity which involves each person in the room, including me, writing on a note card the conclusion to this statement: "I am probably the only person in the room who." I tell students to write something suitable for public consumption on the card. I collect the cards without names on them and redistribute them to the students randomly, making sure that no student gets his or her own card. Then each student gets up and

walks around the room (their first “intense involvement and participation...in the ritual of instruction”) asking likely candidates, based on the brief background information of names and home towns, if they “are the only person in the room who.” When students find the person whose card they hold, their job is to learn to pronounce the person’s name and to discover the circumstance and meaning of the item on the card, to talk with the person briefly, and to prepare to introduce the person to the class as a whole. Finally, seated in a circle so we can all see each other, we go around the room for the introductions. This term my card read, “I am probably the only person in the room who had to pay for three auto accidents this summer.” The context my interviewer discovered, after having a hard time finding me, is that I have two teenaged sons. Based on this twenty-minute activity, students gain a wealth of background knowledge about each other which is potentially useful in writing for the class-as-audience and for being a good responder to specific writers. This “introducing” also fits with students’ desires for developing community and friendships in the class.

I also know that students will need a certain level of comfort with each other before the group work (which will generate more community) will work well. Learning classmates’ names, faces, and a little background information will provide that comfort. I learned this lesson in part from teaching eleventh-grade writing in a moderately populated but geographically large rural school district. For years I and my students had suffered through several initial “stiff small-group sessions before things eventually got comfortable. My error was in assuming that these students knew each other. After all, they were in an eleventh-grade class totaling only about 140 students, and they had been in the same school buildings with each other since the sixth grade. But they had started school in five different elementary buildings, and some of them lived twenty miles from each other. Eventually, by informal survey, I discovered that every new classroom had several people who had never spoken a single word to some of the other people in the room. While most students knew everyone’s names, they were far from ready for any social interaction with some members of the group. Get-to-know-you activities changed that. These activities and the community that can grow out of them also have the power, according to McLaren, to “strip [students] of their usual status and authority” or at least “suspend” it.²¹ This effect can keep outside cliques and popularity and class divisions, existing within the general population of the school, out of your classroom.

Now, before readers scoff at personal introductions as wastes of academic time that could be used for imparting scholarship, let us remember that many college classes meet on the first day only long enough to take the roll and hand out the syllabus, or so my students tell me. Further, I am convinced that it is not the particulars of my self-introduction that are effective but the fact that I do it at all. My poem is particularly effective in my teaching context, but I guarantee that students in any classroom would be interested in any representation of the teacher's early encounters with the content of his or her discipline. What do you remember about your experiences in classrooms like the one to which you are introducing yourself? What about chemistry or economics interested you when you were a sophomore at State U? Share these thoughts with your students at appropriate times. McLaren suggests that for teachers to "elicit dynamic forms of participation [they must be able to] resonat[e] with the dreams, desires, voices, and utopian longings of their students."²² Your students will love to know that you became an engineer because you dreamed of inventing an internal combustion engine that would run on water. We must remember—our students have dreams like the ones we had. For students to learn that we had those kinds of dreams too is important. My syllabus and my first class period activities, including my self-introduction, are attempts at this "resonating."

However, my English 100 syllabus, excerpted below, also makes students uncomfortable.

Dear English 100 Students:

Our *purpose* in meeting together for the semester is to offer you an opportunity to develop and improve your writing abilities. In order to do this, we will each have to agree to become part of a class-based, literate community. What each of us gets out of the class will be the result of *real* attempts to share our ideas and responses with each other. Our approach to response to writing will be to point out the strengths in each other's writing rather than the weaknesses. Our goals in being an audience for each other will be to highlight the effective parts of each other's writing and to encourage the writer to communicate again. Our purpose is also to prepare you for English 180 and English 280.

Focus

Student work will be at the center of all our class sessions. You will be encouraged to write, read, listen, and respond daily. My assumption is, and

current research and recommended practice suggests, that people become better writers by writing in a community of responders.

Sharing

Because communication requires an audience, sharing of writing will be our most common activity. In responding, we will concentrate on one simple question: What do you see that is especially strong or potentially strong in this piece? We will try to be as specific as we can when pointing to strengths.

If your writing abilities are going to grow and develop, you will have to get as much response as possible from your audience which is the class.

Of course, it is primarily the idea of sharing their own papers that worries students. But, before I discuss either the particulars of this syllabus or ways readers teaching in other content areas might use the underlying approach in their own contexts, let me say something about making students uncomfortable.

One of my goals on the first day of class is to make students think that this class is going to be different from their other classes. I want to wake them up, get them to really attend to what is going on in class. I do not intend that my class be a play. I am not pretending to teach and they are not pretending to be students.²³ This is a live event, more organized than what in the 1960s would have been called a happening, but with the same flavor. Though it is scripted that we will all show up in the same place at the same time, interesting and participatory things will happen during class that are not scripted by me or them. We are all involved together in making those things happen. This makes students uncomfortable because active engagement involves taking personal risks which is not the norm in school.

As proof of the disengagement students expect, I offer a strategy for the revision and editing described by a young woman in my senior writing-methods class. By her account, which I took to be honest and candid, her writing process for college papers involved finishing the first draft several days before the due date and over the next several days taking successive drafts of the paper to her lecture classes and doing the editing and revision in class to fight boredom and make use of otherwise unengaged time. Several of her peers, impressed with this strategy, expressed the intention of adopting it themselves, going so far as to identify courses on their current schedule offering downtime for editing and re-

vising. I don't want students sleeping or editing and revising in my class unless that is the scheduled activity.

Comments from my students confirm the expectation that classes are often unengaging:

I hope this class isn't another boring high-school-type class where all the students go to dreamland while the teacher rambles on.

I am afraid the instructor will give long boring lectures about nothing.

Students, at least, know how to deal with being passive receptors. On the other hand, the prospect of engagement through sharing one's own writing and through responding to the writing of others makes students uncomfortable. As contradictory as it sounds, I want to create an environment that is supportive and comfortable enough for students to be willing to make themselves uncomfortable by taking risks in the learning process.

Bruffee's description of the change we are asking students to make also points to such student discomfort:

To teach [collaboratively] seems to involve creating contexts where students undergo a sort of cultural change. This change would be one in which they loosen ties to the knowledge communities they currently belong to and join another. These two communities would be seen as having quite different sets of values, mores, and goals and above all quite different languages.²⁴

In my various teaching contexts I am inviting students to begin identifying themselves as "writers," as American literature scholars, and as professional English teachers. This invitation includes the explicit necessity to adopt the "values, mores, goals, and language" of these alien communities. This kind of change is uncomfortable for anyone.

In fact, fear is a part of reading through the syllabus on the first day of class. Students are usually too concerned about the likely trauma of sharing their writing to ask about it verbally, but they wrote about it in their anonymous journal entries.

I am a very bad speller and not very good at reading out loud to people.

I think everyone will be uncomfortable at first, because I know I will be. I don't like to read my writing in front of people.

I want to be able to write better and to be more comfortable with what I write. I hope people don't laugh at each other's papers unless they were meant to be funny.

I like to write, I'm just afraid no one will like what I have to say.

From experience I expect students to be fearful of this kind of risk taking, and by students I do not just mean first-year college students in "basic" writing classes. High school teachers with master's degrees in English in summer writing institutes are often just as reluctant to write and share as these students, and for the same reasons: they're just afraid no one will like what they have to say. These fears are the reason my syllabus and my first-day comments emphasize collaboration and "supportive response" to student writing and learning.

Consider for a moment how groups of colleagues behave when collaborating on an academic project. Certainly we question and challenge each other's assumptions and conclusions, but with our personal colleagues we identify and learn from their emerging successes. We respond to places in each other's work where ideas are coming together, where interesting concepts are emerging, where we are getting it right. I am inviting students into a classroom experience that promises to be a little unusual, a little scary, but also supportive and productive.

Excerpts from the first day's journals indicate that students also have hopes that the supportive environment outlined in the syllabus will really develop and that my message about this class being different is starting to get through:

I hope this is one of those classes where we all feel comfortable around each other and are able to speak our opinions instead of shying away.

I hope we don't judge other people's writings. I also hope that we can accept each other.

I hope this class will be laid back, meaning everybody feels comfortable when asking questions and people can communicate openly and freely.

One comment in particular suggested to me that one student was also getting the idea about the teacher as collaborator:

I hope I will learn something from [this teacher] because my senior English teacher was very mean and she would never work *with* the class.

In two anonymous journal comments from students in my writing-methods class I can also see the development of positive attitudes about risk and comfort and about the class being different from students' general expectations. I handle all of my classrooms similarly, promoting community and collaboration. One strategy I use periodically is a student-to-teacher feedback exercise called PMI. In this case, my methods class meets every Thursday evening for three hours. At the end of the third class session I distributed note cards and asked students to give me some anonymous feedback about how they felt the class was going. I suggested that they could include on the card (P)lusses about the class, (M)inuses, and points of (I)nterest. Excerpts from two of the cards read:

I enjoy the laid back atmosphere. The time goes by really fast. Even though I have many papers to write in my other classes I enjoy writing for this class because I can really show the "real me" instead of trying to impress a professor.

The classroom community is developing very nicely. I have really never felt comfortable in a class before (especially one where I had to share my writing). I feel EXTREMELY comfortable in here. Also, I've never had a night class go *so fast*!

Again, I am not trying to claim miracle-worker status, but we all know a "slow" night class can be bad. Teaching strategies designed to promote community and collaboration made these students willing to take the learning risk to "show the 'real' me" and to become "comfortable" enough to be so fully engaged, that "a night class go[es] *so fast*!"

My assumption is that readers can see how writing classrooms set up like mine, in workshop formats with the students' text at the center of the class sessions, support community and collaboration. Of course, my students study other more conventional content as well. The English 100 students review textbook models of good writing and have class sessions on form and style. The writing-methods students read an extensive list of professional articles and write academic papers over issues of pedagogy. But because I am dealing with *writing*, most often in both classes we are collaborating on written work-in-progress. In other disciplines, students' learning-in-progress will not always be expressed as writing-in-progress. Active, engaged learning requires peer and teacher collaboration with learning-in-progress.

I believe these strategies do not compete with content for class time, but rather enhance and clarify that content. With that in mind, I want to take a moment to focus on specific ways response to learning-in-progress could enhance the learning of any discipline-specific content.

Here is a secret that can guide that thinking: Sincere and supportive peer response to the content of student learning is the engine that drives the collaborative classroom and builds strong learning communities. How can you find time for the students in your classes to collaborate about their learning without taking time away from content? Besides my first-day introductory activities, here are two strategies that fit with the approach I am outlining that may apply to your classroom.

First, structure ways for students to share their informal written or verbal comments that describe their learning and their experience in the class. You could try, early in the term, the kind of anonymous journal response that I have described here. The English 100 prompt asked students what they “thought, hoped, and feared” the class would be like. The first-day anonymous journal prompt in the writing-methods class was, “What are you looking forward to in becoming a writing teacher? What are you fearful about in becoming a writing teacher?” Not only did student responses provide a healthy reality check for me in starting a new term with a new group of students, but when I typed up excerpts from these anonymous comments and handed them out at the second class meeting, students pored over the comments as if they contained winning lottery numbers. The senior professional students were just as interested in their anonymous comments as were the first-year writing students. Typing up the excerpts took time outside of class, and the reading of the excerpts in class took only a few minutes. However, the effects were significant.

Students discovered that others in their class felt the same things they felt. Students who were fearful and apprehensive read the fearful and apprehensive comments of some of their classmates and learned they were not alone. But, not all of the comments were fearful and apprehensive. One student wrote, “I think reading out loud to each other will be a good experience for me.” Another student said, “I enjoy writing immensely and I have spent tons of free time on writing.” A third was in between the poles of apprehension and positive expectation: “I am afraid of having to write a lot of papers and having to get them done on time... but I really like English.” Reading the excerpts made students aware of the range of positions within the developing community. Looking around the room on the second day, noting familiar faces, some now with names

attached, a student who reads the excerpts must think, “Though I hate writing, some ordinary and reasonable students say they like it,” or “While I like writing, some of my classmates sound pretty scared.” This knowledge is also a foundation for forming community.

Students discovered from these distributed excerpts that I valued how they felt and considered their comments important class content. And students also got their first taste of sharing their writing with the class and discovered that the experience was “kind of cool.” Their individual comments looked pretty good as they viewed their own words typed-up with all of the others. This is a form of validation by informal publication.

My second strategy is dependent on your success at beginning to establish an atmosphere of supportive community and collaboration. However, using this strategy will also give the flywheel a powerful kick and keep the class’s collaborative motor running. If we promote community and collaboration, we have to give students important opportunities to collaborate, and we have to make it clear to students that we value that collaboration. Peer response to work-in-progress can be a site for both of these initiatives as well as a way to enhance students’ understanding of specific content. This strategy also addresses a common classroom problem we all dread—student papers or projects, obviously done at the last minute, handed in without revision or polishing.

My students used to hand in one-draft-wonders at the last minute. Today they hardly ever do. I honestly think I used to let them turn in single-draft work. While I gave low grades for these meager attempts and rejected some of them out of hand as incomplete, I still had to spend time dealing with them. And what about the one-draft-wonders that showed some promise, promise that could have been realized if the student had just structured the time for another draft? Now I use peer response sessions, in part, to create and structure that drafting time for the students. Requiring a draft in advance of the due date to be used for peer response automatically eliminates those one-draft-wonders. Believe me, the higher quality of student papers I get makes the use of class time worth it.

If the first paper in Film Theory or Introductory Metallurgy is due on day ten, then I would probably devote part of class time on day three or four to informal, written, topic-generation activities to insure that most students will actually begin writing or at least seriously thinking about their papers well ahead of the due date. Either that day or the next, when students have all identified their personal take on the assignment (whether the general assignment is “Pick a key date in the first year of the Civil War and write about its significance,” or “Explain an economy of

scale,” or “Explore the character of Pap in *Huckleberry Finn*”), take a minute in class for each student to just name their topic aloud to the whole group. In large classes, topics could be posted on a computer bulletin board set up for that purpose or sent to the class listserv in advance. Bulletin boards and listservs are also ways to handle the sharing and response to students’ informal writing without sacrificing actual class time. Large lecture classes with lab or discussion sections could incorporate some of these collaborative techniques into those sessions. This knowledge of what others are doing helps the class develop into an interpretive community of learners and helps individual students find their place within that community. Of course, structuring assignments with enough wiggle room for students to make them their own is essential for interpretive learning and collaboration. There would be no point in announcing topics if all the papers are required to be the same, and collaboration about very similar paper topics or the actual papers-in-progress wouldn’t be very interesting or productive.

Besides teaching college students, I have a son who is a first-year college student. Nick is taking chemistry this semester. During the second week of class he was assigned to write a paper over a topic of his own choosing illustrating applied chemistry. Being a military type, he chose pepper gas. A significant concern of Nick’s, expressed in conversations with me during the development and drafting stage of the paper, was whether or not this was a good topic. He had cleared the topic with his professor, but he was still unsure of his interpretation of the assignment and of his choice. He also knew that a couple of other students were writing on topics very different from his. By his account, his discussion-section teaching assistant uses that potentially collaborative time to practice his own lectures, distinctly similar to those of the professor. What he really needed, I’m convinced, is to know how his investigation of applied chemistry fit into the whole picture of what *other students* found interesting and accessible in this discipline. If he could have gone to the class electronic bulletin board and looked over the list of student generated paper topics or shared paper topics in his discussion section, he would have learned a lot about the beginning work of his emerging chemistry scholar colleagues. He might have started sitting in the lecture hall next to the students writing about tear gas and land mines.

On day six or day seven, I would require complete drafts of student papers for small-group peer response. Students’ first experience with peer response needs to be supportive and positive. Therefore you will have to tightly structure the response session to keep students from enact-

ing the kind of response behaviors they have learned from other teachers—the undermining, silencing, overly critical “stuff.” Make the charge to responders specific and obviously supportive. You also have to take care that responders feel comfortable in their role.

An activity called “Say Back” is a good place to start. Ask each student to read his or her paper aloud to a partner or small group. Emphasize that this reading is valuable, in part, because it will allow the writer to see the paper anew. Suggest that writers read with pen in hand, and tell them to feel free to stop reading and mark troublesome places to return to later for revision. These directions make it clear to everyone that these are drafts-in-progress which are far from perfect. Explain that the responder’s job is to listen closely to the content of the paper and then to immediately “say back” to the writer the main points that are coming through in the paper and any details the responder can remember. Depending on how much time you give for reading and response, the interaction will usually progress into brief conversational exchanges about the topics after “say back” is completed.

The value of this response is obvious even to novice writers and scholars. If the responder is saying back what you intend your paper to say—great. If the responder is saying back things other than your main points and failing to mention the heart of your idea, then you are in trouble. In addition, each student is forced to take a second look at his or her paper. And teachers should actually be delighted rather than disturbed when pairs or groups make the transition between a structured response activity like “say back” to actual purposeful informal conversation.

In peer response activities we have to guard against our own and the students’ learned behavior of “correcting.” Pointing to peer response as the main portal through which students enter the conversation of the discipline, Bruffee asserts:

What students do when working collaboratively on their writing is not write or edit or least of all read proof [sic]. What they do is converse. They talk about the subject and about the assignment. They talk through the writer’s understanding of the subject. They converse about their own relationship and in general, about relationships in an academic or intellectual context between students and teachers. Most of all they converse about and as a part of writing... In short, they learn, by practicing in this orderly way, the normal discourse of the academic community.²⁵

You can regulate how much class time to devote to this activity by your choice of the size of the groups. A whole room full of partners can perform this activity with four-page, double-spaced papers in fifteen minutes. Make those groups of six and you will need forty or fifty minutes. For longer papers or projects you may need to ask students to select key sections for sharing. In the end you will have accomplished several things.

Most students will have drafted their paper several times, partly because you have structured “the executive tasks”²⁶ of composing for them. You will have coached them into taking time to generate and develop a good topic, to draft their paper, and to get response to their drafts-in-progress—three important activities of all successful writers and learners. My students also understand that completing the final paper assignment includes handing in drafts of the paper stapled beneath the final copy. Collecting these early drafts values them and acknowledges the effort it took to write them. Collecting the drafts will, of course, make your briefcase bulge, but the quality of the draft on the top of the packet will make response and grading time shorter. My English 100 students report learning this important lesson about drafting in their midterm self-evaluations:

I no longer wait until the last minute before I begin to write a paper or a journal entry. I used to always wait until the night before an essay would be due to start writing. Now, with having some type of guidelines, I am able to have the paper done a day in advance.

I have learned that there is no way possible that I can write a paper and turn it in the next day without going over it. I have learned that a paper can always be revised in some way.

My first draft is a rough draft and I need to rewrite it several times before I really like what I have written...I think that writing is a lot easier than before because I never looked through or had people look at my rough drafts so I always did bad [sic] on my papers.

Partly, students will draft and edit more aggressively than usual because of the exposure to the peer audience. From sixth grade through graduate school, students care more about what their peers think of them than what you or I think of them. Bruffee says, “Collaborative learning, it seem[s], harnesses[s] the powerful educative force of peer influence that has been—and largely still is—ignored and hence wasted by traditional forms of education.”²⁷

Responders will benefit too. They will learn about other students' interpretations of the content of the course from reading and listening to peer papers. Here are some comments my students made at midterm time about the value of reading their classmates' writing and getting and giving peer response:

I love the way we share our papers in this class. I have always gotten helpful feedback from everyone. And encouraging feedback makes me feel good about my writing.

I like having a chance to read others' papers. It helps me as a writer and plus I get to learn a little about that person. [Reading the papers] is almost like a privilege. I think when you read through someone's paper you can pick out punctuation errors better and then that opens your eyes when reading your own paper.... You can also brainstorm while reading others' papers. You collect ideas to be used in future papers.

I am pretty sure the other students in this class enjoy swapping papers as well. I had a lot of good comments and suggestions on my papers that have helped me out too... It gives me new ideas to use. The responses that I get from my classmates also help me to see which direction I should go with my writing.... I hope we can continue this reading and responding technique in class. I enjoy it as much as it helps me out.

During our time of sharing the papers, I have been able to pick out some of my own mistakes which I overlooked when I was typing in the computer lab.

In these mid-term evaluations describing their learning, some students analyzed their roles as responders:

When I am being the critic, I put myself in their place (because if it was me I would want support and detailed and descriptive comments) so I perform in the same manner.

As for responding, I try to give my honest opinion on things. If I like it, I'll tell them. And If I don't, I will try to find the most constructive way of putting it.

I liked the feeling of trying to help others get a good grade. I don't know how serious they took my student editing, but I did my best on giving them ideas and praise for what they wrote.

Some readers may be having trouble answering the question, “What are these students learning from these activities, and how can they learn from each other if they are all in a basic writing class in the first place?” Bruffee anticipates this question. “How can student peers, who are not members of the knowledge communities they hope to enter, who lack the knowledge that constitutes those communities, help other students enter them?” He also answers it:

Pooling the resources that a group of peers brings with them to the task may make accessible the normal discourse of the new community they together hope to enter. Students are especially likely to be able to master that discourse collaboratively if their conversation is structured indirectly by the task or problem that a member of that new community (the teacher) ha[s] judiciously designed.²⁸

“Say Back” is this kind of structured exercise because it focuses students first on the paper’s content and meaning. Students learn how to communicate with an audience that actually reacts to the meaning of their writing. Their dialogue about their writing becomes more than conversation. McLaren says, “Students are asked to look at their taken-for-granted experiences (the ideologies of everyday life), including the acts of writing and dialogue themselves, as possible sources of learning.”²⁹

These shared readings also provide the building blocks for community between peers:

Reading someone’s paper can really tell you a lot about the person’s history and about their person... It seems friendly here, especially during class participation.

[Sharing papers] really makes the writers and the listeners feel praised and a part of something.

Sharing writing is a great way to get involved and make writing fun for everyone. It is also a great way for people to learn more about people in the class.

For the teacher, the benefit of this sharing of drafts-in-progress should be obvious. The final papers will contain a more considered treatment of the content as a result of having been drafted and read to peer audiences who let the writers know if the meaning is coming through. Additionally important is that the teacher did not have to read the drafts and give response. If

there are four papers or projects throughout the semester, and you think it would take too much time to share drafts-in-progress for all four, do it for the first three and encourage your students to seek out class members on their own to aid in drafting of the final paper. Also keep in mind that, if your institution of higher learning, *like my institution*, is promoting an emphasis on writing in the disciplines, that obligation, according to one definition, “require[s] that teachers look for ways to increase or vary the language experience that will help students understand and explore the subject matter of the course.”³⁰ Based on this definition of writing-across-the-curriculum, your dean may be suggesting that the time necessary for peer sharing of drafts-in-progress is not extra, intrusive, or optional.

To this prescription for peer collaboration within an interpretive classroom community, I will add a final step that can make the teacher a collaborator and coach.³¹ If we are really willing to view our students as budding agronomists, physical therapists, and elementary teachers—as junior scholars in our field—then we will likely admit that we became scholars, in part, because some mentor in our field coached us outside of course work—during our dissertation hours or when we were preparing our first articles for publication or our first conference presentations. Then I, at least, got plenty of supportive response to my drafts-in-progress. If we want students who write papers in discipline-specific courses to have the same scholarly experience, then we have to structure time for mentoring and for our response to writing-in-progress. And these acts of response should not be confused with our role as course evaluators and graders—as “academic gatekeepers.”³²

You could structure time for your response to student writing and learning-in-progress this way. In our example of the paper due on day ten, students could hand-in their “final” drafts and you or the grad-student discussion-section leaders could respond to the drafts without grading them, noting what the student was getting right and making some “doable” suggestions for revision and rethinking (within the possibilities presented in the paper). You could also suggest that students need to edit better and spellcheck if necessary. Then hand the papers back for revision. When the student hands it in again, grade it with minimal or no comment.

This sounds like a lot of work and it is. But, do you know what students do with the comments we write on their final drafts to justify our grades? They throw them away, often without reading them carefully. Composition research also shows that teacher response to drafts-in-progress is much more developmentally useful to students than teacher comments on final drafts. This is because comments are often “text spe-

cific” and do not transfer easily into behaviors or thinking used in the next paper. If you are already making written comments or having grading conferences with students about papers or projects, I suggest doing it before grading, when students will use what you have to say immediately and successfully and when they will see you as a collaborator as opposed to the teacher-as-examiner.³³

In conclusion, I suggest that your efforts to establish community and collaboration will enhance the learning of content in your classroom. I also suggest that half of the effort to establish community happens before you step into the classroom on the first day. It happens when you as the teacher are imagining how you want to “be” with the students and how you want the students to “be” with each other. Another quarter of community happens the first day of class and in the first few days and weeks that follow. Classroom communities, like friendships and love affairs, are highly influenced by first impressions. And like these relationships, once firmly established, classroom communities grow and take on lives of their own.

On the first day of class I meet students at the door and hand them a single sheet of paper bearing the heading, “Today’s Notes.” The heart of “Today’s Notes” (see Table 10.1) comes from retired University of Iowa Rhetoric Professor Cleo Martin. The current document contains some of my own revisions:

Table 10.1 Today’s Notes

Everyone has a piece of the truth.

We are here to entertain and inform each other.

We are all on the same team. Your success and grade do not depend on being better than each other.

Of course, these are big and unusual assertions. Students don’t necessarily believe me right away. But I think students, right from the first, view “Today’s Notes” as an invitation to change, grow, and learn. Feel free to use these notes as they are or to modify them for your own teaching situation. But if you do use them, then you have to live by them—collaborate, build community, overtly support and reward risktaking. My experience suggests that this teaching stance supports and promotes significant learning and change in my students. In these midterm student comments we can see the kind of transition from one community to another that both Bruffee and McLaren describe:

From reading other people's writing I realized that this is not high school anymore. There is no exact formula to writing an "A" paper.

I was always afraid to share my work, but I feel that this class has broken me from that old habit. Now, I'd rather share it with someone because then I'll know whether or not I got my point across.

This class has opened my writing abilities up. I'm not afraid to write in here and share my papers. Everyone in this class has made me feel comfortable about myself and my work.

Writing is different [in this class] than in any other class because you actually have to think and revise and rewrite. With other classes you read, take notes, you understand and then you take a test.

I have learned that you can never really be satisfied with the essays when finished with them. Even when I am turning in the final papers I still wish I could add a little bit more or subtract something out.

I have never had someone of my own age give me ideas, make comments, or give constructive criticism. The circle gave the group a familylike atmosphere—everyone was attentive, patient, and sincere. In my entire life I can say I have not had a more caring and compassionate class than this one.

From my perspective, McLaren and Bruffee are correct that individual classrooms are cultures which we construct together with our students. If you attempt to construct the kind of collaborative culture I have described, eventually you will have to deal with assumptions in traditional educational practice that conflict with your new culture—not the least of which will be notions of comparative, competitive grading. But, the literature of composition studies, as one resource among several, offers rationales and strategies for dealing with grading and other troublesome issues. Those rationales and strategies have supported my teaching and enhanced my students' acquisition of academic knowledge and I wouldn't let anything force me back on dry land, up onto the dais, behind the podium.

NOTES

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⁶ James Britton, *Language and Learning* (London: Penguin, 1970).

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⁸ Richard Rorty, "Liberal Education and the Social Justification of Belief." *Liberal Education* 68 (1982): 95–114.

⁹ Bruffee, 400.

¹⁰ Ibid., 401.

¹¹ Ann E. Berthoff, "Is Teaching Still Possible?: Writing, Meaning, and Higher Order Reasoning," in *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*, ed. Victor Villanueva Jr. (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1997), 316.

¹² Vera John-Steiner, *Notebooks of the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³ Mina Shaughnessy, "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing," *College Composition and Communication* 27 (1976): 234–39.

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¹⁶ Roy Rappaport, "Liturgies and Lies," *International Yearbook for the Sociology of Knowledge and Religion* 10 (1976): 86.

¹⁷ McLaren, 165.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ McLaren, 173.

²⁰ Bruffee, 409.

²¹ McLaren, 165.

²² Ibid., 166.

²³ Ibid., 167.

²⁴ Bruffee, 411.

²⁵ Ibid., 404.

²⁶ Carl Berietter and Marlene Scardamalia, "From Conversation to Composition: The Role of Instruction in a Developmental Process," in *Advances in Instructional Psychology*, vol. II, ed. R. Glaser (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1982).

²⁷ Bruffee, 394.

²⁸ Ibid., 402–403.

²⁹ McLaren, 175.

³⁰ Christopher Thais, "Language Across the Curriculum," in *Rhetoric and Composition*, 3rd ed., ed. Richard L. Graves (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1990), 35.

³¹ Peter Elbow, "Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process," *College English* 45 no. 4 (1983): 327–39.

³² Ibid.

³³ Britton, *Development of Writing Abilities* (11–18).

ESSAY 11

Authority, Collaboration, and Ownership

Sources for Critical Writing and Portfolio Assessment

HECTOR J. VILA

One of the single most effective ways to have students realize their learning strategies and achieve authority over their work is through writing. Writing, as we have seen in the past twenty years or so, has been used creatively across all disciplines; however, though Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs have helped raise our consciousness concerning writing and learning, there has been backsliding—a no-more-writing backlash, a less-writing backlash—affecting English departments out of which WAC programs sprang. This has been caused by many factors, ranging from the increase in class sizes, to an attitude suggesting that some courses require less writing than others, thus relegating a larger burden of responsibility for writing to traditional composition courses.

Consequently, many English courses, but particularly Introduction to Literature, require very little or no writing; and the writing that does take place is for closure to assignments, an assessment of restated facts “picked up” along with the reading. English departments, then, are not far from counterparts across the disciplines still reluctant to examine curriculum in new and refreshing ways, remaining attached to industrialized—and hierarchical—notions of the teacher as the sole purveyor of knowledge and the classroom as the space for merely receiving, for “the getting of information”—a system for processing not learning. We are therefore conflicted by notions of developing assessment models that will more realistically determine the student’s use of knowledge attained. And we are still reluctant to experience the classroom as the place for inviting interactivity, for communication, for meaningful intellectual and spiritual evolution—of both students and teachers.

The creative use of a writing portfolio, particularly in introductory classes, as in the Introduction to Literature class where traditionally this has not been done, will begin to re-articulate and describe a curriculum that is more in tune with who our students are and what they bring to our classes. The writing portfolio in an introductory class can be used to integrate the student's experiences with the content of the course, resulting in an assessment vehicle that accurately describes the student's learning, as well as, and most importantly, the student's ability to use knowledge attained in a meaningful manner. Thus the writing portfolio in an introductory class launches students into learning patterns and activities that will remain useful throughout their lives.

FRAMING CONTEXTS

In a portfolio letter at the end of the term, Jennifer, a college freshman in an Introduction to Literature class at William Paterson University, tells us that "I learned that literature is actually an explanation about life and that it teaches us how to live." Jennifer is connecting the art of storytelling to her experiences; she has a sense of ownership, so she announces her authority—over the literature she has experienced, over her work. "I have also done some soul-searching this semester," Jennifer continues, delving deeper. "I have learned more about myself, and what kind of person I am. I have made a career decision that finally has me thinking that I will enjoy going to work everyday.... Now perhaps," she declares, "I will enjoy college because I will be studying to do something that I want to do." This is learning.

Closer to a description of the learning environment that facilitated Jennifer's self-awareness, Lisa, another freshman in the same course, writes in her final reflective letter, her final self-assessment vehicle, that she

discovered that much of what I wrote down became the critical framework for my essays. For example, men wanting all the power and choice in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the idea of illusion and reality, fear and insecurity in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," "The Lottery," and "A Rose for Emily," and the oppressive systems in "Patriotism" and "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" all became the basis for my work.

At the end of the term, Lisa suggests that she has been enabled to find her own way, make her own connections: she has experienced herself in the

act of learning. Lisa knows how she learns, what she sees, what she needs. Lisa has consistently returned to her work, at different stages throughout the term, describing how she created and what she believes she has achieved. In turn, it is this action which provides Lisa, and others, with a lens through which to read the world they inhabit. "I find it amazing to see how people view humanity," she concludes, "how the same issues keep coming up, whether they are writing in 1996 or thousands of years ago." Lisa has achieved ownership and authority over her own life of learning, which is, I suggest, what we try to achieve in teaching—why we're in education. This is evident in her portfolio, in each piece of her writing—and in her reflections. The portfolio facilitates the student's and the teacher's needs to communicate with each other so as to understand each other in the context of the complex world we mutually, and inevitably, learn to fabricate—if we can impose ourselves onto it.

Authority, collaboration and ownership become valuable and measurable outcomes that can be achieved by using reflective, writing-to-learn strategies within a curriculum based on the portfolio performance as assessment. This changes the nature and role of the teacher, and in the process metamorphoses the notion of education: Learning emphasizes the students' ongoing engagement with their culture so as to facilitate the development of critical reading and writing capacities that students can then apply to other reading and writing situations; students are encouraged to look for the cultural contradictions in texts they read; and, a tentative, open approach is used to stress issues and questions rather than mere statements of facts to allow students to develop, leave interpretive options open and perhaps change their positions on subjects.

Authority, collaboration and ownership, when used as vehicles for creative, reflective writing, then coupled to writing-to-learn strategies conducive to producing a portfolio, are notions students are very concerned with and are at the core of their learning. In this sense, the portfolio becomes a vehicle by which students and teachers converse about their roles in institutions that are sometimes overwhelming, but which are changeable. This suggests that the portfolio is an instrument by which we can examine conflicts, within institutions and their insistence on certain standards, within our private selves as these collide with public demands, and achieve consensus about issues surrounding *authority, collaboration and ownership* because, ultimately, the subject of this portfolio is truly the student herself. The writing portfolio is an honest and concrete way to assess student performance, the teachers' intentions and

the responsibilities of the institution towards providing equitable education. The writing portfolio is thus an instrument of change.

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

Introduction to Literature courses exist in the no-man's-land between Freshman Composition and Literature—as do many other introductory courses across all disciplines. These courses try to accomplish a lot, whether as teasers into a particular discipline, or as foundations that indoctrinate students into particular academic languages. Nevertheless, Introduction to Literature—introduction to anything, really—suggests to students that they have acquired some “higher order” reading, writing, and thinking skills, but not enough “to take” literature. The course itself, usually a “bastard child” in most English departments, is taught by adjuncts or “composition teachers” who many times are themselves adjuncts or nontenured faculty. Then the introductory course is left alone by the department, never really examined. The message is clear: it is not a vital course; it is a course meant to introduce students into institutional modes of disciplining, not the actual discipline itself. Students enter the course with the *I-have-to-take-this* attitude: *Let's do it painlessly*.

Yet, do we introduce students to genres and periods of literature? Do we perform some of the canon? Which part? What about a multicultural approach? Introduction to Literature texts are mammoth enterprises, literally and figuratively, a cottage industry built for the road to tenure; we occasionally look to these for guidance, then we find ourselves carrying these excesses for an entire semester, but use only one-tenth of their contents.

Is this a sign of our questionable authority, our questionable ownership? And what about writing in the course? Do we introduce students to Marxist criticism? Feminist ideology? Deconstruction? Usually, Introduction to Literature courses are packed in at thirty- to forty-plus students, so how much writing do we actually assign since it is a course somewhere in-between composition and highbrow literature? Then there is always the term paper, a requirement that has been relegated to this course as “the place” to teach the “how to's” and “don'ts” of this challenging form. There is no room in this course for dealing with issues of authority, collaboration, and ownership.

These questions and conflicts are true for other disciplines as well. In an Introduction to Biology class, for instance, how much time is devoted

to the “Earth and the Universe” and concomitant subjects: theories about matter, the atmosphere, viruses and entropy? How do we work with the “Origins of Life”? Do we spend our time on Panspermia? What about Creationism, which some teachers are now including? Can writing create an atmosphere whereby a student can feel free and comfortable to navigate between these theories and personal beliefs? Then there is the very volatile subject of Reproduction: where does the moral dimension come in—if at all?

For a biologist, these are not easy questions; nor is it easy to devise a curriculum whereby these questions are being addressed while ensuring that realistic assessment is going on: Are students understanding the material—getting from it what they need—while also being enabled to realize their own relationship(s) to these questions?

In Introduction to Mathematics the problems do not get any easier. When introducing logic, a vital component for many disciplines, how much language versus diagramming do we do? How do we understand the student’s understanding of the relationships between inductive and deductive logic, then Venn diagrams? Can we use writing and the portfolio to both characterize the student’s understanding of these relationships, as well as to determine this same student’s internalization of the content?

Writing that hinges on reflection, particularly to establish authority through collaboration, will inevitably determine a student’s ownership of content and, most significantly, learning. In the act of working with others—collaborating with fellow students and with the teacher—a student, reflecting, can begin to describe and understand her own voice, the tenor of her thinking—her authority. In this sense, the sense that an authoritative voice has of imposing its will onto any rhetorical situation, students realize that the experience of learning by projecting themselves onto content, then synthesizing this to establish a “fresh” context, is, in effect, the achievement of ownership over the entire learning process, over the world they inhabit. This is true across all disciplines.

VOICE AND CONTEXTS

In a year-long experiment at William Paterson University, I restructured the Introduction to Literature course to emphasize and reproduce its vitality and its potential; then I tested some of these notions in Biology and Mathematics. This was done by assuming that students want to talk about themselves, know much more than we allow, and want to enter into the

world of ideas so as to fashion it and alter it along lines they may deem appropriate for their futures. Two elements became central to this refashioning: (1) the creation of a curriculum that would facilitate the students' efforts to read themselves and their texts within the context of their culture; and, (2) the creation of portfolios which would allow students to select from a body of their work and that would also provide avenues for them to understand—*really* experience—their roles as thinkers, creators, and participants in their education: a mirror of their learning, and a mirror of their conflicts.

The course was based on writing-to-learn strategies—poignant prompts; reflections on work; journals; writing of poems, short stories, dialogues; essay writing—which moved somewhat away from the usual process approach to writing and focused on what Judith and Geoffrey Summerfield call “enabling constraints,” something akin to playing tennis with a net: this *enables* the player to hit better, to play better because accuracy is enhanced by the presence of the constraint, the net.¹ A combination of writing-to-learn strategies, used at different points during a student's evolution to a “final product,” constrain the focus, but also enable the student to delve deeper into herself as a vital, creative individual; “enabling constraints” harness creative impulses and urges, allowing students—and teachers, too—to dwell on the recursive nature of writing.

Along these lines, writing is used to see what students know about a subject and to engage them, to help them discover disparate elements in subject materials, and to help them make their own meanings from subject matter; poignant reflections, or metawriting, compels students to focus on the issues of authority, collaboration and ownership, enabling them to experience and criticize relationships with themselves as a community of learners, the texts being read in the class, and ultimately, the institution of higher education itself. Students in this class learn how to negotiate their individual learning experiences with those of the others in the class; likewise, students then begin to realize that while individually they are in fact learning and achieving, collectively a community, replete with its own history, is evolving in the classroom: Students see their learning community within the context of higher education: thus they can articulate distributions of institutionalized forms of discipline and authority, suggesting how these affect their individualized learning strategies.

Central to the course was the term paper for which I provided three of the five sources they needed to use: Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Anna

Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers*. These texts, which contain critiques of racism, domination and oppression, feminism and the institutionalization of identities, were meant to coerce students into dealing with conflicting ideas about certain preconceived notions concerning who we are and how we intend to exist. But they were also used to demonstrate how all of the work students had previously done in their reading and writing journals, in their reflective writings, and in their actual essays led to an already existing subject that became the genesis for their term papers: students were in effect revising already preconceived notions about themselves and their worlds. There is, therefore, no room for plagiarism in this environment because students are speaking from the heart: they are committed.

The results were astonishing because students were able to experience themselves learning in various writing-to-learn strategies: Students reflected on their conditions and the conditions of their culture; they became active and committed participants in their learning; they became enthusiastic readers and writers; and, perhaps most significantly, they were able to understand the relationships between literature, the culture at large and their own lives. They came away realizing the vitality existent in conflicts when these are examined creatively.

ENABLING CONSTRAINTS

Certain sacrifices have to be made. First, the amount of reading assigned in the course is less than we would expect in our traditional literature courses. Room has to be made for writing; reflection also has to be given importance, so space has to be given for the student to be able to spend time in contemplation and self-analysis. Second, the literature assigned has to be vital; it has to be accessible and exciting, raising issues students may already be bringing to class. This is very controversial because some colleagues still feel that an Introduction to Literature class should begin with Greek classics, move through Chaucer to Shakespeare, stopping somewhere around the nineteenth century, they contend, where culture ceases to be and devolves into a postmodern, and putrid, amalgam. But what will this prove? A course structured as such, is it for students, or more for the instructor?

If we go at this course the way we are accustomed to doing it, then the teacher is sending a clear message to students: I don't care what you grasp, nor do I want to know how you're going to use what I'm giving you. This is a facts-only course, devoid of self-expression, and what we

achieve is not learning, but rather, indoctrination into means of disciplining—and punishment. And many times we excuse this by saying that the student is so culturally challenged that what we have to do is expose this student to as much literature as possible, even if the student cannot grasp it all, reading only some—a dangerous and pathetic fallacy indeed.

In “Teaching Literature, Changing Cultures,” Professor Biddy Martin suggests that “graduate and undergraduate education becomes too focused on teaching students about literature, about interpretation, and about theory without developing pedagogical strategies that encourage students to do for themselves what we put on display—complex, deep, imaginative thinking. There is little time for lingering or dwelling.”²² This is an important, even critical, comment on the current state of education: time for “lingering or dwelling” has been rejected, seen as superfluous, though it is vital for learning. How else are students—are we—to provide the atmosphere to enable authority, collaboration and ownership?

Professor Martin goes on to say that “sophisticated intellectual exchange requires that interdisciplinary formations remain mobile so that new objects of study can emerge. As teachers of literature, we need to identify and remove the educational barriers to complex, creative thought that are built into institutional structures, departmental requirements, and pedagogical approaches.”²³ Martin’s assessment suggests that our current education atmosphere consists of constraints that disable, making subjects of all students and teachers alike.

In *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*, Kathleen McCormick instructs that “one always reads and writes within specific cultural and institutional settings. What one needs to do is to provide contexts in which students can best develop critical reading and writing capacities that they can then apply to other reading and writing situations.”²⁴ So I chose to place students at the heart of the curriculum; I chose to include students as vital elements in the syllabus and the overall structure of the course; I chose to include students’ literatures as scheduled readings.

I did so by thematizing the Introduction to Literature course. I selected readings that would enable students to speak about relationships, personal interconnections, friendships and love. I took the position assumed by math classes, sociology classes, psychology classes, and so on: if students in these classes are made to think like mathematicians, sociologists, and psychologists, for instance, then writing students are going to think like writers in a literature class: They wrote poems, stories and dialogues; they searched for language within their environments and expressed it to peers; they created.

Typically, I begin the semester with poetry because students are more reluctant to read poetry. It is not their fault, though: In grammar school, students are exposed to rhyme and poetry; they are even prone to write poetry, most of them without inhibitions. But somewhere in middle school this innate propensity for poetry is destroyed, so when students reach high school, they have learned to hate the form. This is a serious breach. We begin with poetry as a way to return to some vital roots for self-expression.

But before I hand students the poetry, I want them to commit. I want them to have ideas already exposed on paper to facilitate their critical reading, enabling critical self-assessment, and setting the pattern and tone for the rest of the course. For each prompt—*passion*, *first*, and then *love*—I give students seven to ten minutes of writing time. One student writes, “I think Passion can often make people act irrationally or without thought.” This student has a point of view, and she will then impose this point of view onto her reading. She will look for irrationality in the poetry she will read, comment on it, share this with others, then use it as a source for her own writing. Her initial writing on passion is an “enabling constraint” which contextualizes her reading and writing experiences.

Sharing their insights stirs conversations: the ice in the class is broken, and literature, their first lesson, becomes a vehicle that incites dialogue about differences. Virtually everyone in the class has something to say and my job is merely to direct the order of speaking; sometimes, two or three students will speak back and forth to each other for several minutes. There is an energy in the class; it must be captured on paper as a way to heighten it—and mold it.

I stop the flow, ask for silence, and prepare the class for a reflective writing exercise. I ask that they recall when they first had a strong feeling for someone else; that they try to remember what this moment was like, though at the time they may not have had the language to articulate what they were essentially feeling. Then I ask that students describe how they got the other person’s attention; how they let it be known that there was an interest.

For the most part, students’ early attempts at courtship are characterized by having intermediaries communicate intentions; some pursuers took physical approaches, bumping into others, or hitting him or her in the school yard; still others looked for ways to disrupt the other person’s concentration; they wrote notes; some, the more daring, used a more direct approach and simply spoke of their intentions. The class discovers

how tradition-bound their behaviors are; they discover that courtship requires that we enter preconceived roles.

Again I ask that they reflect on what they have learned and experienced in the class so far.

"I learned about different ways people told other people how they liked that person at a very young age," writes one student. "Many people used friends as lures or ways of communicating." This same student, when he began to read the poetry, writes that "(Sir Philip) Sidney was saying he wants the person he loves to leave because of all the confusion and torment he is going through because of the love he has." Another student, speaking of Shakespeare's sonnet 130—"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"—writes that it "is about seeing beyond the surface and finding something solid, in his case it is love. I can relate my band to this poem because on the surface we don't look like we would be a good band, or even look like a band, but underneath all that we write really great songs and play for a lot of people who enjoy us and that's something that goes beyond the surface."

We can see that within a couple of classes, students are struggling to achieve ownership and authority over content; this struggle is inherent. Students are making meaningful connections between the poetry and their experiences, each others' worlds, and with me, the teacher/facilitator; a creative triangle has been established: teacher—students—texts. Lines of inquiry run back and forth between these nodes. Shakespeare or Blake or Wallace Stevens is not foreboding, but rather, a catalyst for the student's own sense of self; literature is serving to excite creativity.

After reading William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow," a student wrote "Rain" in her journal:

Rain

falling down
slips silvery soft.
White mist blows by
like ghosts through time.

Something of the Williams poem is evident in "Rain"; it is in the student-poet's attempt to capture a still life, a moment that is translucent and meaningful in a spiritual way; it is in the religious overtones—and the atmosphere. This student is achieving ownership of her work; she has totally engulfed Williams—as herself. "Poetic history," argues Harold

Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*, “is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.”⁵ The student above, with “Rain,” is well on her way to realizing Williams, as well as Bloom later. This is a vital lesson to begin to understand as the student moves through her major, English; the lesson has been inculcated.

AUTHORITY CONTEXTUALIZED

In the essay that brought closure to the poetry section of the course, Kellie, in “A Walk Through Life,” begins to articulate thoughts she has had in her journal and that will later become the essence of her term paper on incest. But first Kellie has to peel away the layers of fear and oppression hindering her innate need to express herself, to express who she is and where she has been. This is the road to authority. It takes time to express suffering; it takes “lingering or dwelling.”

“As you walk through life,” says Kellie, “eventually love strikes you and you reach out and grab it. You don’t really know what it is, exactly, and maybe you’re a little terrified to find out. But the excitement of fear to try something new overcomes you and you take the risk and go for it.” Kellie is testing her learning environment, her peers, and her teacher; she wants to divulge, to exorcise—and she is experiencing writing as a means to this end. We can note this in her language; she is working at the edges of her subject: Kellie. She is experimenting with “risk,” meaning that she may have been hurt before and risks, though exciting, leave residues of burdens.

Kellie is struggling with her own sense of self in a public domain: She knows that she is speaking heartfelt emotions in a public forum; she needs to know how far she can go. “All of a sudden you get to the end of the rainbow, and there is no pot of gold,” she says, striking a dark chord. Kellie tells us the story of John, her “pot of gold.” “I thought, and believed for a long time, that the love we shared was unconditional.” Unfortunately, Kellie was blind to the signs; perhaps, the signs were all too familiar. “He used to say things like, ‘she’s a lot prettier than you; I could have any woman I want, but I picked you; why can’t you just agree with me instead of putting up a fight,’ and other degrading things like that.” John told Kellie how much he loved her after his abuses. Kellie, in turn, saw this as a discourse on love, so she hung on. Eventually, when John joined the Coast Guard and attempted to carry on as usual from a distance, Kellie realized that she was being used, finding out that he had been cheating on her for quite some time.

In the short-story sequence of the course, Kellie chose to write on Yukio Mishima's "Patriotism." She said that "this story has a unique way of showing different ways loyalty can be achieved." Loyalty has a deep, abiding interest for Kellie: she has been wounded by its weight. Just prior to her essay, which she titled in bold, as in an announcement—"Loyalty"—Kellie wrote a poem in her journal which later became a part of her portfolio:

Princess is what you call me
bouncing me on your knee.
Growing up is what I did
resulting in a young lady.
Too much attention is what
I was given by you.
If that never was I would trust,
not feel so violated.
But since you did,
fear is my life.

One is immediately struck by her language struggling to understand and rearticulate "loyalty": *princess, too much attention, trust, violated, fear*. The atmosphere evolving in the course characterized by the different uses of writing—reflective writing, journal writing, genre writing (poems, stories, etc.), as well as the classic college essay—are helping Kellie experience, probably for the first time, how learning can be used to understand the self, then express this to others in a meaningful way.

But it is not all just about expressing deeply-felt emotions grounded in past experiences. Students realize that these experiences have to be meaningfully translated to an audience, advancing, somehow, a poignant dialogue that extends into a learning community. The specter of the portfolio, coupled to "the essays" in the course, motivate tonal changes in students' writings that suggest their understanding of performance: They have to *perform* what they have experienced and what they have learned so they continuously evaluate and reevaluate themselves, placing the burden of assessment on themselves first.

On their journey to the "final essay," students have been "lingering and dwelling"—reflecting—on different aspects of their evolution; this enables students to understand their roles and responsibilities in (their) education. Students assess themselves, describing obstacles to their achievements and how these have been overcome; they also define and describe the na-

ture of their work. This somewhat raises the burden of assessment off the teacher's shoulders because it is made a vital part of the ongoing strategies centered on writing. Assessment, then, is no longer a cap at the end of an assignment, or the course, but always a fluid and dynamic part of the "lingering and dwelling." This raises the level of performance in the class. Students immediately realize that this is *their* course and that *they* are responsible for outcomes. Students welcome this fresh change. Inevitably, this too changes the role of the teacher, releasing him/her from the burdens of institutionalized modes of disciplining to that of mentor and guide.

In the introduction to her term paper, "Fear Accepted as Norm," Kellie writes,

Fear is something that is all around us in numerous, different shapes and sounds. It can come in the form of a person, an object, and sometimes an idea. Fear means something different to each individual, each idea being unique in its own way. Many people have more than one type of fear existing within them and are petrified of it. Day after day it follows us around like a shadow, never giving up, as we continue searching for a safe place where fear is finally nonexistent.

Kellie's experiences in the class have evolved. She can now, finally, begin to articulate experiences in a tone that is more akin to the "classic college essay"; there is an obvious distance in her tone. She is trying to be objective, taking into consideration how the essence of her subject needs to be articulated to a vast audience. Kellie is reading her experiences within a cultural context, thereby expanding the notion of the institution, usually seen as foreboding, to that of a place for complex, deep, imaginative thinking. In her transformation, Kellie, among others, is helping to transform the context of the institution as well.

These students are challenging our conservative and staid notions about how education is to be delivered; they are demanding curriculum changes, suggesting, in their own words, that what they require is for education to place them at the center of the learning experience. Thus educators will begin to understand the contexts students bring into the classroom. Students' contexts will change current education conditions—if we listen, look, and learn, "dwelling and lingering" along with our students.

Kellie goes on to say that

Whether it is in the poems I have written, "Never Feel Free" and "My Life," symbolizing the fear I live through every day, or in *Massacre of the*

Dreamers, by Ana Castillo, presented as the fears in society, fear has an individual presentation that goes along with each.

She admits that she has “lived a large percentage of my life in fear. When I was a very young child, about the age of six, I started to be sexually molested by my grandfather.” It has taken Kellie all semester to come to this; however, and equally as important, perhaps, is how she is able to equate her own writings, her own ideas with those of the texts assigned. And all of this matter is used to rearticulate herself to a public. This is due to the time and space given to lingering or dwelling; these create and encourage self-assessment.

It is this lingering or dwelling that promotes authority and ownership. Concerning *Massacre of the Dreamers*, for instance, Kellie is able to understand Castillo’s plight through her own; this is collaboration of the highest order, enabling Kellie’s control of her learning:

Fear is shown as fear in her society and her own fears. Ana Castillo feels that her society is Xicanism, which is all nationalities joined together. She would like this to become one of significance and viability to the world instead of just another culture in the world.

Kellie can also extend her awareness to Janie, in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, where she suggests that [Janie] “has the fear of never finding love and never knowing what love or marriage is... She had the fear of wanting to be the perfect wife and not being able to, and yet at the same time, she wanted to do her own thing.” These are conflicts Kellie knows well since she brings the experiences with her grandfather to her reading and writing. She is using what she has experienced to demonstrate what she now knows. This, she understands, is her way of learning. To move students into another intellectual space, another learning plane, first students have to experience themselves within the context of their own, current learning; lingering and dwelling, then, allow for this to occur, and as we will see below, this holds true across all disciplines.

In Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Kellie finds that fear is “seen as a fear of living in isolation forever, and the second is the fear of never having a child or a family.” These are Kellie’s fears; in Atwood, she reads herself, as McCormick has suggested above. But she yet needs to move the content of her experiences and learning into another context, thus expanding her knowledge, her ability to learn and share. Having seen

herself in the poetry, then in the short stories, now Kellie is seeking to rearticulate herself as an authority for her audience.

To synthesize and give authority to her ideas and experiences, Kellie sought information from the *Behaviour Research and Therapy Journal*, asserting that “findings showed that...groups without fear completed all tasks successfully,” something she has been struggling with: She has found a community, both in the literature and now in her research. She is not alone—and she can share this with her community of learners, raising their awareness, too. This leads her to conclude that “most fears can be overcome if one fights hard enough to make it/them go away. But if the fear is too drastic, it can stay with someone for eternity”—an awareness of her ongoing struggles.

VOICE(S) ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The essence of a meaningful portfolio hinges on the teacher’s ability to create a workshop environment that will facilitate “lingering and dwelling,” what Martin suggests is necessary for the study of literature and the intellectual growth of students. Complex, deep, imaginative thinking not only requires time, but also a vehicle that inspires reflection: the writing portfolio.

“I learned a lot about women in this course,” writes Amy in her portfolio letter. “I learned where we have come from and where we are going. I learned how to express my thoughts clearly about our destiny. I learned that women can be powerful and be, and change things. I learned that change may be not what is best.”

Interestingly, Amy submitted in her portfolio a book review she wrote on *Night Mother*; an essay titled “The Captivating Spirit of Nature,” where, after quoting Wordsworth—“My heart leaps up when I behold/A rainbow in the sky”—she says that she “hope(s) to never grow up, but hope(s) to enjoy life with the heart of a child even when I’m old.” In her term paper, “Women: Tradition and Change,” Amy says that “women cannot do it all and cannot do it on their own.... Women must show competence, attain a good balance and be willing to ask for help. Above all adjustments need to be made, men need to meet their wives half way.”

This is not mere rhetoric for Amy; she has chosen a portfolio which has a poignant vein running through it, as Kellie and others have done, demonstrating that she is conflicted about wanting to be both a perpetual child and a capable woman. She finds that literature can be used as a vehicle by which to reconcile these critical forces: “Literature...is a form

of expression and without it people would have nothing to relate to, nothing to learn from,” concludes Amy. “It is a vehicle for higher understanding of meaning and expression.”

I wanted to understand whether this approach would also bring about the same commitment, resolve and learning in other disciplines; whether in introductory biology and mathematics courses, students could initially be made to synthesize experiences with the content they have to learn and thereby reinvent the context of learning. What I needed to test was whether ideas that students may originally expose on paper would facilitate their critical reading and learning, enabling astute self-assessment and thus also set patterns for learning they could benefit from for the rest of their lives.

Many science courses using writing focus on the more traditional modes: recording findings; materials and methods; searching the literature; and, finally, presentation, which is usually an attempt to model the professional writing in the subject area. I wanted something else. I wanted students to establish voice, thereby infecting their work and study with conviction; this, I believed after my Introduction to Literature experience, would raise the level of performance in the class. But more importantly, I believed that the atmosphere of the class would change; it would become infectious, exciting, engaging.

I used the same approach I used in the Introduction to Literature class: I gave students a prompt. The lesson was to be on “Plant Movement and Transport,” specifically turgor pressure and differential growth.

I asked the class to stand, then I asked that they place all of their belongings at the front of the class beneath the board. When they returned to their desks, they had only a pen and a paper before them: “Tell me,” I said, “what is it like to have movement restricted? Describe to me what it would be like not to be able to go anywhere, travel anywhere, see anyone? Try, then, to also tell me how you would grow, communicate with others, how would you embark on achieving a sense of self, of identity?”

One student said that she “felt horrible and began to panic. Who would know that I was alive?” Another student said that “the human being is remarkable and probably would find a way to survive. I remember this movie where Steve McQueen was a prisoner on an island. He was placed in solitary confinement for years, I think five or so. It was a true story about how this prisoner learned to cope and survive. He had to adjust or he would die. I think that if I couldn’t move, I’d find ways of surviving.”

As it happened in the Introduction to Literature class, now in the Introduction to Biology class, students were involved in conversations

about mobility, the pressures that come from being kept from contact with others and our instinct for survival. I felt that this was the appropriate place to introduce the biology class to Walt Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing." We read it together and then I asked the class to react to the poem in any manner they chose, but to keep in mind what they had already written.

Jose, the same student who had written about Steve McQueen, wrote: "That's it, the lesson from nature is that we can survive. This is why in the poem there is this celebration of what nature can do so easily and we humans can not. This is why I think the poet says that the oak is *uttering joyous leaves all its life*" (emphasis mine). As I suspected, Jose's reaction is equal to that of the students in the Introduction to Literature class: He has found himself in the Whitman poem; we are moving closer towards an investigation of nature.

The class has moved through two levels of introspection: What do I see and know about myself; how is *my self* evident in the literature. The next context is then to bring the students into an awareness concerning the content of biology: They will do so by experiencing themselves *in* the content, thereby decontextualizing the traditional focus of education, the exit assessment.

We went through a reading on "Plant Movement and Transport," highlighting turgor pressure (the pressure created by movement of fluid contents into the layers and walls of the plant cell), and differential growth (the growth that occurs at different rates in different parts of the same plant). As we read and spoke, I asked students to take notes as they would normally. But at the end of our discussion, I asked students to reexamine the writing they had previously done, look over their notes, and then come up with a writing piece (I did not say *essay*) that would best demonstrate their understanding of these particular principles.

Jose writes,

We take our ability to move around for granted. We also take nature for granted and so we don't know how to think about it. We don't know what it is we're seeing when we look at nature. A poet by the name of Whitman wrote a poem, "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing." He says that this Oak, "All alone stood it and the moss hung down from the branches." We sometimes never take the time to see, so we would ordinarily miss how this Oak, all alone in Louisiana actually lives, moves and breathes. We miss how leaves on it are kept spread wide opened, or how the stem is kept upright and firm. This gives it strength. This is turgor pressure we're not seeing.

But Whitman, a poet not even a biologist, sees it. He says, "Without any companion it grew there uttering joyous leaves of dark green."

In this Introduction to Biology, Jose has made connections that parallel Kellie's earlier. He has expressed himself and he sees himself, both in the poetry and then in the biology lesson. But most importantly, Jose has been exposed to an alternative method of learning through writing. His earlier notion about survival and human life is rearticulated in his *proof*, the scientific method used to describe steps to a conclusion; likewise, his voice is loud and clear. Jose is never going to forget turgor pressure; but even more poignant is the very real experience he has had: "lingering and dwelling" leads to insight.

Then another student, Stephanie, conjectures:

When we flip a coin, there are two possible outcomes, heads and tails, both of which are equally likely. But we are always interested in one outcome only, namely heads, it seems. If heads occurs, we call this favorable. We seem to always want favorable outcomes, so we strive to know how best to achieve this.

We fail to see the lessons of Wallace Stevens who wrote "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." He said that "The mood/Traced in the shadow/An indecipherable cause." Stevens was talking about a blackbird crossing by a window. Life is "indecipherable" is what Stevens says. We really can't tell the outcome. Nevertheless, we try, we work at knowing what the probability of getting a favorable outcome would be and so we find ourselves constantly dividing favorable outcomes by the total number of outcomes.

As did Kellie, and Amy and Jose, now Stephanie has internalized an Introduction to Mathematics lesson on "The Definition of Probability." Stephanie has an interesting outlook on the human condition, which she uses to read the Stevens I gave to the class and then to read the lesson on probability. Stephanie has done what the others have done: Namely to express herself, her voice *in* the context of the course's content and thereby rearticulating curriculum more along the lines of her own reading.

THE CONTEXT(S) OF LEARNING

If a writing portfolio were to be introduced to the biology and mathematics courses, students would find reliable themes from their own experi-

ences to enable them to read and contextualize the content of the courses. In the brief lessons above, this manner of learning is already fostering results: students are internalizing the *interconnectedness* of their experiences and their learning; they are establishing authority and ownership. And in each instance, this was done by redefining collaboration, whether between themselves and the teacher, or between texts, themselves and the teacher, and so on. The collaboration is ongoing. Once writing is introduced to facilitate these different lines of interconnectivity, students are enabled to experience themselves within the context of their learning. This is the beginning of curriculum change.

Writing, when used as a tool for learning, not only contextualizes the learning experience, but, likewise, it fosters deep, critical insights that students carry with them for the rest of their lives. Departmentalized, or compartmentalized learning is effectively evacuated with writing-to-learn strategies focused on achieving authority and ownership through collaboration; life lessons, lessons about community and about content are synthesized and connected across disciplines because the focus of education is the student and not standardized, outcome based assessment models.

NOTES

¹ Judith and Geoffrey Summerfield, *Texts and Contexts* (New York: Random House, 1986.)

² Biddy Martin, "Teaching Literature, Changing Cultures," *PMLA* 112.1 (1997): 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ Kathleen McCormick, *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 129.

⁵ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 5.

ESSAY 12

Interpretive Communities

Making Use of Readings and Misreadings in the Literature Classroom and Elsewhere

CHRISTOPHER C. WEAVER

For many of us who teach composition, one of our most important goals is to encourage students to treat their own writing with the same respect and interpretive weight we would expect them to give literary texts. We attempt to meet this goal through a workshop approach, organizing classroom activities in a way which shifts the focus from the instructor's comments to small groups of students sharing and responding to each other's work. A crucial aspect of the writing workshop is that these groups are less evaluative than interpretive. That is to say, their function is to explore *how* a piece of writing works rather than to judge *how well* it fits a predetermined set of criteria. Response groups, then, are not merely extensions of the instructor—students making educated guesses about whether or not each other's writing would meet with the instructor's approval. When they work well, response groups *presume* the merit of a piece of writing. In other words, students in a writing workshop are encouraged to treat each other's work as students in a literature class would treat canonical texts: as writing worthy of examination, discussion, and even disagreement rather than as exercises which fall short or close to the mark the instructor has set for them.

Obviously, one of the goals of a writing workshop is to nurture self-confidence and to encourage self-discovery. This approach to teaching writing is often criticized for being too "warm and fuzzy"—for valuing students' self-esteem over their ability to make critical judgments. These critics—mostly administrators and other faculty, but increasingly legislators and editorial writers as well—complain that students new to the academic community should first be required to prove they can recognize and produce good writing before they are permitted to take courses

which ask them to interpret texts, let alone treat their own writing as though it were worthy of critical analysis. What such students need, they argue, is to face up to their shortcomings through a heavy dose of evaluation.¹

However, this criticism overlooks what theorists tell us about the nature of language and of knowledge—that the meaning of a piece of writing is not brought to light by critical inquiry but, rather, is constructed by it. Interpretation, these theorists say, is not a peripheral activity to be practiced once basic skills have been mastered. Rather, it is *the* basic academic skill—the process through which academic disciplines define what constitutes knowledge. More importantly, interpretation is always a collaborative process since what an academic community regards as knowledge is always a matter of consensus arrived at through persuasion and negotiation.² It is precisely this that students need to understand and emulate in order to make sense of the way academic texts (literary and otherwise) work. And the best way to understand this process is to experience it as members of interpretive communities.³

When, after several years as a writing teacher, I began teaching courses in literature, it seemed natural that I should bring such interpretive communities into these courses. Having learned to analyze their own writing by considering its effect on a peer response group, my students would, I hoped, now come to see literary texts as subject to the same rules of interpretation as pieces they had written themselves, with meanings and nuances emerging out of multiple readings and readers rather than lying embedded in the texts themselves. However, when I attempted to duplicate the response groups from my writing classes, having students share and discuss their interpretations and reactions to literature as the basis for class papers, I found that the very same students, who in my writing classes enjoyed being treated like “real” writers, were not at all ready to be treated as “real” readers. That is, they still tended to see literary texts as puzzles with hidden meanings that only I, as the professor, could reveal to them. When they did share interpretations, their primary concern was not how different readers reacted to the text, but which interpretation was most likely to be the correct one—which reader seemed to have the answer to the puzzle. My goal of having them understand interpretation as a communal activity eluded me.

In the years that I have been teaching literature, I have thought a great deal about why interpretive communities in the writing classroom do not seem to transfer easily into communities of readers in the literature classroom—or, for that matter, into classes in other disciplines. In this essay, I

would like to work through some of my thinking on this problem, to share an assignment I have developed in response to it, and to speculate on how it might be used in disciplines other than English.

In order to understand why it was so difficult to transplant response groups from the writing classroom to the literature classroom, I was forced to go back and think about what made these groups work in the first place. Anyone who has tried to use peer groups in class can attest to the many difficulties in getting these groups to work well. It takes some time for students to trust each other to give feedback that is both supportive and useful. Even when they do trust each other, I have to convince them to take the collaborative process seriously. At first they look to me to provide them with “real” feedback. Only when I have convinced them that I’m not holding out on them—that their goal isn’t to figure out how to write to please me, do they begin to feel it’s safe to investigate how their writing might affect other readers.

The fact that I am eventually reasonably successful at creating an environment in which peer response groups work may be due to a number of factors which make writing classrooms a safer venue than literature classrooms for this sort of collaborative activity. One is the awareness of most writing teachers that grading is often counterproductive to collaboration. In recent years, compositionists have begun to explore ways of restructuring grading systems so that students are not always looking to be rewarded for coming up with the “correct” response to an assignment. The movement toward evaluating writing portfolios (collections of pieces selected by students) rather than individual papers has made it possible for students to take risks with their writing since choosing which pieces to include in their portfolios frees them to try out new approaches or styles without having to worry about the consequences of doing so unsuccessfully. And articles such as “Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting out Three Forms of Judgment”⁴ and “Grading in a Process-Based Writing Classroom”⁵ have suggested alternative grading strategies which deemphasize writing to please the teacher. It is entirely possible that these changes, which have arisen to meet the particular concerns of composition teachers, do not always find their way into literature classes, even when the instructor in question also teaches composition.

Another reason interpretive communities may be easier to establish in writing classrooms is that writing teachers tend to give assignments which invite responses based on students’ personal experiences. Many papers written in freshman writing courses are personal narratives or reflections.

Even when writing assignments are more “academic”—that is, when the subject matter is someone else’s ideas or an unfamiliar concept—writing teachers are often willing to accept responses which focus as much on students’ reactions to the material as they do on the material itself. This bias toward students’ experiences and reactions makes it easier for students to see themselves and each other as authorities with relevant things to say about their writing. This sort of authority is difficult to transplant to other disciplines where students’ unfamiliarity with the subject matter, rather than their reactions and experiences, is likely to be foregrounded.⁶

Finally, writing teachers tend to give assignments which are openended and which invite a fairly wide range of acceptable responses. This fact was brought home to me several years ago when I taught a section of college writing that was linked with an introductory sociology class. Most of the assignments involved the students applying one of several major theoretical positions to a hypothetical situation. As I organized students into response groups to discuss their sociology papers, I quickly realized how few possible “right” answers there were to the questions and how limited the range of appropriate responses was. As it turned out, students in these groups functioned not as an interpretive community so much as a support group. Although this demonstrated how different writing in the disciplines often is from the writing we do in composition courses, I also realized that the situation was not that dissimilar from that in my literature classes. There too, students were more concerned with helping each other get the correct (read “teacher-approved”) answer rather than sharing and exploring their responses.

If I wanted to cultivate interpretive communities that really worked, then, I was going to have to change the type of assignments I gave. I was helped to do this by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff’s *A Community of Writers*, a writing textbook which contains a chapter on how readers construct meaning as they read.⁷ One of the exercises in this chapter asks students to compose a narrative of how they read a poem and to share and compare their narratives with other readers, trying to understand not only the poem itself, but their process of reading and how it compares to the processes of other readers. Elbow and Belanoff then ask students to reflect on what this activity tells them about the kind of readers they are:

It’s interesting to get a better picture of *who we are as readers*—what lenses we read through. There is no such thing as perfectly neutral reading. But insofar as we can get a sense of what lenses we read through, we can get a better sense of what kinds of things we might miss. Do you think, for

example, that women read and notice and react differently from how men do?⁸

My students were hesitant to participate in interpretive communities because sharing and responding to each other's writing seemed pointless unless they were certain they had the right answer. If they were going to be evaluated on their ability to explain and argue for a valid interpretation of a literary text, then there didn't seem to be any point in sharing what might be misreadings—especially when I, as the professor, knew what the valid interpretations were. While they had all been through enough English classes to know “the rules of the game”—that they were supposed to piece together their own interpretations rather than getting them ready made from *Cliff Notes*, they were also savvy enough to look to me for any “clues” they could get.

My solution to this problem was to change the goal of the assignment as well as my criteria for evaluation. Rather than asking them to argue persuasively for their interpretation, I would ask them to compare their responses of a text to the responses of other readers and to account for similarities and differences. I would evaluate them not on the validity of their interpretations nor on their success at supporting them but on how clearly and fully they explained and explored these multiple readings. The assignment had three parts, beginning with their initial impressions and gradually moving outward to include reactions more and more removed from their own. In the first stage of the assignment, I asked them to give an account of their own reactions to a text. Second, I asked them to share their accounts and to compare them to those of other students in their response group. Finally, I asked them to compare the group's responses to those of an academic reader—either myself or an established literary critic—and to speculate on the similarities and differences between the two interpretive communities. Did we, I asked them, tend to read differently? I emphasized that that their grade would not be affected by whether or not I thought their interpretations were valid.

I first used this assignment in an introductory literature class where we were discussing Norman Maclean's “A River Runs Through It.” I asked each group of students to select a few passages from the story that they thought were interesting and to write a short paper discussing their reactions. They would make copies of their papers and discuss them in class. I told them that the next draft of their papers could include any or all of the passages discussed in their groups, but that whatever they wrote

about, they would have to give an account of the group's reactions and interpretations as well as their own.

In one of the groups I sat in on, a student had written on a rather long passage in which Norman goes into detail about how to read a river and think like a fish. The student said that he thought this passage must be important because Maclean spends so much time on it, but he confessed that he wasn't sure why it was important. At the end, he ventured that Norman spends so much time talking about fishing because "it's something that binds the family together. It's their religion." The rest of the students were then invited to share their reactions to the passage. Most of them were fairly dismissive. They thought that the fly-fishing passages were boring, at least to anyone who wasn't a fisherman. "He probably just wrote them because he was interested in the sport and he thought the reader would be, too" said one of them. One of the women in the group said that when she read the story, she too skimmed over these sections. She dismissed them as "guy stuff—a male-bonding kind of thing." She then pointed out a passage where Norman says that the only thing that the women of the time knew about fishing was how to clean the men's catch. Only one of the students in the group agreed that the passage had more interpretive weight. She said that, although she hadn't thought about it much when she was reading the story, she now wondered if maybe the Macleans spend a great deal of time trying to understand the river because they can't understand each other. That prompted the first student to wonder if maybe they understand each other *through* the river.

At that point everyone moved on to the next student's paper, and I left them to join another group, reminding the students that the next draft they would submit would have to account for the reactions and ideas of the others in the group. When we met to discuss that draft a week later, I had written my own short paper, trying to incorporate some of the topics the different groups had discussed. I asked the students to read my paper and to talk with me about what it said about me as a reader—whether I was different because I was an English professor. After reading my paper, a number of students did think my style of responding to the story was significantly different. At one point in the paper I talked about the discussion of the fly-fishing passage. I pointed out how often the theme of reading came up in the story. Norman looks for messages in various texts. Sometimes they are familiar ones such as the Bible but sometimes words appear in stranger places such as the word "LOVE" which he and his brother see tattooed across the posterior of the town prostitute. Throughout the story, I said, Norman looks for clues about how to live his life—

particularly how to live with loss. As a teacher and a minister's son, he is used to seeking knowledge in books. But as a Maclean, he feels he has to prove himself as a man, and one of the ways he does this is by fishing. When he "reads" the river, he is trying to make sense of his life by bringing together these two worlds.

The students were quick to point out how such a reading could only have come from an English teacher. Who else, they said, would be this interested in the idea of "reading." They were particularly amused that I referred to "texts"—a term that they reserved for books with titles like *Concepts in Anthropology* or *The World of Greek Drama*. Only an English professor, they felt, would pick out a word tattooed on a prostitute's backside and call it a "text." They also seemed a bit taken aback at how complete my interpretation was—at how all of my observations seemed to fit neatly into a scheme and lead up to a conclusion. Their own readings, many of them said, felt much more fragmentary and tentative. I told them that this was an important observation and reminded them that the assignment didn't require them to read like I did, and that they would not be penalized if their interpretations were fragmentary and tentative.

While they mostly noted differences between our interpretive styles, the students in the group I had joined did point out some similarities. They had talked about the Macleans trying to understand the river because they couldn't understand each other. That wasn't too far from what I was saying, some of them thought—although they did notice that my language tended to be different: I talked about Norman "reading" the river while they talked about "understanding" it (my obsession with the idea of "reading" again). In both cases, they wondered, wasn't it just a matter of making sense of the world? The class ended with me giving them the final stage of their assignment—to incorporate my reading into their papers and to talk about how an English professor's reading style was different from theirs.

Generally speaking, I was very pleased with the papers. And, more importantly for my purposes, I was pleased with the way the groups worked. Although they seemed skeptical at first, once students understood that they would not be judged on the validity of their interpretations but on how well they accounted for different readings, they were much more willing to listen and respond to each other's papers without constantly seeking my validation. The fact that I was willing to share my own interpretations made them less suspicious that I was "holding out" on them—waiting to see if their readings matched mine. A few students shared interpretations of the story that I would consider misreadings.

This happened, however, no more frequently than it did when I had asked for more traditional papers. But even when it did happen, the students seemed to discover so much about the story from their discussion of it, that I felt the advantages far outweighed the drawbacks.

I wondered whether this sort of interpretive collaboration might be useful in disciplines other than English. My previous experience with the sociology class seemed to argue against the possibility that interpretive communities were relevant in courses where texts weren't ambiguous enough to support a wide range of acceptable responses. Yet what I had learned from my experience with my literature class was that it was useful to explore the range of all possible answers, not just correct ones. What students learned from comparing readings with each other and with me was not simply which interpretations were sanctioned by the professor, but also how and why our methods of reading were different—information which is vital to understanding the way an academic discipline works.

My limited experience with disciplines other than English suggests that students' unfamiliarity with disciplinary values, conventions, and boundaries is fairly widespread. In fact, the problem may be even greater in disciplines where what counts as knowledge is less dependent on subjective reactions and personal experience—in the social and natural sciences. As authority becomes further removed from a student's experience, so too must the conventions of a discipline become more unfamiliar, creating a "discourse gap" between students and their instructors.

Many compositionists have argued that students unfamiliar with academic discourse are best served by teachers who "demystify" discourse conventions by making them explicit. However, it is not always clear to teachers which conventions students don't understand nor *why* these conventions cause them problems. The sociology professor with whom I shared linked classes has told me how frustrated she is that so many students fail to assimilate a basic convention of her discipline—that sociology seeks to understand social phenomena by looking for recurring patterns in groups' behavior. But although she defines this convention explicitly, she still finds students who respond to sociological issues in terms of individual motivations and experiences. That students are more comfortable with explanations based on individual values, motives, and behavior, is not surprising—it represents a basis for explaining the world with which they are more familiar and comfortable. What is troubling is that demystifying the difference between their ways of knowing and those of the discipline has not been more effective at initiating them into

the unfamiliar discourse community. The same students who can define this difference seem unable to practice it.

Such a failure suggests that conventions are not demystified merely by defining them. Students do not assimilate conventions by memorizing definitions but by encountering them in practice and seeing how they differ from other conventions. Yet the emphasis on assimilating these conventions and on using them to come up with the “right” interpretation is so great that students may seek shortcuts—regurgitating the conventions as information (often out of context) rather than employing them to interpret information. Indeed, my sociologist colleague tells me that she sees this often. She marvels that students can define what theoretical perspectives sociologists use to explain behavior and yet—often in the same examination—write essays which seem to contradict their own definitions. Like my literature students, their concern about having the correct answer gets in the way of understanding how the discipline determines that answer.

I suspect, therefore, that collaborative reading may be useful in other disciplines for the same reason it was useful in my literature classes. “*Do we read differently?*” is a question students and teachers in a variety of disciplines probably ought to be asking ourselves and each other. Students who don’t know the “rules of the game” won’t learn them by having these rules spelled out for them but by experiencing how they shape our interpretations of whatever facts make up our fields of study—how they define what we look for, what we count as knowledge, and how we construct our arguments. In order to understand how interpretive communities work within a discipline, students need to become aware of their own interpretive strategies and where they differ from and overlap with those of the discipline. This may mean decreasing our emphasis on having students produce “valid” interpretations—especially in introductory courses—and replace it with an emphasis on exploring and explaining the values, assumptions, and strategies which make their ways of knowing different from ours.

Such a shift will inevitably invite more criticism from those who are calling for a greater focus on evaluation. They will accuse us of yet another evasion of tough academic standards. In fact, they are likely to view it as an infection that has spread from the relativistic humanities into the “hard” sciences. These critics, however, are not unlike students in search of the shortest route to a right answer; they want results without having to go through the complex process it takes to get them. We need to respond that accountability is more than arriving at that answer; it is knowing how you got there.

NOTES

¹ The implication of this line of criticism seems to be that students need to spend less time thinking about what they are doing and more time thinking about how well they are doing it.

² This is not, of course, to argue that there are no such things as facts. It is, however, to say that facts must always be interpreted. A discipline continually redefines which facts are important and which are not, as well as through what theoretical lenses such facts may be viewed. While practitioners of these disciplines may take these assumptions for granted, they are the very things likely to trip up those unfamiliar with the interpretive community.

³ Ironically, the idea of “interpretive communities” comes to composition studies through literary criticism. In *Is There a Text In This Class* (1980), the noted critic Stanley Fish argued that it was not the formal features of a text which gave rise to interpretations but the common assumptions and values of a community of readers which allowed them to define the formal features of a text. The idea of the interpretive community quickly spread to scholars in composition and rhetoric where it has increasingly replaced “skills-based” models of teaching writing. Pat Bizzell, in particular, has noted her debt to Fish (see her introduction to *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*). Interestingly, though, collaborative models of classroom activity, which are common in composition classes, are much less prevalent in literature classes—an issue which I go on to discuss here.

⁴ Peter Elbow. “Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting Out Three Forms of Judgment,” *College English* 55.2 (1993): 187–206.

⁵ Christopher C. Weaver. “Grading in a Process-Based Writing Classroom,” *The Theory and Practice of Grading Writing: Problems and Possibilities* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 141–150.

⁶ In fact, writing workshops’ focus on personal narrative has been the source of some criticism within composition studies. Some compositionists—notably Pat Bizzell and Mike Rose—caution that introductory writing courses which privilege personal experience may not adequately prepare students for courses in which personal experience is irrelevant; see Pat Bizzell, “College Composition: Initiation into the Academic Discourse Community,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 12.2 (1982): 191–207, and Mike Rose, “Remedial Writing Courses: A Critique and a Proposal,” *College English* 45.2 (1983): 109–28. However, my position here is somewhat different. I bring up this focus on the personal not because I object to it—on the contrary, I don’t think it is possible for students to participate in interpretive communities without being aware of their own reactions and experiences—but because I want to recognize it as a difficulty in making the transition

between writing classrooms and other disciplines, particularly the study of literature.

⁷ Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, *A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course In Writing* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1985.) See “Workshop 11 Interpretation as Response: Reading as the Creation of Meaning,” 285–310.

⁸ Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, 292.

ESSAY 13

Read, Write, and Learn

Improving Literacy Instruction Across the Disciplines

BONNIE A.HAIN

RICHARD LOUTH

INTRODUCTION

A student walks into History 101 and sees the evening's assignment on the chalkboard—"Read Chapter 10 on the Mycenean Greeks." Like many content-area teachers, the instructor believes that every student will interpret this assignment in exactly the same way. Yet, "reading" is a different experience for each person. To some students, this assignment will mean running their eyes over the text and looking at accompanying pictures of vases. For others, it will mean underlining and memorizing every name and date. For the history teacher, "reading the chapter" could mean either of these two. Or, it could also mean gaining an understanding of Mycenean Greeks that would allow students to formulate a thesis on how the Mycenean age contrasts with the classical age. "Reading" is a term so open to interpretation that without an exact frame of reference, "read the chapter," could become an almost meaningless command.

It would be wrong to assume, as some students do, that all readers open a book, start at the beginning, and run their eyes over the words, automatically absorbing knowledge in the same way for each text. Reading, like writing, is a process which can differ for each individual and task and which is essentially active, cognitive, hierarchical, and recursive. Experienced readers, like experienced writers, are not at the mercy of their evolving texts but are constantly in charge. Their cognitive actions range hierarchically from "decoding" written words to bringing questions, testing ideas as they evolve, and developing concepts or "schema" as they go back and forth within the text as well as between the text and the mind. For example, a reader familiar with reading science

investigations knows that sometimes investigations do not list all required materials in the materials list. The experienced reader will actively search for additional materials needed, questioning each direction to see if the materials listed in that direction match the materials list. This mature reader, upon finding a new material listed, is prepared to decide if the investigation is feasible. Those readers that are passive and who have little experience with texts rarely take much out of texts when reading. So, those unfamiliar with reading science investigations, because they fail to look for additional necessary materials, may choose to do an investigation that is unfeasible, not realizing upon reading the text that the additional materials are needed yet unavailable.

The process of reading may be artificially subdivided into three stages: prereading, initial reading, and rereading. It is safe to assume that students are not fully aware of these three stages, how they complement each other, and how they contribute to the reading process in different ways.

Prereading occurs when readers access prior knowledge about texts and about reading prior to decoding a text. Types of prereading include actions that give a reader a sense of the whole: scanning the table of contents and bibliography, skimming chapter and section headings, looking at accompanying illustrations, reading the first and last paragraphs, and reading a book jacket. Prereading helps readers anticipate the focus, concepts, and details of a text and as such makes it easier for the active reader to comprehend a text. After all, it is easier to find something when one knows what one is looking for.

Initial reading typically involves decoding of the text (illustrations, tables, charts, and prose) from start to finish. According to Margaret Mackey, during this stage of the process, experienced readers are not seeking complete understanding of the text but instead are attempting “good enough readings” which “make compromises with the demands of a text”:

Rather than call a halt to the reading process while they investigate a detail, many readers seem more inclined to come up with a make-do interpretation that will enable them to keep reading. They develop provisional understandings; they simply take note that something is important and keep on reading without pausing to fret over its complete significance; they provide affective substitutes from their own personal experiences when they cannot immediately make sense of a cultural reference; they carry on even when they are not clear that their understanding of the story is accu-

rate or appropriate, hoping for clarity to develop over time. In all cases, the preference is to keep going rather than to call a halt.¹

A “good enough reading” typically allows even the most experienced reader to “take out” of a text only the most superficial, literal meaning. Less experienced readers, of course, mistake this “good enough” reading for the real thing—developed comprehension. During the initial reading, only the most mature readers, those who have much experience reading and who decode with both fluency (quickly enough to see words and phrases, rather than individual letters) and accuracy (90–95 percent of the words of a text decoded accurately) can derive more than a global, general understanding of a text. Unfortunately, many students consider the initial reading to be the entire reading process.

For true comprehension to occur, as Judith Langer points out in *Envisioning Literature: Literary Understanding and Literature Instruction*, rereading of the text is required.² Rereading occurs whenever readers revisit a text. Types of rereading include: rescanning the text as a whole, literature discussion circles, reading of secondary sources related to the text, and writing about the text. With rereading, the superficial meaning derived from the initial reading is deepened, developed, amplified. The meaning derived from rereading activities is usually what content-area teachers desire when they assign reading assignments; they want students to acquire developed knowledge in the content.

Another facet of reading as process that is important for students to understand is that reading is always rhetorical; we read within a particular context for a purpose and audience. When we read “in private” at home, we often select texts ourselves to gain pleasure or relax. Thus, some people read novels to enjoy the literary merits of an author while others read newspapers for current events or “surf the net” for facts that are intriguing. When we read on the job, it is more often a “public” act, at the request of someone else who wants something accomplished (a manager who wants an employee to read the directions for completing a time sheet appropriately or a client who wants a proposal to be considered, and so on).

When students read material in an academic setting, context, purpose, and audience must be addressed. Is the assigned book meant to provide new information, connect to another reading, supplement a lecture, or introduce primary sources? Is the reading’s purpose to prepare students for the next class, to expand their minds in some ambiguous way, or to prepare them for a paper? Is the audience of the reading simply the student, or is it

peers, teacher, or perhaps a multiple audience? Without a clear understanding of the rhetorical situation or purpose for reading, readers are likely to falter. Yet, so many classroom reading assignments never establish the rhetorical situation for reading. This is one reason content-area teachers find their students do not adequately “read” the content texts.

Another reason students do not adequately “read” is that the texts themselves are inadequate. When teachers select content materials, they often fail to assess the “readability” of the texts. Textbook publishers try to present texts that are appropriately geared for a particular level of student, but since each student body is slightly different, and since the reading skills of college students vary widely, those teachers who do not assess their students’ reading abilities may continue to find students unable to derive knowledge from texts. To assess the readability of a text, teachers need to ask a subset of average students (four or five students should suffice for a class that typically averages twenty-five to thirty students) to read aloud sections of the text under consideration. If most of the students can decode (say aloud) 90–95 percent of the words in the selected passages, and if these students can provide a general or global summary of the passages read, then the teacher will know the text is readable. If most of the students are unable to decode the text or to summarize it, then the students in the class will be unlikely to derive content knowledge from the reading of the text.

It is easy to see why content-area teachers often find themselves disappointed in their students’ abilities to “read the textbooks,” for reading is a complicated process, and few content-area teachers adequately prepare students to read well. There are many strategies content-area teachers can utilize to get students to read well in the content-areas, and it would be impossible for a single article to detail them all. A content-area teacher’s first step in improving students’ reading might be to do the following:

- *Clearly define “reading” for a class*
- *Reexamine current reading assignments*
- *Introduce students to the stages of the reading process*
- *Consider the rhetorical situation underlying each reading*
- *Assess the readability of texts*

In this article, we are going to focus on the use of a strategy dependent on the five above: the use of prewriting to improve reading, and therefore comprehension of, content-area texts.

THE WRITING/READING CONNECTION

Writing has the power to increase comprehension by actively involving students in a subject. Research shows that writing not only transmits knowledge but also produces it in the writer.³ Thus, James Britton describes how ideas that did not previously exist suddenly materialize as the writer is “shaping at the point of utterance.”⁴ It is this shaping of thought as writing occurs that makes it a powerful tool in the reading process, for as readers shape their thought through writing, they become more active, and thereby “better” readers. Educators interested in teaching students to write better have devised activities they termed “prewriting”—quick, painless forms of writing designed to stimulate thought while requiring little or no preparation. These prewriting activities help writers to untangle the mass of thought that exists in their heads, usually to get writers started on a first draft. However, when used throughout the reading process, these same activities help readers to preread, to do an initial read, and to reread texts.

It is important to note that the activities listed below are designed to be used for adult, mature readers, and though some of these activities can be adapted for less experienced readers, some are clearly not appropriate for emergent readers or for young children. Reading ability and writing ability clearly determine which activities will work and which will not. For example, those readers who are still having trouble with decoding will lose their train of thought too easily and miss the meaning of a text altogether if the initial reading is interrupted. (Since most people’s short-term memory only allows for seven chunks of meaning, plus or minus two chunks, those that read slowly cannot hold enough content in short-term memory to allow for meaning to be made well.)⁵ Likewise, the development of students’ writing and thinking skills will determine which of the prewriting techniques below are most effective: while one level student may profit from brainstorming, another may find sketching or cubing more suitable as a strategy for enhancing reading. Though most college-level students have reached both reading maturity and intellectual maturity levels high enough to use the activities described below to advantage, some special-needs students may not have reached these levels, and the activities may require adaptation. The six activities below are designed to enhance the reading comprehension of average adult mature readers.

FREEWriting

Freewriting consists of writing freely, with no stopping, for about ten minutes. The writer simply keeps the pen on the page and tries not to stop, not to look back, not to correct errors or worry about where the ideas are going. If writers can't think of anything to put on the page, they write, "I can't think of anything to say," over and over until a new utterance pops into the head. This activity has been described as "vomiting on the page"—a perhaps ungracious, but accurate metaphor, since undigested thoughts and ideas come tumbling onto the page. The goal is to fill a few pages, knowing that the freewrite is not going to be read by anybody else and can even be thrown away when done. Generally, students are amazed at how much writing they can generate, and there is a sense of wonder and success at seeing oneself able to produce a couple of pages of writing in a few minutes.

For many writers, freewriting allows a kind of free association of ideas that brings new thoughts, connections, and details to a subject. Unstructured and painless, it can become almost meditative. For that reason, it is an especially good exercise for getting the mind revved up and prepared for a reading activity. Many reading problems occur simply because the student begins with an essentially blank slate, failing to preread, expecting knowledge to pour out of the book and into the brain. Yet, as Frank Smith demonstrated in his classic book on the reading process, *Understanding Reading*, the eye and the mind must actively seek knowledge on the page, searching for specific words, images, and concepts as the brain builds schema and makes meaning from the symbols relayed by the eye to the brain.⁶ Freewriting allows the mind to prepare for a text by stirring it out of inactivity, by getting the brain to recall background knowledge, and by generating leading questions that can lead to the creation of appropriate schema for constructing knowledge.

For example, a student assigned to read a chapter on the role of British generals during the American Revolution for history class might be asked to write freely on the subject "American Revolution" or the subject "British Generals" for ten minutes just prior to beginning the reading. Or the teacher might guide the freewrite slightly by asking students to write freely by answering one or more of the following questions, still asking that the writing be nonstop with no lifting of the pen off the paper and no editing. What does the student think of when hearing the phrases "American Revolution" and "British generals"? What words, images, stories, and memories come to mind? What concepts might appear in a reading devoted to British generals and the American Revolution?

Freewriting need not be solely a prereading activity, but also can be useful as a rereading activity. A student might pause midway through a chapter to do a quick freewrite on what is remembered thus far of the chapter, of what is expected next, or what is confusing thus far. After an initial reading of the whole chapter, a freewrite that attempts to summarize the chapter or that answers end-of-chapter questions can help the reader reread the text and to create a more developed interpretation of the material present in the chapter.

A series of freewrites may also be a way to activate readers' abilities to make meaning of content texts. This freewriting technique is called looping.⁷ Looping consists of doing several consecutive freewrites, writing a summary sentence at the end of each ten-minute freewrite, with the summary sentence as the focus for the next ten-minute freewrite. As each loop is made, like a series of concentric circles, the reader should get closer and closer to the core knowledge already present buried deep in long-term memory. Thus, looping helps a reader gain several perspectives on a single topic, helping generate a developed understanding of the content-area text being studied.

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming consists of listing words and phrases on a page and producing a document that resembles a grocery list. Like freewriting, it is a low-pressure activity that can fill a page quickly and stimulate the mind at any point in the reading process. Unlike freewriting, it requires isolated words and phrases instead of sentences. It may be especially helpful for students with weak verbal skills.

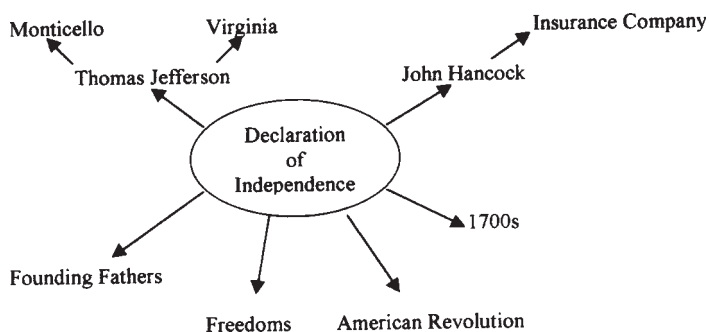
A business student assigned to read Peters and Waterman's first chapter of *In Search of Excellence*, "Successful American Companies," might focus a brainstorm on the book or chapter titles.⁸ What associations do "Excellence," "Successful," and "American Companies" bring to mind? The student who brainstorms such a list prior to reading the chapter will come to the chapter with a few concepts and details in mind that will increase engagement with the text. Another strategy that might be helpful prior to reading would be to review the initial brainstormed list and to draw lines between words and phrases that relate and to write a summary sentence or two to capture the "sum" of the parts of the list. Or, having reviewed the brainstormed list, prior to reading, the reader might make a list of questions that he/she believes will be answered by the reading. After the initial reading, the reader can review the brainstormed list, sum-

mary sentences, or question list and add, take away, or change them to capture ideas generated from the initial reading. This rereading activity links the prereading, initial reading, and rereading processes to help the reader form connections between prior knowledge and the utterance shaped through reading and writing. As with the freewriting strategies, the brainstorming activities work to increase reading comprehension because they help readers interact with texts more actively than when readers simply pick up a text and begin to scan that text with their eyes.

CLUSTERING

The student who circles words in a brainstorm is already using the visual side of the brain to enhance activity, and thus comprehension. Clustering consists of creating a kind of diagram out of words associated with a subject. Usually, the central subject, for instance, “Declaration of Independence,” is circled in the center of the page. Spokes are drawn outward from the central, circled thought, and the person doing the cluster brainstorms words that are tangential to the central thought. These words are placed at the end of the spokes. Then, each of these words is connected to other words with spokes. Ultimately, the page is filled with a web of words, all interconnected and leading back to the central concept which started the cluster. For example, see Figure 13.1 below:

Figure 13.1



The visual element in clustering and the almost organic movement from broader terms to more specific ones combine to make this activity particularly compelling. It is loose, because there is no right or wrong, but it is not as loose as a brainstorm, for there is a sort of logic propelling it out

from the center. Used before reading, it can help visual learners predict; during an initial reading, it can help organize thoughts; after reading, it can help readers develop their interpretations of the text and make better connections to their prior knowledge, to previous texts read, and to the ideas within a particular text. Two variations of this technique work particularly well for people who need more structure from the start. First, the person doing the cluster can draw only five spokes off the center circle, with the terms “see, hear, taste, smell, touch” labelling the spokes. Then, the idea is to connect the central thought to ideas and details that are sensual. So, Declaration of Independence might be connected to:

- *see=Thomas Jefferson*
- *hear=sound of the Liberty Bell ringing*
- *taste=freedom*
- *smell=gunpowder needed to win independence*
- *touch=the fine parchment and the wet ink*

Then each of these new thoughts can be connected to other sensual details so that a rich picture of the central object appears.

The other variation requires six spokes from the center circle, with the question words “who, what, where, when, why, how” labelling the spokes. Here the idea is to attempt to answer the questions with regard to the central thought. So, the “who” for “Declaration of Independence” might produce a list such as: “Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock, Founding Fathers,” and so on. By prompting answers to the questions, the person creating the web or cluster prior to initial reading quickly discovers prior knowledge of the topic, including misconceptions that might be cleared up with an active read of the text. During the reading, these two variations help the reader capture important details of the text. If done as a rereading activity, these clusters serve as both note-taking devices and new utterances, new thoughts.

SKETCHING

Sketching can take many forms and has the power to engage a creative faculty of the mind that is too often ignored in academia. Doodles, illustrations, charts, cartoons, or snapshot drawings all help readers—particularly “visual learners”—interact with a text to gain a new perspective. As with the other techniques mentioned thus far, sketching can be done at any point in the process. As a prereading activity, it makes graphic the reader’s prior

knowledge, readying the reader for the schema of the text. If done during initial reading, the reader “rereads and prereads” simultaneously, helping the reader make sense of what has been read while readying the reader for what is to come. Done after the initial reading, sketches help readers further their ability to make graphic the connections between and among texts.

So, for example, a business student reading about successful American companies in *In Search of Excellence* might read the first paragraph, which pertains to organizational charts, and try to sketch a chart for a successful company. This could contribute to the understanding of the text, since later in the chapter there are two charts on the subject. By viewing the self-drawn chart with the author-drawn charts, the reader may see the need to expand prior knowledge or may verify prior knowledge. A teacher might, after the initial reading of the chapter, ask students to sketch a good manager or a disgruntled worker, or to draw a Dilbert-like cartoon of an unsuccessful company meeting, allowing students to capture ideas and connections made through the reading of the chapter. This sketch would demonstrate both what the student had discovered through the process of reading and what the student might still need to learn on the subject covered by the chapter.

Teachers need to remember and must remind students that the goal of sketching is not artistic mastery. Those intimidated by their artistic side might be directed to use simple stick figures or to cut and paste magazine pictures. Students with access to graphics programs might choose to juxtapose a series of clip art pictures. Teachers can encourage students to explore the role of graphic and verbal connections, and thus the development of content knowledge, by providing lots of materials (e.g., chalk, crayons, pencils, watercolors, different types and colors of paper) and by rewarding students who demonstrate content knowledge regardless of the artistic merit of the sketch.

CUBING

Another, more analytical type of prewriting activity that works well to improve the reading process is cubing. Cubing consists of viewing a subject from six different perspectives by

- *Describing it*
- *Comparing it*
- *Associating it*
- *Analyzing it*

- *Applying it*
- *Demonstrating you are for or against it*

A student using cubing would take a subject in a reading text, for instance a chapter in an art book on Impressionism, and spend about two minutes writing about that subject from each of the perspectives above. The prewritings could all be in one format (e.g., all freewriting) or vary in format, and they could come at any point in the reading process as directed by the teacher. Thus, the description of Impressionism might be a loose freewrite on the subject touching on a few paintings, the comparison a more focused freewrite comparing the Impressionist movement to the Romantic movement, the association a brainstorm of impressionist painters, the analysis a cluster on Monet's *Waterlilies*, the application a quick impressionistic sketch of a landscape the student sees outside a window, the for or against a prewriting of any kind that critiques Impressionism. As a reader approaches Impressionism from these six perspectives, the subject accretes new layers of meaning which could impact the student's reading at any point in the process.

TAGMEMICS

Tagmemics is a complex system of inquiry based on particle/wave/field theory.⁹ Due to the complexity of this activity and the amount of information required to make the activity work, this activity is most useful as a rereading technique. The tagmemics system works on the assumption that any subject can be treated as a particle, as a wave, or as a field. A particle is a simple definition of a static, unchanging, object (e.g., a word, a phrase, or a text as a whole). For example, in an anthropology chapter on Neanderthal man, one first could describe Neanderthal man as a static object (shape of skull, height, eating habits, locales, etc.). A wave is a description of an evolving object. As a wave, Neanderthal man could be described as something that had a beginning, a middle, and a continuing effect (from his origins to, as some believe, his persistence as Bigfoot!). A field is a description of a generic object in a large plane of meaning. Thus, the Neanderthal Man as a field could be described in terms of his relationship to earlier Pithecanthropus, later Cro-Magnon, other primates, surrounding species, and so forth. In addition to the three types of descriptions for each object, tagmemics allows for three modes of thought within each type of description: comparison/contrast, variation, and distribution. The result is a grid like the one shown in Table 13.1 below:

Table 13.1

Particle	Wave	Field
Comparison/Contrast	Comparison/Contrast	Comparison/Contrast
Variation	Variation	Variation
Distribution	Distribution	Distribution

The reader could be taught how to use the grid and to fill in the nine cells after reading a text. In completing the grid, the reader would reread the text from many different perspectives, thus shaping many new thoughts regarding the content conveyed in the text. Nonetheless, most people find the nine-cell grid intimidating, so often teachers instruct students in only the three types of descriptions (particle, wave, and field).

Another way teachers can simplify tagmemics to make it useful to students is to guide student inquiry through questions based on the different types of inquiry encouraged by the tagmemic system. This use of tagmemics, without the terminology, may be best for students and teachers whose content is already jargon laden. So, one might ask the following questions after students read a passage on Neanderthal man:

- *What is Neanderthal man? Describe him as in a snapshot—something that will not change.*
- *What happened before Neanderthal man to make him come into existence?*
- *What happened during Neanderthal man's time on earth? What happened to end Neanderthal man?*
- *How has Neanderthal man continued?*
- *How is Neanderthal man like other primates? How is he like other ancient hominids? What is the largest grouping of which Neanderthal man is apart?*

If students are taught the grid, then they might at some point be asked to generate their own questions of a text. The activity of developing such questions would serve as a high-level critical thinking, rereading activity and would encourage a thorough development of ideas.

CONCLUSION

A student walks into History 101 and sees the evening's assignment on the chalkboard:

Freewrite for 10 minutes using the phrase "Mycenean Greeks" as your focus. Then read Chapter 10 on the Mycenean Greeks. After you finish your initial read of the chapter, sketch a day in the life of a Mycenean Greek.

When students arrive at the next class, they are given about ten minutes to do a cubing on the Myceneans in journals which they use, actively, at the beginning of each class. At the end of class, to prepare for their next reading assignment, students are asked to brainstorm ten questions they have about classical Greeks.

By combining related out-of-class and in-class prewritings with well-defined reading assignments, the content-area teacher can enhance students' interaction with texts without sacrificing substantial class time. Each student will still "read" the text in a different manner from other students in the class; after all, no person's reading process is the same as another's. Yet, each will have at least five points of connection with the others who do the assignment:

1. The freewriting will access prior knowledge about Mycenean Greeks.
2. The initial reading of the text will build on that prior knowledge.
3. The sketch, a reading of the text, will help shape graphic key ideas.
4. The cluster will help reread the text as well as assess knowledge.
5. The brainstorm will provide connection between reading assignments.

Through these connected prewriting activities, students are able to convey to the instructor what they knew prior to reading the text, what they know now, what they still need to know, and how they connect one segment of knowledge to the rest of the course. Prewritings, done in this way, are not "add-ons" but integral pedagogical tools for engaging and educating students about course content.

Using a write-to-learn approach and prewriting techniques, students can become more actively engaged with texts throughout the reading

process. These prewriting activities work to increase students' levels of activity and the connections they can make between prior knowledge and new material presented in content texts, and thus, can increase student reading comprehension. While content-area teachers may have little desire to "teach" reading and writing, since communication in the classroom frequently comes through written texts (professionally written and student written), content-area teachers who do not adequately prepare students to read and write the discourse of the content will surely find that their students do not adequately master that discourse or the content. The prewriting activities provided in this article are only one step in enhancing student abilities to comprehend content texts; yet, by providing students with the opportunity to try a few of these activities before, during, and after the reading of content texts, teachers will discover a profound difference in the quality of student learning and communication of the content provided by those texts.

NOTES

¹ Margaret Mackey, "Good Enough Reading: Momentum and Accuracy in the Reading of Complex Fiction," *Research in the Teaching of English* 31 (December 1997): 455–456.

² Judith A. Langer, *Envisioning Literature: Literary Understanding and Literature Instruction* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995), 16.

³ James M. McCrimmon, "Writing as a Way of Knowing," in *Rhetoric and Composition: A Sourcebook for Teachers and Writers*, ed. Richard L. Graves (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1984), 3–11.

⁴ James Britton, "The Composing Processes and the Functions of Writing," in *Research on Composing*, ed. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1978), 24.

⁵ George A. Miller, *The Psychology of Communication* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1967).

⁶ Frank Smith, *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971).

⁷ Peter Elbow, *Writing With Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 59–78.

⁸ Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (New York: Warner Books, 1982).

⁹ Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970).

ESSAY 14

Emerging Meaning Reading as a Process

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Well aware that our students, like many who are entering college, haven't done much reading, and having experienced certain success in engaging students in the writing process, we began to consider how our prior training in writing as process might be useful in expanding our understanding and teaching of reading as process.

Iser describes reading as a "dynamic interaction" between text and reader. He explains that since a whole text cannot usually be perceived in its entirety, reading is an unfolding process: "There is a moving viewpoint which travels along inside that which it has to apprehend"¹; this viewpoint is, obviously, the reader. Iser argues that meaning is not brought about solely by the text: "Any successful transfer, however—initiated by the text—depends on the extent to which this text can activate the individual reader's faculties of perceiving and processing."² Recognizing that reading is an active, "unfolding" process,³ we asked what are the steps of such a process and how can we help students, via awareness of and engagement in such steps, increase their reading efficiency and effectiveness?

In college, reading, like writing, is evermore a complex process. It is "no longer solely thought of as simply something one does or teaches, but rather is understood as a complex, orchestrated, constructive process through which individuals make meaning."⁴ Reading is primarily a process of making meaning (signification) involving understanding (decoding and interpreting or comprehending); it entails being able to put the author's ideas into the reader's words (summarizing), seeing how the text does what one "sees" it doing (analyzing), and making connections (syn-

thesis). Reading is an interactive process that involves several activities that operate simultaneously in particular contexts.

While we may think we understand this process as teachers, one of the most important things we have learned is that students and teachers need to explore what they mean by *reading* and “how” they as individuals perform this task. Becoming aware of their own reading process, reflecting on how they make sense of a text or how they make meaning, is essential for teachers and students to reach some consensus on what it means to read. The assumption that we as well as our students know what we mean when we assign reading is further complicated by the variety of types of reading based on texts and purpose, as well as differences in students’ learning styles.

Even though many students are aware that they have difficulty reading, it is even harder for them to tell us what these difficulties are. They are easily frustrated by what they perceive as complicated texts, and very often their only response to us in class is that they couldn’t complete the reading assignment because they “didn’t get it.” As teachers, we share their frustration, and so we considered how methods from our writing courses might be useful in understanding the reading process. We set out to consider students’ views and attitudes, ways to get them to reflect on what they are doing, and which concerns of theory would be most applicable. Almost immediately, we found that establishing a context⁵ provides a place to start, a precise way to look at students’ reading process.

Context, either prescribed or developed (we recommend a combination of both, just to get things started), serves a number of functions. First off, it provides purpose: to determine not only what the text is saying, but also what the text offers the context. Context helps establish specific criteria for making connections. The reader looks for what the author, via text, has to say about specific concerns. The reader is asked to consider what the writer is attempting to communicate, and to determine what the reader needs to know in order to receive the message.⁶ The establishing of context, as well as making use of feedback-style questions, helps the reader begin to address these tasks. Culler advises that we concentrate on public interpretative process, that we learn how to determine what the text is doing and how it is doing that. In particular, Culler advises that we look for what the reader must supply.⁷ This aspect of context, commonly termed “prior knowledge,” might also be seen to include the reader’s attitude, not only toward the article’s topic or the writer’s stance, but to *reading* itself. In an effort to explore such attitudes, among a host of other

concerns, we developed a Reading Skills Questionnaire (RSQ) (clearly a variation of Elbow and Belanoff's "Writing Skills Questionnaire").⁸ We found the RSQ useful in terms of eliciting students' attitudes and reactions to the act of reading. The RSQ also serves to get students to see themselves as readers and to begin becoming aware of the many aspects and concerns of the reading process. In essence, the questionnaire is an initiation into the very process itself; and as Smith argues, "Learning to read is literally a matter of 'understanding reading.'"⁹

Following this spirit of the writing as process approach, we also appropriated the tactic of process journals and called them reader-response journals. With poignant help from Toby Fulwiler, we developed the imports of feedback and reflection into reader-response questions. These appropriations allowed students to begin to see what they were doing, what was working and what wasn't. This "new" use of journals allowed the students to track their progress as readers. Just as students used the process journal for tracking drafts in writing and reflecting on developing their writing through peer feedback, we wanted ways to engage the students in the "drafts" of meaning occurring in their reading.

Following the direction of our writing class, we looked to engage students in our research of reading as process, especially in terms of practical concerns, as well as what is at debate, rather than simply telling them what to do. We intended to get students talking about what they were reading, talking to themselves in notebooks and to each other, and to reflect on how they were reading.

Needing a place to conduct such research, our "lab" became a core-curriculum course called *The Modern Condition*, a year-long interdisciplinary course comprised of primary texts in psychology, science, religion, political science, economics, technology, sociology, and art. The reading material is demanding and varies in complexity and sophistication of idea, style, and format (e.g., narratives, essays, poems, and excerpts from texts). In this course, students encounter contexts and concepts both foreign and familiar.

Sharing many of the same students in our critical reading and writing courses facilitated the refocusing of processing typical to writing to the concerns of reading in the reader-response journal. Such reflecting (processing) informed group discussions and tasks. Involving students in select theories and practices of reading, namely the interactions between text, reader, and knowledge of the world, we sought to measure the effectiveness of our assignments in terms of the students' applicable learning and refining of the ways and means of making signification (making

sense of the text). We realize that reading, like writing, is a developmental and ongoing skill.

Since *The Modern Condition* is organized thematically with sections comprised of texts from various disciplines, it offers students a sense of context. For example, the first section, “Human Development, Self, and Sexuality,” looks to engage the student in defining these terms, and more important to education, in exploring and weighing what is at issue in defining these inherently ambiguous concepts. The texts—specifically selected as commentaries on the issue(s) under discussion—provide a distinct context to help readers begin to make connections. Then, via discussion and further connection to contemporary issues and concerns (as in the inclusion of reference to *New York Times* articles that illustrate or elaborate on the context), ideas about what is at debate—the various sides of an argument—can arise, and the process of making meaning is intensified in class discussion and assignments.

Readers, as we situated them here, would want to see what the text is “about” and what it is worth. While such aspects of understanding and evaluation (the two pronged definition of “reading” presented by Browne and Keeley)¹⁰ are approached subjectively—as Rosenblatt clearly explains: “The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him*”¹¹—we push toward some sense of validity, arguing that what a text is “about,” or any element of worth, involves more than individual discovery. That is, individuals make meaning in a social context. Our procedure, as with writing, is to urge the student beyond the subjective toward the objective, that act of transaction seen in the movement from writer to audience need also occur in a move from reader—as Smith reminds us, “the meaning that readers comprehend from text is always relative to what they already know and to what they want to know”¹²—to readers “centered” on a shared text. Complex, indeed.

Building this context for interpretation and evaluation presents one of the most challenging problems in the development of the reading process. Context is product as well as process; it is a complex space for the interaction between reader, text, and the world. As the text in writing is shaped by feedback from both the writer and an outside responder, context in reading is an open system, fueled by reader feedback: a mix of the text (its genre, historical and biographical background, and literary traditions) and the reader’s knowledge and experience of the world. “[T]ext and context are not separate entities available for analysis at different

times. “[T]ext and context are always part of the same process, the same moment—they are inseparable.”¹³—the essence of intertextuality.

Once we established the context of a particular section of the Modern Condition, we developed reader-response questions with a triple focus on text, reader, and world. While this seems a simple triangulation, “texts,” “readers,” and “worlds” more precisely incorporate the world of writer, the history of the text in the world, and the world of reader.

Reading with questions in a context helps students establish a purposeful element;¹⁴ one is reading to comprehend something, which, if that something is not yet specific, it at least has some expansive clarity; that is, the context itself can be in a state of developing, of becoming more and more specific. As Smith reminds us “reading can never be separated from the purposes of readers and from its consequences upon them.”¹⁵ These purposes need to enter our discussion of the issues, and the consequences need to be explored and, perhaps, redirected.

We also found it important to distinguish between “deep reading” and “skimming.” Skimming involves the reader in some “sketchy *specification* of the text”; according to Smith, this allows in the course of reading for “consolidating in terms of what [they’ve] read so far and elaborating when necessary for the prediction of what is to come.”¹⁶ We look to compile these consolidations and predictions in the reader-response journal, and to open them to discussion as to the deeper meanings and values of the text under investigation. It is “deep reading” which allows *answers* to begin to develop.

We developed questions which focused on the reader, on the aspects of meaning as it emerges, on places in the text which we anticipate will pose problems, and on what the text offers to our investigation (the particulars of the context). The context is basic, at first appearance. It is, in actual practice, a protean construct; it, too, is in a process of being developed, of becoming more and more meaningful, more specific and inclusive. We found the most productive questions were those which considered global and local predictions (about content, theme, and treatment), the intentions of the writer, and any global schema. We developed our first set of questions for the reader-response journal in standard fashion; our questions were grouped as “Before Reading,” “While Reading,” and “After Reading.” These three stages provide a beginning sense of reading as a process.

We wanted our students to establish a focus before reading. The before-reading questions asked them to reflect on what they already knew about the author and the historical setting when the article was written.

Our Modern Condition text provided information on author and historical setting with supplemental biographies and a time-line. We asked students to state their notions and positions about the topic and then to read the opening paragraph(s) and to react to it: What did they find interesting (or not!), what might they predict this article will be about? We also had students reflect a bit on what in that opening led them to think such. We wanted students to get in the habit of providing reference to the text.

Students were then prompted to “skim” the article. That students know how to “skim” should not be assumed. It needs to be modeled. Our instructions were basic and aimed to get students to proceed *to read* with some anticipatory idea of what the article was about. Skimming further aims to get students focusing on the text—they needed ultimately to be able to show how the text supported their *read*.

While-reading directions look to get students to note what words, ideas, tone, or purpose they found confusing as they read; we didn’t want them to stop and figure out such things in this first *full* read, but to just note, perhaps in the margins as well as in their journals, the “things” they didn’t understand. “Reading always involves asking questions of a text (the purposeful, selective aspects of reading to which I have referred), and comprehension ensues to the extent that such questions are answered.”¹⁷ We found it productive to have students bring in and refer to their journals in class; this allows for an “airing” if not an “answering” of these questions asked of the text. We also asked them to state where and why they had—if at all—to make adjustments in their anticipatory sense of what the text is about. We asked them to comment while reading—that is “read with a pen”—on what reactions they had, what the article led them to think about. (Many of these types of responses derive directly from Elbow/Belanoff’s “feedback”)

We also found it of interest to have students comment on who the audience might be—and, again, to provide some sense of what in the text led them to think/feel in a certain way. The basis of this is transactional. It serves to let the reader “off the hook” as the only one to have to interpret the text, and gets students out of the mind-set that the text has only one single “right read.”

Immediately after reading, students are asked to write a brief summary: the main points, supports, and shape of the author’s argument. While these are sophisticated actions, they are supported by instruction. In our composition classes, students are reading and learning to apply Browne and Keeley’s guide to critical thinking, *Asking the Right Questions*. Students are asked to distinguish what is “at issue” and what ap-

pears to be the writer's argument by exploring the relationship between conclusion and reasons. And, because we are now looking at *the process* of reading rather than reading as a final production, we get to see what sense students are making of these activities, helping them see where and what they might be having problems with in their reading. Within this focus on the process, Smith's point assumes validity: "What the reader brings to the text, looks for in the text, and does as a consequence of this interaction with the text are far more important and relevant than being able to 'identify' and recall the actual content of the text."¹⁸

Another after-reading reflection is for students to investigate what they think wasn't addressed in the article as well as any major disagreements they might have with the article. Students are asked to consider where the text succeeds/fails—for them as readers, as well as in terms of what the text implies or states it is doing. Finally, students are prompted to consider what the text adds to or clarifies regarding the context. Here is where their college reading skills get honed.

As we proceeded through the year, we developed questions tailored to each article; nonetheless, the questions followed a similar pattern and included specific pointings to the text, especially in terms of passages that raised different views or debates about the status quo or standard values. As the semester continued, we'd have students prepare reader-response questions for each other. This helped us see where their interests and skills were. We also collected reader-response journals in tandem with drafts of assigned papers and found that the journals, usually written in candor, often contain better topics and arguments than the papers. This practice offered us another "read" on how students approach academic discourse.

Because the reader-response journal serves as a space where the cognitive and affective domains of learning can mingle, students can freely mix, in writing, their analytical evaluations with their emotional responses. This record of the transaction between reader and text is a *mélange* of insights, problems, questions, misreadings, understandings, agreement, and contention that give both teacher and student something concrete to discuss, analyze, and act upon in class discussion and written assignments. We have found that this engagement with the reader-response journals resulted in discussions that were on a higher and deeper level. In our class discussions of the assigned texts, we granted "meaning" as we moved from an individual's read to a group consensus, which included any agreement to disagree. The tone of the discussion about the content shifted recursively from subjective to objective, from individual

meaning to social meaning—an organic process by which we determine product.

The reader-response journal allows us to see students' reactions to things that weren't dealt with in class; it points to concerns that need further explanation and provides some evaluation of our teaching: a sense of what is and isn't "getting through." This record of the physical and intellectual activities involved in the reading process, observations that range from time to place to questions of comprehension and interpretation, opens a window into what students are "doing" when they read—information we found vital in redirecting, when necessary, students' efforts.

Theorists of reading speak of how a reader must rewrite a text; that the text is not the pure product of authorial intention. In "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes defines the text as a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."¹⁹ The reader becomes the site where meaning is made from this "variety of writings"—the result of this recursive movement between individual and social context. Again, the reader-response journals provide us with information about what is occurring at this site: how the reader is understanding and evaluating the texts.

Because context construction requires sustained attention and memory, the reader-response journal, which maps the making of meaning, gives the reader a place of reference for evaluation. In this way students become engaged with the theoretical concerns of reading in a direct and concrete way.

One of the practical ways we have accomplished this task has been the development of journal questions and assignments using a chart known as the "Substrata-Factor Model for the College Level" as a point of reference for students. While this chart can be complicated to fully interpret, it is based on a hypothesis that offers specific areas that students can respond to in terms of their individual reading process: "The general reading ability of college students is a composite of speed and power of reading."²⁰ Speed involves word sense, word discrimination, and span of recognition; power (the variable we concentrated on), involves integration of dispersed ideas; interpretation; central thought; clearly stated details; and drawing inferences.²¹ These factors, particularly those related to reading power, can be central to an assignment. For example, essay assignments can focus on how students arrive at the meaning they are arguing.

What is interesting about this chart is that 44 percent not accounted for in speed is “probably motivational habit and a desire for speed” and 22 percent not accounted for in power is “probably sustained effort and desire to know.”²² Clearly, students’ motivation and interest are significant factors in developing effective reading. The RSQ, updated midsemester and at the end, provide us with a means to note the students’ changes.

We have found that the success as well as the difficulty students have in making evaluations in written assignments does correspond to the thoughtfulness and sense of grappling recorded in their journals (another element for real assessment). Despite the thematic organization of *The Modern Condition*, many students found making connections between issues and the main focus of a particular section elusive. While they were generally articulate concerning their opinions, they were most often reluctant to risk an analysis of these feelings based on the texts they’d read. In a way, this mirrors the difficulty we observe in composition class when students change from expressive to transactional writing. Yet, we hope, if students can follow how they have read, what strategies they have used (which ones worked and which ones didn’t), then they and teachers can more realistically develop their reading abilities which evolve as the semester progresses. Thus a course focusing on reading takes on an organic dimension instead of a predetermined monolithic pattern.

If we agree that a text can have various meanings and that meaning is a construct effected by the constructor’s abilities of construction as well as an understanding of what is being examined, then engaging students in testing of their hypotheses can help students begin to learn the difference between opinion and evaluation based on their own reflections as readers. Allowing open discussion, allowing students to be “wrong” is integral to learning. “In order to learn you must take a chance. When you test a hypothesis, there must be a possibility of being wrong.”²³ As Smith notes, “Even bizarre personal interpretations are better than none at all.”²⁴ We are certainly concerned with our students getting it “right,” yet we are learning to be a bit more flexible and give the students some time to learn, some time to make mistakes. Students are invested deep enough in getting it right—this approach looks to loosen them from that habit.

Our focus has been on the students and what works for them—“One can not understand reading without understanding readers.”²⁵ We share Smith’s concern with “bad reading habits,” and ask ourselves what to do to get students to break those sorts of habits? Obviously, we first have to identify such habits, and the reader-response journal helps us and our students to make those identifications.

The idea that one learns to write by writing is also true about reading. Reading teaches us how to read better. As Brower posits, reading is an experiment; we learn to do it.²⁶ Other of our sources, as well, mentioned how reading, like writing, is something we learn by doing. We've found that students, especially those who do not have a history of reading, need to read and read, yet they need to do so purposively and in a supportive environment. Students benefit from talking and writing about what they've read. They call for descriptions of the text, descriptions of the reader's response, and identification of "points of correspondence between the text objectively understood and the subjective experience of the text"²⁷; that is, they do learn to locate what in the text leads them to what reaction: Remember, if it can be located, then there is some basis, in the rhetorical sense, for argument—a solid basis for the meaning-making enterprise of reading.

Our investigations into the ideas/theories regarding the steps of the reading process are ongoing. We continue to look for ways to get students to try new methods and to see what works and what doesn't, and what they might do about that. We are now at a stage of concentrating on identifying the factors that make reading difficult for our students. The larger problems (beyond those connected to attention, vocabulary, and slow reading) which arose were a reader's limitations of prior knowledge, attitude, and authority (who establishes validity of meaning and intention of text, for instance).

Smith also talks about the limits of human perception. We need to consider as well as look to expand what resides in the reader: prior knowledge (students' knowledge of subject matter), as well as experiences in reading. We need to develop more effective ways to get students to consider what the writer is attempting to communicate, more efficient ways to determine what the reader needs to know in order to receive the message. While we're learning to get students to focus first on meaning...rather than identify words or letters, we recognize that we're in the process of finding out what "expectations about meaning"²⁸ our students have, and how those expectations mesh with the ones their teachers have. Obviously, reading brings problems—problems of determining intentions of text, validity of interpretations, and authority—yet, as with writing, attending to the *process* allows a constructive look at *how* before settling with a "final" *what*; that is, as we've found with writing and now find with reading, there is rarely a product without a process.

NOTES

¹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 109.

² *Ibid.*, 107.

³ Frank Smith, *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read*, 5th ed. (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Association, 1994), 2, 21.

⁴ P.David Pearson and Diane Stephens, "Learning About Literacy: A Thirty-Year Journey," in *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, ed. Robert B.Ruddell, Martha Rapp Ruddell, and Harry Singer (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1994), 35.

⁵ Kenneth S.Goodman, "Reading, Writing, and Written Texts," in *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, ed. Robert B.Ruddell, Martha Rapp Ruddell, and Harry Singer (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1994), 1105.

⁶ Smith, 170–176.

⁷ Jonathan Culler, "Prolegomena to a Theory of Reading," in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R.Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 58.

⁸ Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, *A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1989), 422.

⁹ Smith, 10.

¹⁰ M.Neil Browne and Stuart M.Keelye, *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 1.

¹¹ Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 4th ed. (New York: Modern Language Association, 1976), 30.

¹² Smith, 157.

¹³ John Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* (Athens, GA: Georgia University Press, 1996), 44.

¹⁴ Smith, 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, quoted in John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Athens, GA: Georgia University Press, 1993), 85.

²⁰ Harry Singer, "The Substrata-Factor Theory of Reading," in *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, ed. Robert B.Ruddell, Martha Rapp Ruddell, and Harry Singer (DE: International Reading Association, 1994), 905.

²¹ Ibid., 904.

²² Ibid.

²³ Smith, 190–91.

²⁴ Ibid., 210.

²⁵ Ibid., 2.

²⁶ R.A.Brower, *Introduction to the Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951).

²⁷ Ibid., 28.

²⁸ Smith, 161.

ESSAY 15

Critical Theory

A Jump Start and Road Map for Student Writers

ALICE ROBERTSON

For every class I conduct, it is composing—the act of discovering, constructing, and shaping meaning—that gives life and form to what my students and I do.

—Sondra Perl¹

As a writing teacher, I agree with Sondra Perl. Teaching students to compose is our business, and giving life and form to the act of discovering, constructing and shaping meaning is what teaching writing is all about. Therefore, any strategy—no matter how unusual or unsuitable it might appear on the surface—that helps me to help my students compose effective papers is a pedagogical tactic worth sharing with my colleagues.

Critical theories, which have been traditionally regarded as ways of thinking about and examining texts and, more to the point, as ways of talking and writing analytically about such texts, seem, at first glance, to be just such an out-of-place strategy. Recently, however, a number of scholars have begun to study possible pedagogical links between the structuring of prevailing theories and the cognitive processes involved in the acts of reading and writing. For example, at the annual American Reading Forum in 1993, James B. King presented a case study describing the results of his use of specific critical theories to help students analyze texts in a masters'-level reading course designed for high school teachers.² Earlier, in 1989, Richard W. Paul's report, "Two Conflicting Theories of Knowledge, Learning, and Literacy: The Didactic and the Critical," explored in part the relationship between knowledge and thinking and suggested connections between critical thinking skills and the proc-

ess of reading and writing but neither tenet was the main thrust of his report.³ A year earlier, Norman P. Wills's 1988 paper, which focused on developing a role for critical theory in teaching at the two-year college, reminded us that post-structuralist approaches like deconstruction could be quite useful in bringing out multiple meanings in literary texts.⁴

But the practice of employing critical theories as heuristics that function as practical, effective tools for undergraduate writers is an idea yet unexplored in our current pedagogical discourse. Certainly we as publishing professionals utilize, consciously or unconsciously, critical theories in this manner every day of our academic lives; we first adapt a particular theoretical stance, or combination of stances, regarding a text and then create an essay that is not only based on that stance but often developed and structured by it as well. That is and always has been how much professional literary discourse is produced. Yet how many of us as teachers teach our writing students what we as writers automatically practice? How often have we structured our critical reading and writing or literary analysis classes around critical theories as a pedagogical heuristic that can both jump start and focus undergraduate literary essays? Should we design and teach such a course? If we did, what would it look like? How would it work? Or would it work?

As I attempt to answer these questions, let me admit up front that this article is really based on hindsight and a series of accidental epiphanies. I did not deliberately develop and conduct an experimental class to determine the effects of using critical theory as a pedagogical tool in an analytical writing course. My original intention was much less ambitious; I decided to begin my Literary Analysis and Argumentation class with an overview of critical theory in general that would include brief sorties into popular individual theories English majors were likely to encounter later in their literary surveys and specialized lecture courses. Highlighting current approaches would, I felt, provide my as yet uninitiated freshmen and sophomore students with a number of new and different ways to think about and talk about the texts they were reading in the class. With those parameters in mind, I designed an opening two-week theoretical segment of my fifteen-week course that I hoped would expose my students to the various competing theories and simultaneously accomplish some fundamental goals of literary analysis. From this brief encounter with these theories, I wanted my students to begin absorbing four tenets of critical reading and writing:

1. To realize that any text—literary or otherwise—can be approached and examined from many different points of view
2. To absorb from their theoretical reading and our class discussion much of the vocabulary of our discourse and be able to incorporate that language into their own writing
3. To discover that what readers find in a text is often predetermined by what they are looking for in the first place—that is, a Freudian critic sees Oedipus everywhere, while a feminist has no trouble identifying misogyny, or a Marxist uncovering economic class structures
4. To be forced, again and again, to return to the primary text to support their ideas regardless of which theory they utilized, thus learning to reinforce their claims with specific textual evidence uncovered during their theoretical examinations.

None of these goals originates with me; probably every English professor who ever taught critical reading and writing hoped her students would somehow master these fundamental principles that apply to basic analysis in any discipline. My accidental experiment differs simply because I tried to achieve these goals with a previously unexplored format, one I designed as an introductory “dollar-ride-through-theory” concept that compressed a bulk of difficult material into six fifty-five-minute class sessions. Interestingly, my students achieved all that I had originally intended, and much more than I bargained for; while the class mastered those basic principles, I discovered, through sheer coincidence, a valuable heuristic my students could utilize to focus and structure their writing regardless of the assignment I gave, the literary genre involved in that assignment or the theoretical approach they chose to apply to it. For decades composition teachers have adapted classical rhetorical strategies originally designed for creating and structuring oral discourse to the actual process of writing to help students develop and organize ideas.⁵ By using the very different raw materials of theory, my unintentional class experiment developed a similar adaptive process when my students unconsciously absorbed the methodologies of the critical approaches they encountered and molded them into ways to approach and structure their analytical, text-based writing assignments.

In the beginning, however, those methodologies were the last thing on my mind. Instead, I was completely focused on developing a coherent, concise but thorough dollar-ride-through-theory that my students could readily comprehend because I felt today’s beginning English majors

need early exposure to the various critical stances that currently dominate our discipline. Those students comprised my spring English 204 class, Literary Analysis and Argumentation, a course required for all English majors and recommended for others wanting to develop and sharpen their critical reading and writing skills. Because it was a writing class, it was limited to twenty-four, which, in my case, broke down into one senior, five juniors, fifteen sophomores, and three freshmen. Twelve were English majors and the rest were scattered among biochemistry, premed, prelaw, physical therapy, psychology, and engineering. All were traditional college age (there was no one over 24 in the class); ethnically, three were African American, two Asian American, one a Korean national, and three Hispanic. The rest were first-generation college students from mostly Italian and middle-European backgrounds from local Long Island communities and New York City.

Three separate texts comprised my reading requirements: (1) a primary anthology of twelve short stories, sixteen poems, and two plays, (2) a small critical collection of concise essays outlining critical perspectives both past and present, and (3) one novel.⁶ These selections enabled me to cover the basic literary genres as well as the current critical perspectives. In the actual syllabus, I set aside two weeks of classes for my participatory guided tour through the complex web of contemporary theory and began the first class with a mini-lecture outlining an overview of the role theory has played in literary study and then provided brief summaries of past theories. In separate homework assignments, the students then read and responded in their journals to seven different essays that individually discussed seven contemporary theories.⁷ After each reading, we discussed their reactions in class and together tried to answer their questions and deal with any difficult concepts they had been unable to untangle on their own. In this mediator/interpreter role, I sought to both link and disconnect the various perspectives, pointing out ways in which the different approaches could be successfully combined in examining a certain text (e.g., a feminist angle might uncover economic discrimination or lead to psychological issues) while sharply differentiating between them at the same time.

The next stage of my dollar ride involved getting the students involved in hands-on work with individual perspectives. To date, they had responded to my promptings and contributed much to our mutual discussion; almost always students, if given the chance, will bring up a majority of the textual points a teacher would have covered in lecture format, and our theoretical conversations were no exception. But most were still bus-

ily recording my every word for future feedback. Since I have always agreed with Paola Freire about the inadequacy of the “bank deposit” method of education (the active lecture presented to passive students), we quickly shifted gears to a participatory, student-centered format. I divided the twenty-four students into six groups of four each and let each group select a critical perspective they wished to examine further. Interestingly, no one chose deconstruction. Instead, they opted for the psychological, feminist, Marxist, reader-response, cultural, and structural approaches in that order. Then each theory group received a limited critical biography of articles relating to their specific perspective, and each student within each group chose a single article to locate in the university library, photocopy, read, and summarize for their fellow theorists for the following class.⁸

All these essays required complex theoretical readings; none was easy to decipher. But challenge is a great motivator, and the students dived in enthusiastically. The following Monday they met in their respective groups in class and reported the results of their individual plunges to their fellow theorists. The subsequent homework assignment asked them to meet outside the classroom and compile a single fifteen- to twenty-minute oral report that was based on all their articles and summarized their specific theoretical position. Each group scribe was to record and write up this report and after the presentation submit it, signed by all the students involved, to me for evaluation.

After two days of reporting and some lively, occasionally heated exchanges between various critical factions—the feminists attacked the Freudians, accusing them of a male centrism (though not in those precise terms) while the cultural studies critics accused all the other perspectives of narrow-mindedness (in those exact words)—the students received their first formal writing assignment. They were given two choices for a three-to-five-page essay: (1) “Write a paper briefly comparing and differentiating between the six schools our groups have presented,” or (2) “compose an argument identifying one particular school as superior to the others and explain why you feel it would be the most productive and/or logical way to examine a literary text.”⁹ In the next class the students, using a detailed response sheet I had given them, shared and edited their rough drafts, one more mutual exchange of critical materials that reinforced their exposure to the actual theories while giving them a chance to improve their papers before I saw them. Final drafts were due the next period.

At this point we had spent seven class periods reading, talking, and writing about these theories. The students had read and written about these perspectives collaboratively and individually and discussed their findings with each other in groups and with me in class. For the most part, the papers they turned in were clear though not always complete. For example, what they wrote about the psychoanalytical approach, they thoroughly understood; what they didn't quite comprehend, they simply left out. But only five of the twenty-four were either confused, convoluted, or poorly written and had to be rewritten for content, organizational, or grammatical reasons. Considering their limited exposure to rather complex theoretical texts, the students overall demonstrated a fairly thorough grasp of individual theories; in fact, nineteen of the twenty-four opted for the second assignment—arguing for a particular theory—while only five chose to summarize and differentiate between the various perspectives. Retrospectively, I see that very early in the semester individual students hopped aboard a particular theoretical bandwagon and stayed on that bandwagon for the rest of the course, though some later had to shift theoretical ground or combine theories to make a particular analytical assignment work for a specific text.¹⁰ In one sense, I had knowingly created a limited version of narrow-minded critics; but, in another, I had unknowingly taken them below the literal level of the text one step deeper into the analytical process. But that unexpected progress did not become apparent until I read the papers from the second assignment—their analysis of a short story.

In preparation for that paper, they read and again responded, one at a time, to six short stories, each chosen because it could be successfully examined from several perspectives but was obviously suited to one in particular, though I never identified that one in advance. In other words, I stacked the deck because I wanted them to see their various perspectives in action and identify them on their own. For example, could they realize that Chopin's "Story of an Hour" begged for feminist analysis while Kovac's "Born on the Fourth of July" segment was perfect for cultural studies? In each assignment, students read the individual story, wrote one page responses in their journals, and then discussed it with me and each other in class. During these discussions we tried to relate the points they raised to a particular theory; thus, some student would quickly label a remark about the doctor's absolute control over his wife in Gilmore's "The Yellow Wallpaper" as "patriarchal" while another recognized that Kovac's description of his teenage patriotism obviously mirrored a broader cultural perspective held by middle class, blue-collar Americans

before the Vietnam War. In other words, their class contributions revealed, one by one, that the students had absorbed the basic principles of the aesthetic theories and were learning to apply them to specific texts. As a class they were progressing nicely, mastering the process of critical examination by following these theoretical road maps, but could they reproduce the same analytical processes in their own individual papers? Assignment number two was designed to determine just that.

Now the students were asked to write an analytical essay of a short story using the theoretical perspectives we had just covered. I set three specific limitations for the assignment: First, while the story should be chosen from the course anthology, it had to be one *not* previously discussed in class. Thus I avoided having them feed back hashed-over lecture or discussion material from class. After all, I could only determine whether or not they had actually mastered those critical processes by having them apply those processes to “fresh” texts we had not examined together. Second, the students had to choose a single perspective or combination of perspectives for their approach to the story. And finally, they were to write a cover sheet for the paper identifying their perspective(s) and explaining the reasons for their choice for their particular story. This assignment format and the processes of reading, writing, and discussing that preceded it were repeated for the segments of the course focused on poetry, drama, and the novel. In all cases, the resulting papers were consistent: There were no plot summaries in the fiction or drama and no “heresy of paraphrase” line-by-line prose rewriting of the poetry selections. Those particular problems, so long the bane of critical reading and writing teachers, had miraculously vanished in my classroom. How had that happened? Was I just blessed with an incredibly perceptive class of talented writers? Was this an accidental fluke or coincidence? Or was there a pedagogical explanation for these unexpected results?

As a whole, the class enjoyed the challenge of difficult texts and responded well to the assigned materials. They were bright, articulate, and involved, but, like all classes, there were some average and borderline students, yet none of them had produced those dreaded summaries or paraphrases either. The just-a-fluke theory might explain such an occurrence on one paper assignment, or even two in a semester, but this phenomenon recurred in all four genre analyses. Through my Sherlock Holmes process of elimination, only one possibility remained: There must be a pedagogical explanation for their performances. And since the only difference between the literary analysis class and the numerous others I had taught in the past was the introduction of theory and the result-

ing theoretical framework of each writing assignment, I reached the inevitable conclusion that the required use of theory had created a heuristic for these students to generate a thesis, locate relevant textual evidence, and actually structure their final argument. Simultaneously, the theoretical investigative road maps enabled them, unconsciously, to sidestep retelling the plot or paraphrasing the lines. Somehow the critical theories had provided them with ways into the literature that bypassed basic actions and events and drove straight toward meanings. They were looking at the texts in a very different light, automatically searching for the hows and whys behind the whos, whats, wheres, and whens. One student wrote in the cover letter for her first analysis paper:

I started to write a feminist analysis of "The Lesson" but after I started the paper, I realized it wouldn't work very well because the kids in the story were too young. Their sex wasn't important in the story. It was their poverty that mattered. The line about the price of a toy feeding a family for a month made me see this was a story where I needed a Marxist approach. So I changed my paper and wrote a Marxist analysis that I think worked out better for this story.

This student's perception is acute and accurate, as is her ability to clearly express that perception. Finding critical thinking on this level in a first-semester sophomore B student is exceptional. An A student's cover analysis of her final assignment reveals the same kind of understanding, though hers is expressed in slightly more sophisticated terms:

Like a kaleidoscope, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* exhibits the depth and richness of literature because it allows critics from all different perspectives to explore its pages. For critics holding a Marxist or Historical perspective, it epitomizes the ideas of class struggles and antagonisms. From a Feminist perspective, it presents a study of women victims who fall prey to caustic social expectations and the deadly follies of a patriarchal world. Yet *Frankenstein* encapsulates much more...."¹¹

Hers are valuable and exciting insights, yet assignment after assignment, other cover sheets echoed these kinds of discoveries. Not only did these sheets demonstrate that the students knew what they were doing, critically speaking, but the papers they produced behind these cover sheets *worked*. Their arguments were logically structured, supported, and, for the most part, effective. Certainly some papers had to be rewritten be-

cause of errors, others required some reorganization, and occasionally their evidence needed to be “beefed up.” But overall they produced thoughtful, effective analyses, especially in their final papers.

At the end of the term we spent four weeks as a class examining one primary text, the novel *Frankenstein*; our examination included two different formats: (1) approaching the text from five different critical perspectives—feminist, reader-response, Marxist, psychoanalytic, and cultural, and (2) comparing the cultural contexts of the 1819 original with three different film versions—the 1930s Boris Karloff film, the 1970s comic parody, *Young Frankenstein*, and the recent *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*.

After such familiarization with a single story, I felt the students were ready to take a further step in the analytical process. Therefore, the final assignment required them to write the by-now standard analysis from a particular critical perspective but also asked that they locate, read, and integrate secondary material from at least one additional critical article that either supported or refuted the theoretical approach they had chosen for their papers. Sample excerpts from the introductory paragraphs of their final drafts clearly document their mastery of the processes involved in different critical perspectives while simultaneously revealing their ability to utilize those processes as heuristics to generate, focus, and organize their arguments. For instance, Scott, a psychology major and one of my best students, wrote

A psychological interpretation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* offers an intense depiction of human drives and nature. The analysis of R. Walton exposes the danger of excessive ambition while the character of Victor Frankenstein presents us with the human tendency to avoid responsibility. Furthermore, Rosemary Jackson’s article, “Narcissism and Beyond: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *Frankenstein* and the Fantasies of the Double,” enables the reader to explore the emphasis on physical beauty in the novel. When applied to the characters of the monster and his creator, this article reveals the psychological results of being unable to identify oneself with other similar beings.

Another student, Carlos, a biochemistry major who began the class with a B- paper and eventually earned an A- for the course, took an entirely different tack:

Upon opening Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, my mind was filled with the preconceptions of popular culture’s later versions of the text. If I had not seen

Kenneth Branagh's movie, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, I would have been surprised to discover that Victor was not a mad scientist, and Boris Karloff's portrayal of an inarticulate, lumbering, bolt-headed brute was far from Shelley's eloquent, intelligent creature. What I was shocked to find was the lack of any description of Victor's lab in the original text. Why, I asked myself, has a story that has been so ingrained in world culture, been told so inaccurately through the media of film and television? So I borrowed Frankenstein videos and a stack of books of critical analysis of horror films, locked the door to my "filthy workshop of creation," and set out to discover the similarities and differences between the text and the movie versions.

A confirmed feminist critic and veteran English major, Marie, employed a much narrower approach in her analysis:

A misogynist is defined as a person who hates women. This term can be applied to the character, Victor Frankenstein, in Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*. Evidence of Victor's misogyny can be found throughout the novel, beginning with his creation of a male monster. In doing this, he takes creative power away from Mother Nature and women in general. Also, Victor refuses to create a female monster and literally tears her apart while he cannot bring himself to kill his male monster. Furthermore, he shows more concern for the welfare of Henry and his father than for Justine or Elizabeth; in fact, he lets Justine hang for murder even though he knows the monster is to blame. Finally, Victor's relationship with Henry (as opposed to his relationship with fiancée Elizabeth) borders on the homoerotic.

Even less articulate writers like engineering major Harold presented workable, interesting, and thoughtful theses in this final assignment:

Frankenstein, a novel by Mary Shelley, is a literary work that deals with many issues. One of these major issues is the acceptance, or non-acceptance, of the monster into society. The cultural perspective envelops this issue of acceptance because society is composed of family and community. How these two institutions react toward the monster in the novel tells a lot about Shelley's society in Nineteenth Century England.

One B student and English major, Ailene, tackled a massive topic, and though she didn't resolve it in a four-page paper, she made interesting and valid points by connecting psychological, feminist, and biographical approaches:

The problems that Mary Shelley faced during her lifetime become evident in her novel *Frankenstein*. The story can be understood as a response to the author's personal history that was influenced by the atypical circumstances of her upbringing. It was also influenced by the social constraints she felt being a woman in an all man's world.¹²

Not only do these texts demonstrate the effectiveness of using critical theories as a writing tool to develop theses and organizational structures, near the end of the semester the students themselves began to realize that requiring them to utilize specific theory(s) in all their writing assignments had helped them to focus ideas, organize their papers, sharpen their analytical skills, and increase their fundamental understanding of different genres and particular texts. Indeed, these end-of-term informal class evaluations consistently reiterated those realizations in a number of different ways. Because the evaluations are anonymous, I identify them by number only:

[1] The critical perspectives (and the book) definitely helped me to understand literature better. Then the papers forced me to articulate my ideas and reinforced the learning process the theories started. The perspectives are absolutely necessary. Not only did they help me here but I used them in other disciplines, my Philosophy and Art classes (applying ideas learned in this course to the creativeness of artists).

[2] I learned how to read more critically and that helped me write critically. I usually have a problem with focusing on one idea or approach. Instead of proving an idea or a point, I would summarize the plot. Now I am much more capable of finding and proving a point effectively.

[3] Learning the various perspectives has helped me greatly when writing papers. The thing I liked about the theories was that they allowed us to choose our own perspectives and write them. That started the paper for me automatically.

[4] The part I liked about the course and the part that helped me the most was at the beginning when we all learned the perspectives. I felt that this helped me not only for this class, but also for my other courses. I liked the use of theory because it gave me more of an angle on how to approach our papers instead of the customary ways that never worked very well.

[5] Learning the different critical perspectives before reading any literature helped me to understand the literature better when we read it. It helped me

to approach a text more clearly than I could before because now I knew what I was looking for.¹³

A perfect class in a perfect academic world? Of course not—nothing on this planet is ever perfect, least of all in academia, where so many variables affect each class we teach. Thus I must admit that using the theoretical heuristic has its drawbacks, too. First, and most obvious, are the time constraints it automatically imposes on the course. Devoting seven classes of a fifteen-week semester (actually fourteen because of one week slated for final exams) to the thorough introductions of theory—including individual reading and responding, whole-class discussion, collaborative group work, and individual papers—consumes more than 15 percent of actual class time. It was also necessary to set aside a month at the end of the term for five separate critical examinations of a single text because that kind of intense and focused investigation cements the students' grasp of all these theoretical perspectives while it strengthens their abilities to apply them to individual texts. Sometimes confused by the proliferation of approaches, students need, at this point in the course, to experience the various theories interacting with a single text. But combine this four-week segment with the first seven classes, and it becomes increasingly clear that the time necessarily sacrificed to the theoretical portion of the course severely reduces the number of primary texts that can be covered in each genre. If compared with previous reading lists for this course, my particular syllabus was shortened by four short stories, ten poems, and one play. This unavoidable reduction limited my students' exposure to a more varied selection of texts available in the general curriculum. For example, I worked in African-American and Asian American selections in the short-story segment but had to cut the Native American piece at the last minute.

A second problem surfaced when a few students homed in on one specific theory to the exclusion of all others and then refused to examine any subsequent texts from any other perspective, even when it was painfully obvious that a particular text just would not fit a certain theoretical approach very well. In such cases, my dyed-in-the-wool Freudians or feminists or Marxists simply crashed and burned, their papers consumed in the flames of illogical, unsupported argument as they struggled to force a theoretical paradigm onto an unsuitable primary text. Requiring a complete rewrite solves this problem eventually, but time is wasted and it is somewhat disturbing to encounter such narrow-mindedness in novice critics. Whenever this occurred during the semester, I had to continually

insist, in class and in conferences, that they examine all the assigned texts from multiple perspectives before settling on an appropriate one. Without this multi-angle approach, the class would lose sight of one of my primary criteria for the course, getting students to see a text from as many different points of view as possible.

Finally, there is always the danger of these students falling into ideological traps. Creating minor league Marxists or novice reader-response theorists or budding feminists was never my intention. I wanted them to use the theories as tools to examine and discuss the literature, not embrace one as the ideological construct that provides all the answers in any analytical inquiry. When that undesired, single-minded embrace occurred, the students involved often became so enamored of their particular theory that they lost sight of the primary text altogether. This loss was most likely to occur whenever the theoretical issues dominated and derailed discussions that should have been centered around investigating the literary work in question. And that derailment was entirely my fault. A teacher must be alert to such unintentional sidetracking and keep the class's collaborative inquiry focused on its original object, the assigned short story, poem, or play. By extension, the same problem can crop up later in individual papers; one or two students get so caught up in discussing the theory that they forget about or lose interest in the literary text they chose to analyze. Anticipating this possibility generates a simple but effective solution: the teacher must ask the peer evaluators to watch for and identify this problem in critiquing sessions; then, in a one-on-one conference with the individual student, the teacher should suggest refocusing the paper to eliminate this kind of digression, an error the student is often unaware of making in the first place. In both cases, class discussion and individual papers, teachers must continually remind their students that the critical perspectives involved are being employed as investigative tools, not as ideologies to be debated, rejected, or subverted. After all, English 204 was, and is, a critical reading and writing class, not a theory course.

I believe, however, that the advantages here outweigh the drawbacks because the papers my students eventually wrote were more focused, better organized, and more in-depth than any literary analysis class I had taught before.¹⁴ Like Sondra Perl, I believe that "reading and writing, followed by talking and reflecting, build their own momentum" in the dynamic learning process.¹⁵ My students' final papers were the results of our following those processes in exactly that order. The students read a text, responded to it in their journals, and then participated in class and

group discussions that, in this case, were structured by various critical perspectives. Finally they reflected on those discussions in a second journal entry about the same text. Their utilizing those critical approaches not only sharpened their second response and subsequent final papers, they often defused class dialogues that, overcharged with students' personal feelings about a particular topic, often became too heated to be productive. In those situations the inserted theoretical perspectives provided a welcomed distancing that restored at least a semblance of objectivity to our discussions. Simultaneously, the class generated such discussions more quickly, sustained them longer, and, for the most part, had no trouble consistently applying theory to text in the course of these conversations.

Peer editing, too, became more focused, more specific, and therefore more productive because each reader was reading each paper from a particular critical perspective already identified by the writer in her cover sheet. Even grading the papers proved a simpler process because the critical stances the students chose determined to a large extent the parameters I used to evaluate their final drafts. In other words, did the student successfully apply the theory to the text? Did the argument constructed in that application process work? Was there sufficient evidence to support that argument? Old questions, certainly, but in this instance, the questions are much more pointed and specific because the critical perspectives involved automatically limit the nature and process of the investigation by defining in advance the kind of thesis, structure, and evidence required to meet the assignment. More simply, the standards a teacher uses to judge individual papers are already overtly built in to the assignment she gives the students and the approach they adapt to fulfill that assignment.

Last, but certainly not least, using critical theories as heuristics to explore and write about primary texts keeps the analysis class right where it should be—process-oriented and student centered.¹⁶ The teacher provides the theories to be used in the reading/writing processes, but the individual student chooses and applies that choice to his/her own analytical processes and writing.

As I mentioned much earlier in this essay, students have utilized classical rhetorical structures like comparison or classification for decades as paradigms for organizing papers because those paradigms provided them with a general framework for arranging raw data into coherent patterns for written presentation. In the early eighties, Mike Rose suggested using those paradigms or patterns, not as rigid frameworks for prescribed pa-

pers, but “as strategies by which one explores information and structures by which one organizes it.”¹⁷ My accidental experiment indicates that a critical theory—any critical theory—can function in much the same way but more effectively because, while it too serves as a method of inquiry into a text and a subsequent structuring of student papers produced by that inquiry, it can also provide an automatic focus and a jumping-off point for students to explore that text in the first place.

How does a critical theory heuristic accomplish all this? I believe any theoretical paradigm automatically supplies students with an angle of approach, a kind of specific road map, a way of thinking about a text, a builtin pattern of examination that initially structures their analyses and is then reproduced when they write out the results of those analyses. Similar to Lev Vgotsky’s unresolvable language-structuring-thought or thought-structuring-language debate in his text *Thought and Language*, this process operates in a reciprocal cycle. Because their reading assignments, responses, and discussions forced the students to think continually in terms of critical approaches, they were more naturally able to write in terms of those theories. Thus the investigative patterns determined by those theories became so familiar that they became second nature to the students using them. In turn, going through the cognitive process each time focused and structured their critical reading and thinking when they tackled their next assignment. Our repeating these processes through a series of reading and writing assignments for four months provided the practice the students needed to internalize the heuristics and thus become comfortable “veteran” critics of literary texts. A similar repetitive process could be adopted by a college instructor in any discipline that utilizes theoretical approaches to investigate and explore its subject matter—for example, Freudian or Jungian schools in psychology, cognitive-learning patterns in education, or critical-reasoning methods in philosophy. Not only will students in such courses learn by writing, they will write more sharply focused, better organized papers and develop a more in-depth comprehension of the texts they are reading.

Undeniably, pitfalls exist in this particular teaching process, but if they are effectively presented to students through interactive formats and carefully developed and reiterated throughout the course, critical theories can serve as a successful heuristic teachers can consistently employ to help students develop and improve both their critical and composing abilities in literary study and other disciplines.

NOTES

¹ Sondra Perl, "Composing Texts, Composing Lives," *Harvard Educational Review* No. 4 (1994): 428.

² James B. King, "Is Resistance Empowerment? Using Critical Literacy with Teachers," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Reading Forum, Sanibel Island, Florida, 12 December 1993.

³ Richard W. Paul, "Two Conflicting Theories of Knowledge, Learning, and Literacy: The Didactic and the Critical," Resource Publication, series 1, no. 2 (Montclair, NJ: Montclair State College, New Jersey Institute for Critical Thinking), 1988.

⁴ Norman P. Will, "Old Premises and Old Promises: Contemporary Critical Theory and Teaching at the Two-Year College," Opinion Papers Series, New Jersey Language Arts, English, 1988.

⁵ One such theoretical concept was Frank D'Angelo's adaptation of the classical topoi into paradigms for invention and the structuring of student essays in his textbook, *Process and Thought in Composition*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little Brown, 1985).

⁶ I picked individual stories, poems and plays from available copyrights through McGraw-Hill's *Primus* format, choosing, when I could, those selections that readily lent themselves to particular critical approaches. The critical text was Robert Diyanni's 1995 McGraw-Hill book, *Critical Perspectives: Approaches to the Analysis and Interpretation of Literature*, because of its comprehensive but concise format (it includes ten perspectives) and its accessible language for undergraduate reading levels. The novel was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, chosen for three reasons: (1) the availability of several film versions for cultural comparisons with the original text and each other, (2) its existence as a text utilizing multiple critical perspectives in one volume, and (3) its consistent popularity with undergraduates. They were going to spend a month with that text and I wanted one they would enjoy dealing with for a prolonged period of time. I did not, however, order the text containing the critical perspectives for the students. I wanted them to read the original text "cold" and then be exposed to the various approaches. Thus I photocopied the individual critical articles and handed them out one by one as we examined the novel.

⁷ Although the collection contained essays on all twentieth-century theories, I asked my students to read and respond to only contemporary ones because I felt that those were the ones they would most likely encounter in other English courses. The seven I chose were Marxist, feminist, psychological, structural, deconstructive, cultural, and reader-response. Each was covered in Diyanni's text by a three-to-four-page essay that included bibliography.

⁸ The assignment was given on a Friday, allowing the budding theorists a weekend to complete their tasks, work that included learning to use textual and computer-based library indexes to find specific essays. The bibliography I distributed consisted of six different categories, one for each theory group, and five articles within each category. While it is too lengthy to reproduce here, I will list one article from each group to illustrate the level of difficulty involved in the assignment: for psychoanalysis, Freud's "Creative Writers and Daydreaming"; for feminists, Elaine Showalter's "Towards a Feminist Poetics"; for Marxists, Raymond Williams's "Alignment and Commitment"; for reader-response, Normand Holland's "The Question: Who Reads What How?"; for cultural studies, Terry Eagleton's "Two Approaches in the Sociology of Literature"; and for structuralism, Umberto Eco's "The Myth of Superman."

⁹ This is a direct quote from the three-page course syllabus concerning this particular assignment. With considerably more detail, it was given on a Friday, the sixth class of the semester, and was due in rough draft form on Monday.

¹⁰ For example, my psychological critics read more Freud on their own and sometimes realized they had to branch out into feminism or Marxism or cultural studies when a particular short story or play presented certain problems a single perspective could not fully resolve.

¹¹ Both passages are direct quotes from student essays. The first belongs to an African American woman who began the class with C+ and B- work and, after rewriting each assignment more than once, achieved a B+ in the course. The second is from one of the class's best, an extremely well-read Korean native who was an A thinker from the beginning and consistently improved her beginning B+ papers and received an A in the course.

¹² These excerpts are from the final assignment turned in the last day of class. These final drafts had undergone peer revision and teacher response in one-on-one office conferences over a ten-day period. All passages quoted here are from those final drafts and, though I have changed the actual names, all quotes are used with the permission of the individual students.

¹³ Nineteen of my twenty-four students were in class the day we did these informal evaluations. Of those nineteen, one did not mention theory (it was a free-form evaluation: I merely listed on the board topics they could cover in their commentary, and theory was one of those topics), and two said they liked it but did not say why. The other sixteen were unanimous in their enthusiastic endorsement of the ways we used critical theory in the class. These brief excerpts comprehensively represent those sixteen.

¹⁴ In sixteen years of college teaching, my tally before this class was six English 204s at Stony Brook and five English 200s (Critical Reading and Writing About Literature) at Arizona State University.

¹⁵ Perl, 435.

¹⁶ Maxine Hairston, "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing," in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, 3rd ed., ed. Gary Tate, Edward P.J. Corbett, and Nancy Myers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 22.

¹⁷ Mike Rose, "Remedial Writing Courses: A Critique and a Proposal," in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, 3rd ed., ed. Gary Tate, Edward P.J. Corbett, and Nancy Myers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 365.

ESSAY 16

Teaching, Writing, Changes Disciplines, Genres, and the Errors of Professional Belief

MIKE HILL

Here the teacher, confronted by what at first appears to be a hopeless tangle of errors and inadequacies, must learn to see below the surface of failure the intelligence and linguistic aptitudes of his students. And in doing so, he will see himself become a critic of his profession....

—Mina P. Shaughnessy

COMPOSITION IN THE EYES OF ITS PUPILS

The epigram above is taken from Mina Shaughnessy's 1977 book *Errors and Expectations*. Her proposal, well-known in Composition circles, is that the means to better writing "often lie hidden in the very features of writing that English teachers have been trained to brush aside."¹ Errors contain a "logic of mistake," Shaughnessy suggests. While the choices students make are not always appropriate for each "writing situation," those choices are in themselves not bereft of meaning. Errors, in fact, are something more and something more important than just correctness gone awry. Errors signal the breach of an occulted contractual arrangement between a teacher's expectations and what writers really do. In that last sentence, the words "occulted" and "what writers really do" mark a conflict, then, of readerly expectations and writerly desires that have a complicated way of reciprocating such that people learn from their mistakes.

So rather than automatically undo error with exercises in prescriptive grammar, or strike error out with the well-intended subterfuge of scribbled marginalia, Shaughnessy proposes an especially challenging

alternative. Writing here becomes a specific—one is tempted these days to say technological—medium, whereby wrong decisions gain significance in ways its constituencies will not know in advance. It is not so much *being wrong* that matters, but knowing what “wrong” means and—to follow this all the way through—what “wrong” means to certain ways of “being.” In the sense that meaningful expression is linked to being anything or anyone at all, writing, Shaughnessy goes on to suggest, means exploring “the tension between being right, and readable, and being oneself.”² When error is taken “situationally,” the rules themselves are made more clearly visible. Alternative choices about what we say and how we relate to one another thus begin to make reasonable sense.³

Pursuing Locke’s idea of the “signification of language” over Cicero’s alleged formalism, C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon join the term “rhetoric” with the term “discourse” to describe something similar about writing, identities, and their vexed relation to the rules.⁴ In common with Shaughnessy’s rereading of error, the “rhetorical” turn in Composition holds vouchsafe for Knoblauch and Brannon two important principles: first, the “generative role [of writing] in the pursuit of knowledge”⁵; and second—a more nettlesome consequence and one which will remain central to this chapter—the predilection of writing to be read in such a way that complicates at once our sense of correct and incorrect choices and our understanding of ourselves.

What the theoretical parlance of the 1990s might have called “subject formation,” Shaughnessy more modestly called “Composition.” By doing so she meant, I think, to infuse writing with profound democratic potential. Since for her, subjectivity is a conditional feature of writing and not, as we might more romantically conceive, the other way around, Composition solicits from its writers a rereading of themselves as knowable only to the extent that formerly unknown rules (i.e., writing “situations”) are made an explicit part of writing’s formerly occulted scene. But remember, too, that the subtitle for *Errors and Expectations* is “A Guide for the *Teacher* of Basic Writing” (emphasis my own). To recall James Moffet, the “act of discoursing” we call Composition becomes as much about the habits of teacherly reading as the perceivable imperfections of student writing. And of course, there is the incontrovertible problem of naming the desires that circulate between them.⁶ We might say of Composition what Derrida says of the university at large, that it exists “in the eyes of its pupils.”⁷ And we might extend this wholly reflexive and reflective statement to the epigram that circumscribes this chapter: To

understand the “logic of *their* [i.e., our student’s] mistakes” (emphasis mine) means that we also “become critic[s] of [the] profession.”

In what follows, then, I would like to explore how writing depends on a “logic of error.” By writing, I mean not just the medium, but the discipline. The academic field of Composition is constituted very much like the students that, to use Composition’s language, writing itself helps “generate.” Put simply, I want to suggest that the field of Composition is a subject *subject* to an explanation by mistake. The institutional errors that continue to circulate around Composition are “generative” precisely in the way Shaughnessy and others offer with regard to student error. These other, earlier, and somewhat more obstinate institutional errors inform the ways we think about what English is today. They might therefore be read back upon English such that its origins relative to Composition are more accurately disclosed. The disciplines that constitute our “profession(s)” might be “critically” explained, in other words, by evoking a certain division of academic labor (a division that for most of us, by the way, remains very much occulted). By conceiving of disciplines themselves as situated, which is to say, as dependent upon certain forms of expectation hidden by the functional ignorance of institutional habit, we can use what Composition teaches about the “generative” role of writing as a way into the history we English teachers never knew we had.

Thus the historical episode I offer in the first section of this chapter addresses how English became the institution of English literature as distinct from the generic study of written discourse *per se*. I want to explore how Composition has played what I will call, taking from genre theory, a metafunctional role in the widespread institutionalization of literature in the U.S. during the cold war era. By the term metafunctional I mean to describe how Composition has enabled literature’s relatively recent ascent within what was once called English Studies, while at the same time being relegated to the ivory tower’s basement floor. (Recall that the MLA’s Committee on Professional Employment reported that in 1997, 96 percent of the first-year writing classes in Ph.D.-granting English departments were taught by graduate students, part-timers, or full-time professors not on tenure track.)⁸ On the other hand, the metafunctional status of Composition, given its reluctant renown as academe’s unacknowledged bread-winner, combines with a certain willingness implicit in the best of Composition theory to be more or less at home with certain metafunctional mistakes. This willingness provides a workable place, it turns out, for critically rereading our current disciplinary divisions. As

Shaughnessy says about learning, these disciplinary divisions, I shall show, are more or less surreptitiously predicated on a logic of error.

The second part of this chapter provides a concrete and specific example of how I use strategies otherwise associated with Composition in an “interdisciplinary” course that goes by any number of names. Here I offer a syllabus that explores the history of writing as a specific form of knowledge production with consequences that help explain our self-administered disciplinary blindfolds. This senior seminar, while identified somewhat awkwardly (and perhaps necessarily so) under the heading of English/Liberal Arts/Communication Arts/History, draws upon the rhetorical or discursive models that describe the current field of writing-studies as a deeply reflexive practice. My course, called Print, Politics, and Publics, though focused on the history of writing in eighteenth-century England, draws inspiration from Composition’s occulted metafunctional proximity to English Literature as it emerged in the U.S. in the 1960s. In both histories, I am interested in the historical legacy of writing and in naming those of its rules that remain more or less unrecognized today.

PROCESSING THE PROFESSION: DISCIPLINES AS GENRES

Training in a discipline ordinarily implies *doing* something, and in Composition, that something has been in practice and largely remains the teaching of writing. However, the modern version of the field is founded, really, on the subversion of that practical tradition.

—Stephen North

The structure of the subject must be meshed with the structure of the student.

—James Moffet

In thinking about the origins of modern Composition studies as tied up with a legacy of logical errors, Stephen North’s *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* is a very useful book. North sketches a history of Composition from the early 1950s to 1987 when the book was first published. This is also the time when, as North states in the book’s subtitle, Composition moved from its nascent, predisciplinary and paraprofessional incarnation, to being an “emerging field.”⁹ The peculiar and interesting aspect of this “emergence,” however,

and why I think a description of Composition's origins in error remain worth pursuing, is what is expressed in the last part of the North epigraph above. The word "emergent" signals here the troubled expectation that by the late 1980s Composition would exist as a formal and autonomous discipline, with stable objects of study that remain discrete from other, presumably competing knowledge-jurisdictions. But in 1987, Composition's disciplinary status seemed oddly vexed. As North traces its ambivalent history and tardy arrival, he notes that its emergence and subversion seemed to be happening all at once.

How was this so and, more to my purposes, need the kind of disciplinary self-consciousness that occurs in the ambivalent emergence/subversion equation be as unproductive as North goes on to insist? What might the conflicted historical presence of Composition on the academic scene suggest about its strange proclivity to show up outside the hardly impermeable discipline of Composition proper in such resilient and decisive ways?

North prefaces his attempt to recover Composition's history with reference to an agenda-setting College Composition and Communications Conference paper by Carl Claus called, "Public Opinion and Professional Belief."¹⁰ Even though at the time the talk was delivered, 1976, there was no graduate instruction in Composition, and even though it was Claus's pitch to win Composition teachers and scholars to a field only knowable by what its early constituents might wishfully project, North's particular breakthrough is to locate the origins of Composition less in a disciplinary future than in a para-disciplinary past—about ten years earlier within education policy debates immanent to the cold war. Composition, he reminds us, was "a matter of national defense."¹¹

North refers here specifically to the National Education Defense Act (NDEA) of 1958, which designated unprecedented financial support from the federal government for educational development and reform. This money contributed greatly to the growth of several disciplines, especially the sciences. However, as North details, English was quite remarkably excluded from the list of NDEA-fund recipients. In response to the exclusion of English, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) responded with a 1961 report called *The National Interest and the Teaching of English*. This report mobilized the term "English studies," meaning a pursuit of "the ability to think and write and read" and, thereby, to "equip our citizens" and "prepare our youth" for the challenges implicit in sustaining "America [as] a major world power."¹² This NCTE report was thus adopted root and branch by the House Subcom-

mittee on Labor, and in 1964 congress added "Project English" to its 1954 NDEA mandate.¹³

"English studies," then, was a term designed to lend a hand to shoring up cold war "national interest." That in itself may or may not be remarkable. "War," to recall a haunting phrase from Howard Zinn, "is interdisciplinary."¹⁴ But what is remarkable, especially given Composition's continued diminutive status among the higher profile and, certainly, relatively better-funded English disciplines, is that the national rise of "English" originally elevated the study of writing above literary work.

North signals our attention to what he and I would agree has been both an unfortunate institutional irony and fundamental historical mistake. But it is the conditional mandates of this professional mistake with which I want to differ with North by suggesting that they distinguish not only Composition's legacy, but as it happens, a certain kind of disciplinary self-reflexivity not found in the less generous domains of English *qua* "literary" work. Literary study without the study of writing *per se* was (indeed remains) unable to earn the wages paid to create literature's eventual dominance (graduate students and adjuncts live this paradox daily). The occulted arrangement between writing and literature is in the first instance a material one. But no less importantly, it is important to repeat that Composition helped provide the very conditions for ignoring its generative professional value. Literary study, North emphasizes, "could not attract the sought after federal support.... [But] Composition, the 'service' course...*could* attract such money."¹⁵ This is a matter of no small significance, and the basis for a reasonable amount of irritation for mostly part-time writing teachers who expected better and still do. The NCTE report garnered the funds that would enable the sublimation of its real interests to the more belletristic pursuits of English literature.

There is not space enough here to repeat the various positions North traces as the wounded discipline of Composition tries to re-group after the "crisis of 1963."¹⁶ Indeed, it is enough, for my purposes, to dwell a moment on Composition's apparently ambivalent place as the poorer institutional cousin of Lit. Crit. How is the bantam status of Composition as a formal discipline connected to (and therefore, explained by) the legacy of errors that eventually buried a more heterogeneous term like "English studies"? Put simply, as Shaughnessy might have, how do we English teachers learn from the historical mistakes that helped create us?

North registers a second error, which compounds the error of origins, in his final chapter, "Futures." Here he struggles to make sense of the apparent disinclination of the field's "second [i.e. post "English Project"]

phase” to renew its quest for formal disciplinary status and coherence.¹⁷ After Composition won federal funding for what turned out later to be a too exclusively literary English, Composition, North notes, has followed up with a characteristically divided response. And this response he proceeds to cast as the unintended counterdisciplinary fallout of Composition’s nagging metacognitive tendencies.

Composition’s expectations are thus bewildered a second time. And North puzzles, to return to the epigram, over Composition scholars who have tended to subvert the very field they also purported to find. Because of developments within Composition studies aligned, for example, with discourse analysis and poststructuralist theory, scholars like Robert Connors who are critical about all paradigmatic claims, are therefore also unobliged to posit Composition’s status as a content-specific disciplinary field. “Composition,” North forewarns, insofar as it was ever fully circumscribed and fixed, “is gradually pulling itself apart.” More to the point, “Composition faces a peculiar methodological paradox: Its communities cannot get along well enough to live with one another, and yet they seem unlikely to survive, as any sort of integral whole called Composition, without one another.”¹⁸

I would suggest alternatively that what North describes in 1987 as a lamentable “peculiarity” (as reasonable as that might have sounded at the time) becomes ten years later a fortuitous, if still error prone and ironic, occasion for articulating the study of writing anew. That knowledge production occurs in divisional vacuums, from within communities comprised of self-evident and “integral whole[s],” seems today an untenable and even somewhat nostalgic claim. It appears untenable, precisely because, not in spite of, the tendency of approaches to knowledge like those found in Composition studies to see themselves as situated and relational enterprises. If North’s history is right, Composition as the discipline-which-is-not-one has been less about successfully fortifying self-evident unities than tracing how disciplines secretly generate one another’s identities. Composition is more “process” than “product” minded, the saying goes, and this seems evident both in word and deed.¹⁹ It is more metacognitive about the veneer of expectations that condition its worried (but decisive) institutional presence, than peaceably adherent to a set of hidden rules. Indeed, Connors’s remark in 1981 that Composition be best described as a “mixed discipline” seems well ahead of the institutional curve as interdisciplinarity and cultural studies moves us toward the twenty-first century.²⁰ Its “peculiar” and “paradoxical” stance on “integral [institutional] wholes” potentially locates the teaching and practice

of Composition at a unique vantage point, not only for understanding the still largely unexamined disciplinary rules and expectations that delimit Composition's status, but also for helping to refigure disciplinary division as the predominate mode by which meaning is recognized and knowledge is valued.

Composition's ambivalent legacy is, I would suggest, both reasonable and extraordinarily well timed. From its error-affiliated relation to disciplines, Composition studies is apt to focus on the false transparency of rules. This seems to me a practice very much on the order of Shaughnessy's students. Like them, Composition's own history discloses both North's "emergence" and, as North less optimistically but rightly points out, a "subversion" of sorts. This complex combination provides a way to get at errors productively—but first by having made them.

Expectations, "situatedness," rules, the importance of error to learning, the emergence of new knowledge and the occulting of disciplines—without saying so I have been exploring these issues with the second epigram from James Moffet very seriously in mind: the "structure of the subject" of writing—call it Composition—is "meshed with the structure of the [writing] student."²¹ In the history Steven North provides (and at the same time laments), Composition performs what it also describes. For us "professionals," for our students, for us students, Composition reveals an unspoken contractual agreement that binds meaning to mistakes. If we read its past carefully and critically, Composition is likely to foster the kinds of identity-reversal (Shaughnessy would have called this a problem of being oneself) that seems also implicit to learning.

But it occurs to me that I need to find a more consistent conceptual language for bringing the general question of how rule-boundedness constitutes the complex process of disciplinary and subjective structuring which I have been trying to describe. How exactly do divisions and meaning work together, and even, or indeed, especially, when one finds oneself riddled in error? I think genre studies provide the clearest language for describing how disciplines work. So to finish up this second section of the chapter, and toward my account of a course in which some of the themes explored here are put into another kind of practice, let me introduce a few principles of genre theory to shed further light on Composition as a discipline both troubled and enabled by a logic of professional mistake.

Genre studies continue to have a great deal of relevance to scholars and teachers of writing, especially those concerned with rhetoric. Within recent years, Avivia Freedman, Carolyn Miller, the collaborative work of

Carl R. Lovitt and Art Young, and others, have moved us a certain distance from a formalist approach that says genres are univocally identifiable and autonomously distinct. These and other scholars have written eloquently and convincingly of the “generative” capacity of categorically bounded knowledges to make (indeed, to enforce) meanings on the other side of the boundary. And they have written, moreover, of the way “genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community.”²² Genres are best described as intricately interrelated networks that inform—sometimes without our knowing—the very grounds on which they become perceivable.²³ Genres mark partially disclosed (because entirely relational) contexts, to again recall Shaughnessy, those nontransparent, rule-bound “situations,” by which one comes (sometimes haphazardly) upon the discovery of oneself in the eyes of critical readers. The rules for different kinds of writing produce by their very constraints how meaning transpires, and ultimately, how readers and writers relate. Genres, then, are a process of induction. They invent and sustain otherwise diffuse arrangements of knowledge and community such that, for example, asking what student errors really mean, *means* as Shaughnessy insists, “becom[ing] a critic of [the] profession.” As Ralph Cohen suggests, “genres are cultural formations” which are also “cultural forces.”²⁴

But Cohen takes the postformalist account of genres one step further, and it is here that genre studies provide a way to join the error-affiliated disciplinary status of Composition to the transformative critical potential which Shaughnessy and others have been seeking for some time. Cohen notes that genres are both “cultural forces” and interrelated “constructions.” This in a post-formalist age is a modest enough proposition. But Cohen goes on to proffer that the constructions of genres “operate with and against each other,” and furthermore, that this complex dynamic of “with and against...[is] necessary [for genres] to define each other.”²⁵

What Cohen offers by such an assertion is a uniquely positive way to account for the strange reciprocity identified in Shaughnessy’s work on error, and in North’s lamented history of modern Composition’s cold war origins. In both cases, error and expectation amount to a form of agency that was “latent” (Shaughnessy’s term) to the extent that writing’s rules remained unknown. The agency of error is “latent” in the sense of being unrecognizable to the students doing writing, but error is made recognizable by teachers who externalize their own (at least, to them) genetically appropriate (mis)readings. For Shaughnessy, recall, it is less useful to say that students are wrong, than that they have made

wrong choices within rule-bounded contexts, what I am calling genres, which students may not know exist. That wrong choices are right in some contexts but not in others, that those two kinds of contexts are eventually knowable and, indeed, interrelated, means that wrong choices are translatable and that all writing has a logic that, as a first step, good teachers must work to describe.

This is a complex process of exchange, as reading and writing seem to necessitate. Cohen gets at this process by the following, very handy formulation: the “semantic elements” of genre, he suggests, are “*intra*active within the genre and *inter*-active with members of other genres.”²⁶ Thus, it might be said that writing situations, while not formally transparent, are also not *simply* relational. Their relation to one another renders genres deeply integral, what Cohen finally calls a “combinatory” relation.²⁷ One organizational field, one genre (or for that matter, one discipline, here Composition) operates in relation to a superficially separate field (here English literature) in a way that Anne Freedman and Amanda MacDonald would call “metafunctional.”²⁸ As with the constitutive “tension” Shaughnessy describes between a reader’s rule-bound expectations and a writer’s differently rule-bound choices, genres and disciplines are only illusively distinguishable. But they *allusively* retain traces of each other in fundamental, if always sublimated and error-prone ways.²⁹

The implications of Cohen’s combinatory theory of genre is to get critical access to unspeakable exchanges already at work between and across organizational fields. Considered with the question of how rules and disciplines are formed, and how their apparent subversions are useful to new knowledge, I find Cohen’s combinatory approach uncommonly useful. First, it suggests that the rules are operative in the errors that both subvert and reveal them (this, again, is Shaughnessy’s ultimate point about the logic of mistake); and second, a “combinatory” approach to the breaking of rules says, for example, that the interrelations between organizational fields cannot be acknowledged (like error) from a secure position within those same fields. Among other things, Cohen’s conception of genres as both inter- and *intra*-related provides a way to assess Composition’s sublimated, and as such, all the more productive relation to literary (and other) studies.

In an important volume on the just two-centuries-old habits of disciplinary thought, Steve Fuller remarks on the tendency of science “to suppress the fact that knowledge is *in* the same world that it is *about*.”³⁰ Not so, I would suggest, with the practice I have placed under the name Com-

position. North might well suggest that for its extreme metacognitive capacities, Composition has paid a grave institutional price. I would propose, on the other hand, that it is Composition's singular good fortune to have so persistently failed in achieving the form of scientific legitimacy that Fuller critiques. For Composition (and recall again that graduate students and part-timers are by and large the ones trained in and most likely to teach it) remains emphatically, if not altogether always easily, part of the world it describes.

As a process-minded enterprise, and one with the recent historical status of playing a secondary though formative role to literature in English studies, Composition seems keenly equipped to address the superficial constraints that make meaning within and against the rules we call disciplines. Composition studies has, of course, already engaged in such an examination when it posits the mediational force of genres and encourages students to engage in the writing process as constituted, in part, by sublimated expectations. Why not read Composition's relation to the disciplines similarly? Combinatory thinking, as Cohen describes it, places meaning between genres, in a zone of what remains unsaid.³¹ This zone of the unsaid is also the zone of error, a zone where latent meanings are read back upon writing's subjects such that expectations are externalized and subjects are transformed.

From this vantage, errors and expectations, whether conceived as institutional or epistemological questions, are actively at work in what we do as writing teachers, even as we teach by other names. Insofar as the eye towards process and metacognition gains recondite critical access to the constraints that help determine what we mean and who we are, and insofar as the blind enforcement of those constraints remains (*pace* North) beyond our cause if not our care, Composition makes productive use of errors.

PRINT, POLITICS, AND PUBLICS: A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO THE HISTORY OF WRITING

What I was not interested in doing was letting the course be shaped primarily by an effort to honor my students' initial sense of their own needs.

—Cary Nelson

You *need* contradiction.

—Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow

I have explored above how the constitutive “tension” between error and expectation that Shaughnessy applies to student writing might also be applied to the similarly institutional force of Composition as an ambivalent discipline. The disciplinary ambivalence immanent to Composition’s vexed emergence during the cold war acts very much like the meaningful errors Shaughnessy sees with her students. Shaughnessy asks teachers to reread student errors as significant choices. She suggests that the meaning of errors directs us toward a better understanding of how students and teachers are situated by rules, and how writing situations produce for writers and teachers the ethical conditions for more effective understandings of each other. Because metacognitive thinking is built into Composition from the ground up as part of its very institutional history, Composition stands poised to identify the generative relation between superficially differentiated knowledges and their supposedly self-evident and autonomous contents. I used genre theory to describe the occulted collusion that always already happens across disciplines as a metafunctional relationship between the rules and their subversion, and I suggested further that this process was necessarily difficult to name from strictly within disciplines. Thus I concluded that we should take seriously the institutional mistakes made around Composition’s ambivalent origins. I borrowed Stephen North’s history in order to reread the discipline of English such that the study of writing becomes a founding though still sublimated force of literature’s accidental rise within what English studies might have been.

In what follows in the remainder of this chapter, I would like to translate the more abstract lessons I have proposed about writing, errors, disciplines, and genres, to a more practical level and suggest some of the ways such lessons bear on my own teaching. The clearest way I know of to do that is to produce a syllabus, and some description about its objectives and implementation, especially as they relate to the rhetorical turn in Composition. In particular, I would like to recall how Composition’s acute sense of process and metacognition informs my teaching of an inter-/intra-disciplinary course in the history of writing. That the course was listed across traditional disciplinary divisions was a matter of necessity (if a confusing choice in terms), since the desire to examine disciplinary writing as such mandated a recombination of its rules.

The title of the course I will discuss is Print, Politics, and Publics. It was offered as a senior seminar at a small liberal arts college in New York City, and although officially open to anyone with enough units to qualify,

the course as I mentioned was cross-listed in three separate disciplines (English, Communication Arts, and History).

The course description follows:

Print, Politics, and Publics. This course explores the historical relationship between writing, its various institutional forms, and the modern state. The period considered will range from the lapsing of the Licensing Act in late seventeenth-century England, through the reading and writing revolutions of the politically turbulent eighteenth century. In the last few weeks of the course we will attempt to bring our historical discussion of writing to bear on current debates, for example, the digital innovations of the late twentieth century, and the global reaches of information and power. Topics of discussion will include: reading and writing in relation to the public sphere, “individuality” and the intimate sphere as a principle of modern government, the invention of authorship, the engendering of literary work, divisions of knowledge and capitalism. Our goal in this course will be to examine the historical function of writing in its complex historical relation to emergent and divergent democratic cultures.

And the syllabus for the course is thus:

Power to the Presses:
Of Liberty and Letters

Weeks 1–2 Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*

Milton, from *Areopagitica*

Addison, *Spectator* (on the reading public), nos. 1, 6, 10, 49 and 262

Janius, from *Letters* on the republic of reading

Hume, “Of Liberty of the Press,” “Of Essay Writing”

Week 3: Warr, “Discovering the Distinct Interests of the King” and
“Privileges of the People”

Locke, from *Two Treatises of Government*

de Lolme, “The Constitution of England”

Johnson, “The Universal Visitor”

Paine, from *The Rights of Man* “On Society and Civilization,” “On the
Old and New Systems of Government,” “On Constitutions”

Week 4: Kernan, “Writers in a Print Culture”

Habermas, from *The Structural Formation of the Public Sphere*

Foucault, from *Discipline and Punish*: “The Body of the Condemned,” “The Gentle Way of Punishment,” “Panopticism”

Private Functions, Public Interests:
The Novel and its Masses

Week 5: Slide presentation (prisons, libraries, mobs, images of print culture, a female thermometer)

Probyn, from *English Fiction of the Eighteenth Century* “The Unstable Genre: Novels and Readers, 1700–1789”

Fielding, “Preface to *Joseph Andrews*” and from *Joseph Andrews* (48–51)

Johnson, Rambler no. 4, “On Fiction”

Manley, “Preface to *Queen Zarah*”

Smollet, “Preface to *Roderick Random*”

Week 6:

Godwin, *Caleb Williams*.

Ticklish Foundations/Cordial Subjections:
Engendering Literary Work

Week 7: Astell, “A Serious Proposal to the Ladies”

Fordyce, from *Sermons to Young Women*

A.D., “A Letter...about Printing Anything Written by a Woman”

Weeks 8–9: Edgeworth, *Belinda*.

Weeks 10–11: Lennox, *The Female Quixote*.

The Ends Of Enlightenment:
Democratic into Digital Culture

Weeks 12: Kant, “What is the Enlightenment?”

Nietzsche, from *Twilight of the Idols*

Foucault, “What is the Enlightenment?”

Birkerts, from *The Gutenberg Elegies*: “Into the Electronic Millennium” and “The Death of Literature”

Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”

Week 13: Rushkoff, from *Cyberia*: “The Global Village,” and “Interfacing with the Technosphere”

Gingrich (in Toffler), “A Citizen’s Guide to the Twenty-first Century”

Toffler, *Creating a New Civilization*.

Week 14: Penny, "Virtual Reality as the Completion of the Enlightenment Project?"

Morse, "What do Cyborgs Eat?"

Winner, "Three Paradoxes of the Information Age"

Without going into much detail on the nature of each and every reading, let me briefly summarize each section of the course and, from there, relate back to some of the issues I addressed about metafunctionality, combinatory thinking, and community making in the earlier part of the essay.

The first two weeks of the course, "Power to the Presses," is comprised of a series of readings, all with a similar general objective. Each essay, by Milton, Hume, and the spiritual autobiography from Bunyan places on the agenda the historical case that writing and anything we might want to call democracy are historically inseparable affairs. This section of the course, in other words, establishes the thesis that writing is generative of certain ways of thinking about the rules of government as a newly ethical matter, a way of revisiting the question of how we relate to ourselves and to each other. In these readings, the students' usual assumptions about writing, that it's either neutral or, at best, "reflects the way history was at the time" are challenged. The more explicitly political writers selected for the third week (Warr, Locke, Paine) only supplement this crucial reorientation of stock premises about writing. Writing does things. It has material consequences, and among them, as one of our eighteenth-century writers says, is to provide the conditions for "governing people."

But what really happens when, as Cary Nelson says, one does not "let the course be shaped primarily by an effort to honor [the] students' initial sense of their own needs"?³² Some very difficult and some very good things, it turns out. My sense of how the students initially responded to the implication of writing in ethics or politics was that they were somewhat put-off and a little confused, but also quite curious. For many years literature has operated for them in the way Steve Fuller describes the discipline of science above: as if writing, too, was somehow detached from the world it describes. This is where the habitual idea that writing "reflects" the world usually comes up in our discussions about writing, instead of, for example, the more challenging notion that writing is work that helps us "produce" (and maybe even "change") one another. Moving students toward understanding the constitutive aspects of writing means, first, to get them to think and write critically about writing and thinking themselves.

The term “process writing,” which some are no doubt familiar with and which I alluded to in the theoretical discussion above, remains key here. It is at this point in the semester that I draw on my graduate school training. In the writing text-book, *A Community of Writers*, the book I used ten years ago to teach my first college course, Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow suggest that “the most important kind of learning in school is learning about learning.”³³ But they also say that “process writing”—“writing about writing,” “self-reflexive thinking,” and so on—“makes [some students] feel self-conscious,” and “feel odd.”³⁴ Now there are all sorts of ways to “feel self-conscious,” I would add. But in my experience with this course, the word “odd” is exactly the idea. What students find “odd” is that writing is implicated in power, and that they, in usually wholly unwitting ways, are in turn implicated by *it*. What happens in the “Power to the Presses” section of this particular course, ideally, is less an exploration in “self-consciousness” as something already there, known, waiting to be expressed in writing, than a recognition that who one assumes one is, *is* in part, a historical effect of writing.

So for example, after the right amount of historical documents are put in circulation, I ask students to write in class about what they think the historical function of writing might be. Then I have them exchange these exercises for peer readings in small groups and, in effect, “process” one another’s writing on writing. I ask them to examine whether or not those functions they have tried to describe as the historical force of writing (be they specific assumptions about self-knowledge, mutual understanding, or better, the power to move minds) are somewhere also apparent in the writing they just did. In this way a sense of the students’ own agency in writing is heightened. But more importantly, I use this simple collaborative exercise to emphasize (after Shaughnessy) the agency of writing in an understanding of themselves.

I deliberately suspend the writing that proffers a more conceptual description of what I hope the peer processing exercise will have shown. This more theoretical part of the course draws upon the seminal writings of Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault. By the time we get to the fourth week of the course, some of the initial discomfort about looking at writing and its rules as generative cultural-historical forces should start to pay off. Students have had some formal and informal time to both discuss and to write about the historical function of writing, and with those activities, ideally, to engage in the metacognitive realization that they are already, if not altogether consciously, political thinkers. The theorists in the fourth week hopefully begin to give students a language for more

precisely naming the constitutive effects of writing that the seventeenth- and our eighteenth-century writers have proposed as modernity's first and last best hope. Thus we attempt to move out of the alienation implicit in the words of the epigram attributed to Gary Nelson which arises when students are denied "their own needs," and we hopefully attach some learning to the "oddness" that the history of writing as an ethical-political problem will bring. What we come to recognize (I hope) is that in rereading the history of writing, we are also rereading ourselves. This, again ideally, inspires a practical interest both in the historical effects of literary writing, and in pursuing new relational freedoms that emerge in re-arranging its rules.

The next two sections of the course are called "Private Functions, Public Interests" and "Ticklish Foundations" respectively. Here, the relationship between genre and discipline which I described above is fundamental. By this point in the course we have come across Habermas's term "audience oriented subjectivity." What he means by this is something very much on the order of what I have been referring to in the manner of Composition studies as the generative quality of writing. For Habermas, the "public sphere" (and with it, the possibility of democratic sociability) is made conceivable by the formation, first, of the very concept of individuality, of a sense of privacy, one might say, a metacognitive understanding of who one is and what, always in relation to others, one means. (The slide show offered at the beginning of this section is meant to concretize how changes in eighteenth-century architecture instill a new sense of privacy and self-consciousness in the masses, for example, in prisons, schools, housing, and so on.) We begin this next phase of the course, with Habermas's "audience oriented subjectivity" very firmly in mind, and seek to describe the historical relation between writing and self-formation. And again, what we are interested in exploring here is the productive capacity of writing's historical constraints.

C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, whom I referred to in the introduction as characteristic of the discursive turn in Composition, make the provocative remark that "free-writing [that is, private journal writing] is as fully constrained as any other kind of Composition."³⁵ Privacy, too, I suggest at this point in the course, is the outcome of certain eighteenth-century genres. Indeed, we might have begun with such a proposal in these two sections of the course, as we turned toward the eighteenth-century novel. Through a series of prefaces, sermons, critical accounts, and early histories, our task in weeks five through eleven (the bulk of the course)

was to tighten our focus on the generative effects of writing in the sense that this important term is linked to genre. Here we explored how the vexed categorical fate of prose fiction in the period, the ascent of the novel from romance, mediates the kinds of relationships eighteenth-century women in particular were allowed to have. How, we wanted to ask, does writing both historically constrain and produce individuality, and how does it divide and group people (here as genders) together? Individuality as such, we discover referring back to Foucault, is also a matter of inscribing within self-consciousness a sense of moral duty and the proprieties of “the fair sex.” While female morality is addressed privately by certain forms of writing, that very form of address presumes decidedly public functions. And those functions do not always work on women’s best behalf. This point, in effect, is a furthering of the “oddness” that Belanoff and Elbow describe, pushed to the point almost of an internal division, an instrumental “contradiction” about reading writing by rules not always known in advance.

The ultimate point of the course’s core sections on the eighteenth-century novel is to attach the disciplining of women (and the engendering of reading) to divisions being negotiated simultaneously over the novel’s vexed relation to literature as such.³⁶ How, we wanted to ask, are debates over the status of the eighteenth-century novel, in particular, of what would come to be known as formal realism, intertwined with a conversation about women’s reading habits, their pleasures, and how certain forms of writing assign those pleasures to a moral as well as disciplinary jurisdiction?

The final section of the course, “The End(s) of the Enlightenment,” asks students to move from (but not out of) process-oriented work and toward some speculation about the future of writing. Our subject here is writing and power in the digital age. Given the changing conditions of communication and economies, changes which I find my students to be more expert in than they are in the history of writing, the course ends by offering a series of essays on digitized discourse. Without going into the specifics of each argument, what I can say is that the new premises established in the earlier phases of the course gave the future of writing a newfound urgency. We could now begin our discussion, for example, of Toffler’s (and Gingrich’s) “third wave” information-based economy, with firm critical access to the relation between discourse and materiality. Writing, we could by now safely assume, was generative, and as such, intimately connected to the identities people assume and how those identities are allowed to relate.

Where to go with writing in the twenty-first century is a question thus immanent to politics and power. Our recognition of this fact provides a basis from which we might objectify the historical constraints of eighteenth-century writing, and not just endlessly perform the same old tasks from within them. The hard work of founding such a premise, of both denying and enabling certain thoughts about writing, rules, and subjects, was at last our general objective in this course.

PROCESSING THE PROCESS: WRITING, TEACHING, THIS PAPER

It had not occurred to me until writing this chapter how essential my graduate training in Composition has been to the kind of scholarship and teaching that I have tended, perhaps wrongly, to locate elsewhere over subsequent years. There are versions of my arguments pertaining to writing, rules, and identities that have gone on in domains other than Composition to be sure. Some of them I have mentioned, others I have not. But I see now that this sometimes confusing parallel vision, with each discipline enabled by the blindness of the other, would not have to exist if the permeability of disciplines were as immediate as I continue to hope. If that hope, like the work that holds it forth, is in error, it is an error that for now I will have to retain.

NOTES

¹ Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5, 13.

² *Ibid.*, 293.

³ On the constitutive force of (mis)reading, see Ross Chambers, "Reading and Being Read; Irony and Critical Practice in Cultural Studies," *The Minnesota Review* 43/44 (1995): 113–30. See also my short piece, "Being Red and Misread," *College Literature* 21.3 (October 1994): 41–46.

⁴ C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing* (Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook, 1984), 53–63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶ James Moffet, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), 212.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils," in ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer *Contemporary Literary Criticism, Literary and Cultural Studies* (New York: Longman, 1994), 321.

⁸ See Alison Schneider, "Bad Blood in the English Department: the Rift Between Composition and Literature," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 13, 1998):A14–15.

⁹ Stephen M. North, *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1987).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, preface, ii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ For a more thorough analysis of the NCTE document, see North, 12 ff. On the origins of what North calls "modern composition," that is, composition studies after 1963, see Arthur N. Applebee, *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History* (Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974).

¹⁴ Howard Zinn, "The Uses of Scholarship," in *The Howard Zinn Reader: Writings on Disobedience and Democracy* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997), 501.

¹⁵ North, 13 n. 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 363.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 364, 369.

¹⁹ On "process over product" originally, see Richard Young, "Paradigms and Problems: Needed Research in Rhetorical Invention," in *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*, ed. Charles C. Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English, 1978). The connection between discourse analysis and the rhetorical turn in Composition has been well described in numerous places, beginning as early as Moffet in 1968. For a more recent book on rhetoric, writing and power, see *The Role of Rhetoric in an Anti-foundationalist World: Language, Culture, Pedagogy*, ed. Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard R. Glejzer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), and in that volume, Mike Hill, "Towards a 'Materialist' Rhetoric: Contingency, Constraint, and the Eighteenth-Century Crowd." See also, Gale Xin Liu, *Teachers, Discourses, and Authority in the Post-modern Composition Classroom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

²⁰ For one of the most useful volumes on disciplinarity and disciplinary change, see *Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity*, ed. Ellen Messer-Davidow, David R. Shumway, and David J. Sylvan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993). The relation between Composition studies as a rhetorically minded field and cultural studies has been usefully explored in the following works: James Berlin, "Composition Studies and Cultural Studies: Collapsing Boundaries," in Bernard-Donals and Glejzer; *Reclaiming Pedagogy: The Rhetoric of the Classroom*, ed. Patricia Donahue and Ellen Quandahl

(Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); and *Composition and Resistance*, ed. C. Mark Hulbert and Michael Blitz (Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1991). See also James Berlin's and Michael J. Vivion's volume *Cultural Studies in the English Classroom* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1992); and finally, Mike Hill "Cultural Studies By Default," in *Class Issues: Pedagogy and the Public Sphere*, ed. Amitava Kumar (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

²¹ Moffet, 13.

²² The following provides a short list of some of relevant new work in genre studies: Avivia Freedman, "Situation Genre: A Rejoinder," *Research in the Teaching of English* 27 (1993): 272–81; Carolyn Miller, "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 151–67; Carl R. Lovitt and Art Young, "Rethinking Genre in the First-Year Composition Course: Helping Student Writers Get Things Done," *Profession* (1997): 113–25. The quote is from Miller, 165. For seminal work on how genres mediate distinctions of gender "communities," see Clifford Siskin, "Gender, Sublimity, Culture: Rethorizing Disciplinary Desire," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28.1 (Fall 1994): 37–50.

²³ See my essay, "Towards a 'Materialist' Rhetoric: Contingency, Constraint, and the Eighteenth-Century Crowd" in Bernard-Donals and Glejzer.

²⁴ Ralph Cohen, "Genre Theory, Literary History, and Historical Change," in *Theoretical Issues in Literary History*, ed. David Perkins (London: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 89.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁸ Anne Freedman and Amanda Macdonald, *What is this Thing Called Genre?* (Mount Nebo, Australia: Boombana, 1992), 21.

²⁹ In anthropology, Clifford Geertz has proposed a similar "blurred genre" approach. See his essay, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," *American Scholar* 49 (1980): 165–79. See also Julie Thompson-Klein, "Blurring, Cracking, and Crossing: Permeation and the Fracturing of Discipline," in ed. Messer-Davidow, Shumway, and Sylvan, 185–214 n. 19.

³⁰ Steve Fuller, "Disciplinary Boundaries and the Rhetoric of the Social Sciences," in ed. Messer-Davidow, Shumway, and Sylvan, 125 n. 19.

³¹ Cohen proposes the term "Literary History," but rhetorical attention to rule-boundedness is consistent with what I am broadly calling here, again after Shaughnessy, "composition."

³² Cary Nelson, "A Theorized Poetry Course," in *Teaching Theory to Undergraduates*, ed. Diane F. Sadoff and William E. Cain (New York: Modern Language Association 1994), 180.

³³ Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, *A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing* (New York: Random House, 1989), 18.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁵ Knoblauch and Brannon, 64 n. 4.

³⁶ Clifford Siskin's work on "novelism" in *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) is again seminal here.

ESSAY 17

The Tie that Binds

Toward an Understanding of Ideology in the Composition and Literature Classrooms (and Beyond)

PATRICIA COMITINI

Am I doing this right?

—Kristen Oleshefski

Is this what you want?

—Brenda Garcia

The precarious position my freshman composition students occupy produces questions like the ones above. Teetering on the academic ledge, they are trying to create a concreteness, a certainty, to discourse, as if it can be defined, explained, and performed in one fell swoop. I am certain that most teachers of composition and literature (and other disciplines as well) have heard these questions or similar ones. And, though we know better than to play into their hands, the lure often proves too seductive. Our “natural” reaction is to say yes or no and give advice; or perhaps we stop to ask the student, “Well, what do *you* want to say?” and then proceed to help them say it. After all, that is our job.

But, the questions reveal their, and our, assumptions about writing and reading well: The students assume that the instructor is the authority vested with knowledge to determine “correct” from “incorrect” writing, and this is the most important lesson to be learned in the writing classroom. They assume that knowledge always lies beyond their grasp in the forms of discourse they are studying, and, therefore, they need an intermediary between themselves and their texts. And, students assume that discourse is something someone else produces; it is distinct from their “thoughts,” and thus they must conform those thoughts to “artificial”

constraints like grammar, a thesis, an essay format, and so on. My students come to the composition or the introductory literature classroom with the same general supposition: Written language exists in a foreign conceptual space. In Bartholomae and Petrosky's words, "a reader...is not a person who tells what he sees as he studies the words on the page, but one who tells what he is told. As a consequence, he has little motive to say much at all."¹

My students' precarious position, however, reminds me of my own. Trained primarily in romanticism, I find myself teaching primarily composition at a four-year state university in a rural area. Teetering at the edge of my department's curricula, I have been trying to figure out exactly how I got here. When I accepted my present job, my advisor asked with genuine concern, and just a hint of disappointment, "Will you be happy teaching Comp?" Even though there was not much choice in the matter, the unspoken assumption is that "good" academic jobs do not involve teaching composition. Composition is something serious young scholars do while they work on their degrees and dissertations, but not something they do if they are on the fast-track to academic glory. But the reality of teaching composition, and feeling marginalized for it, is the experience of many in my generation of English Ph.D.s.

My advisor's statement is derived from an institutional bifurcation of English Departments.² Coming from major research institutions, graduate students are taught a certain version of the academy: Scholarship, the production of knowledge—our "real" academic work—only happens in literature courses, even though we are quick to deconstruct the notion of the "literary." We are not as quick to deconstruct a fundamental dichotomy in our own profession, one that positions knowledge about literature and writing at opposite ends of the English spectrum. As one colleague of mine put it in a department meeting, "Composition is a skills-based course; literature courses are knowledge-based." Obviously, the implication is that the teaching of composition assumes no special knowledge, just technical skill; but teaching literature involves a special kind of knowledge that can be imparted unto students. Thus, professors enact a power relationship on an institutional and professional level between those who teach literature and those who teach writing, or "research" jobs and "teaching" jobs. Of course, this kind of dichotomy and hierarchy also underlies the administrative push for more writing courses to "serve" the university, once again dragging down, as my colleague would say, the appreciation of researching and studying literature.

This composition/literature dichotomy within English departments is based on disciplinary exclusion that seems no longer tenable, not just because of the growth of "service" writing courses to serve various kinds of curricula and the dearth of jobs teaching literature, but more fundamentally because the dichotomy is the result of a faulty epistemology based on a theoretical misunderstanding of the study of writing. This is a misunderstanding that composition theory and pedagogy has been struggling to articulate in recent years.³ In the final analysis, however, both composition and literature courses are, and have always been, based on the production of meaning; the mode of production is a text, whether construed as academic or literary discourse, respectively. If viewed as a continuum, rather than as a dichotomy, the purposes of teaching composition and literature have more in common than they have appeared to have had so far. Both kinds of courses work to "interpret" texts, constructing and producing meaning from the struggle between language and its social conditions, and the material forms in which that struggle is produced. That struggle, as Bakhtin has theorized, is necessarily an ideological one. The material form can be literary texts, but it can also be extended to other kinds of texts, and thus other disciplines: historical documents, philosophical and political treatises, psychological and experimental theories. The purpose, then, of both composition and literary studies, or writing and other disciplinary contexts, is to study the materiality of ideology. This is the tie that binds the ends of the English spectrum in a knot that entwines, but does not enclose, meaning.

Because "ideology" is such a slippery term, let us define it the way Louis Althusser defines it: That is, ideology "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."⁴ What is useful about Althusser's definition is that ideology is not conceived as a mystification of the "real" or even conscious distortions of reality; rather, it is "the largely concealed structure of values which informs and underlies our factual statements," which is connected to the socioeconomic relations of power that constitutes how we *can* live.⁵ Consequently, the stories writers write, and the stories we tell about our personal experiences, are constructed from within ideology. Ideology, in this general sense, expresses a "representation," an "imaginary relation," between the individual and the world around her, one that is, in some sense, "fictional." I do not mean to imply that it is necessarily untrue; after all, ideology is not false or true; it simply *is*. Rather, in order to understand those "concealed" values and assumptions, we need to *interpret* the structure of that representation (such as a literary text or other kinds of

academic discourses) that conceals them, and then figure out how the relations of the imaginary relate to the real: This relationship constructs how we *can* know ourselves, that is, our experiences. Individuals—what they believe, the ways in which they act, even what they feel—are constructed from within ideology. Thus, as Patricia Bizzell has pointed out, ideology can be conceived as “an interpretation that constitutes reality,” and if we do manage to see through one ideology, another one appears in its place and is just as persuasive for already culturally conditioned reasons.⁶

This concept of ideology may seem totalizing and omnipotent because we can never really get beyond ideology to the “real” or the “truth” of our everyday existence. We can only know “truth” or the “real” through its representative forms. However, uneven developments of specific ideologies surface because of the shifting or changing social conditions or individual reformatory action. Material forms of culturally-specific ideologies lead individuals to question, rather than to assume, the “naturalness” of culture and of our society in general, and to deconstruct those various and specific ideologies. So what is really at stake here is how an individual interprets the meaning of particular ideologies—even if they are interpreting the ideologies which construct their own experiences. This is no easy task. The interpretation depends upon a variety of cultural and socioeconomic criteria that by and large exceed what a text (or an experience as text) merely says. However, all our English courses, whether they are writing or literature, involve acts of interpretation; what is in question, normally, is who determines that particular interpretation. As readers, we construct literature from one kind of interpretation, but we expect personal “opinion,” “feeling,” and “experience” to be simply descriptive, rather than constructive of an interpretation of, as Althusser would say, our “lived relationship to the real.” Therefore, if we understand literature, all writing in fact, as a cultural product, particular questions can be raised. Will that interpretation reproduce the already culturally-determined ideological response? Or, will it offer a new way for a student to understand how she feels, thinks, acts in relation to the world in which she lives—in other words, as a subject of/in ideology?

My own view is that we should engage the latter question. To this end, my composition students’ questions prove a good place to start. Their questions about their assignment reveal their assumptions about education, in general, and writing, in particular. These ideas are themselves culturally conditioned: My students come from largely workingclass backgrounds and are usually the first in their families to go to college.⁷

Education, for them, serves as a means of social mobility that is based on a working-class notion of personal and, usually, financial “improvement.” This is not to condescend to their position; I was one of these students fourteen years ago, and I believed these same things. However, their social positioning constructs their perception of the value of their education, and the value of their writing. College education and culture, for many of these students, exists in a space that is beyond their own, or their family’s, experiences, and therefore they must construct an “artificial” notion of college culture. To employ Paulo Freire’s “banking” concept of education, students perceive themselves as vessels into which knowledge is poured, and that knowledge will “improve” them, somehow, usually stated in terms of financial results: “getting a good job,” or having a “professional career.”⁸ Consequently, their investment in education is both figurative and literal.

My observations are not exaggerated; many of my colleagues consistently complain about the students’ “lack of responsiveness” in class discussion and their “lack of initiative” to do extra work or think through ideas presented to them. There are few English majors at my institution because they do not see a career in studying English. Those who do are often secondary-education majors, who in very real ways will reproduce these “banking” notions to a new generation of students. However, in my experience, these students do have many things to say, many experiences and ideas to contribute, but they do not believe that they are enfranchised to say them, even when teachers ask. Thus, our students too easily play into what Freire describes as the culture of silence.⁹

The more recent and interactive version of “pouring knowledge” is the way group work is conducted in both composition and literature classrooms. Theoretically, we believe this learning strategy enables students to come to their own conclusions; it engages the students’ ideas and makes them interact with each other in a dialogue about their ideas, rather than just the instructor’s. However, in the way that much group work is conducted, in either classroom, the goal is to “discover” by themselves the “correct” form of the paper with the correct components, or the “correct” interpretation of a text garnered from questions the teacher asked them to consider. The product of this group work, in practice, is always lastly in the hands of the professor who grades it accordingly. Thus, willingly or not, the teacher fills her students “with the contents of her narration,” contents that are detached from students’ reality, disconnected from the meanings students could give them.¹⁰ I am guilty of this practice as much as anyone. So, while we pay much lip service to “inter-

active learning strategies” and to producing “critical thinking” skills, are we really enabling our students to engage in meaningful dialogue about a text or to be critical of it? Or, are we merely reproducing the existing relations of textual (and social) production, that is, the “banking” ideology of education in another format?

My answer is to insert a voice, however faint in the beginning, into the culture of silence. The genesis of my students’ questions occurred when I had asked them to watch their favorite TV program with a critical eye, and think about why they liked the show so much: Did they relate to the characters? How and why? Was the show a fantasy in some sense? What is appealing about that kind of escape? Did they have fun mocking the themes or characters? I had chosen a reality-based TV-sitcom, *Mad About You*, to model the assignment for them. Together, we created an interpretation of the show that examined formal elements of the text—character, plot, themes, camera positions (TV’s visual language)—and how they created ideas (my interpretation of the text—and I was careful to point this out) about heterosexual couplehood as the “natural” goal of human maturity. When we discussed these ideas in class, they were wide-eyed and responsive; they had never conceived of heterosexuality as an idea, or an ideal—it was simply “natural.” They offered interpretations from (as I realize now) my instructional cues:

Student #1: Ira’s just the bachelor friend who’s always lookin’ for a girl to sleep with.

Me: Does that fit in with the theme of couplehood?

Student #2: Well, he says...when he’s in the bar with Paul...that he doesn’t know how lucky he is that he’s got Jamie.

Me: So, do you think he wants to be married like Paul?

Student #3: Yeah, but he’s still trying to pick up girls in the bar.

Me: So what does that say about marriage?

Student #4: That in marriage you’re committed to being with one person. But Ira’s so silly.

Student #3: Yea, he’s a pig. All he’s interested in is sex. He’s so immature.

Me: Why is he silly, or immature?

Student #3: Because he's drinking, and acting silly, and trying to hit on women, when Paul's trying to talk to him about a real problem in his life. Paul's more mature. But, Ira just can't understand, and says that he's lucky.

Me: So what does that scene, that exchange between Paul and Ira, tell us about Ira's view of relationships, or about Paul and Jamie's relationship?

Student #2: Maybe that means that he really wants what Paul and Jamie have. Paul seems much more mature.

Student #1: Maybe if Ira got married he wouldn't act like such a jerk. Maybe, he feels there's something missing from his life because he doesn't have one special person.

My students' commentary about the show reveals an engagement with an idea: the idea that heterosexual commitment to marriage suggests maturity along the "natural" development of human beings; if one is not committed to one person, or has an overt interest in sex, one is perceived to be immature, undeveloped. Marriage, sexual fidelity in particular, is a "higher" level of relating to people and is linked to the natural "development" of individuals. Ira is not "ready" for commitment, unlike Paul who is, but he understands its value, as everyone who is "missing" something (or someone) in their lives does, and thus calls Paul "lucky."

While they could offer, in class discussion, an at least rudimentary analysis of a scene in this show, when I asked them to write a paper about their interpretations of the shows they chose, they continually asked me, "Is this right?" "Am I doing this right?" "Is this what you're looking for?" as if I had a formula for what they should write, should think, about a particular program. Finally, one exasperated student came to my office and said, "What do you want us to write about, *exactly*?" I thought that I could enable their interpretation of a cultural text, with which they were familiar, by giving them the tools of analysis that I had learned in my undergraduate literature classes, and that I had taught to my literature students.

What I found was anxiety at the very prospect of doing analysis, about asking the penetrating question, "Why?" They wanted to describe the shows. That would be familiar territory to them—sort of like a book report—and then have me "correct" their prose and organization. These weren't English majors—they were accounting majors, elementary education majors, journalism majors. This kind of assignment was highly disconcerting to them, as was my refusal to specify a particular rhetorical

format for the paper. That the meaning of a TV program is formed though the language of the visual medium, that meanings could be different for different people depending on their own particular investment in the socioeconomic structure, that there were different ways to articulate an interpretation, and that TV was meaningful *at all* was a kind of literacy they were unfamiliar and uneasy with.

But what I had thought was an utter disaster at the beginning of the course actually turned out to be success. When I met with my students in one-on-one conferences, as I always do in composition classes, to talk about the specifics of the papers they were writing on this topic, I discovered that there was not a problem with analysis: In fact, many were quick to tell me that they loved, for instance, *Melrose Place* because they could easily “make fun” of people whose only concern in life was whom to sleep with next and how to entertain themselves by stabbing each other in the back, and how that didn’t reflect the values they held, but they watched it anyway because the show’s premise gave them a superficial release from the pressures (educational, financial, social) they faced everyday. (I assume what they are telling me is correct, since I have never actually seen an episode of this show.) The problem was that they simply did not realize I wanted their papers to reflect *their* opinions about a text. “So, you want me to put my opinion in the paper?” was a question I heard over and over again. Thus, the problem with the assignment lay not with analysis—which some of my composition colleagues thought was “too difficult” for them—but with their preformed ideas about writing and, particularly, about writing in a college setting. Apparently, writing, for the student, is equated with pure functionality—tell me what you want me to say and I’ll put it into words. The meanings they construct are inconsequential to the task of writing. Students see their analysis of the topic or text, at best, as always insufficient, needing the words, the thoughts, the fine-tuned analysis of the authority on the subject, usually labeled the “professor.” Academic discourse is discourse that has a specific code they can plug other people’s thoughts into. But they, the writers, are left out of the equation.

What is even more disturbing is that it seems almost “natural” for these students to write this way and for educators to accept it as a test of their writing, and thinking, skills. Even though students do not see themselves as “reproducers” of expert opinion or ideologies, writing autonomy becomes glaringly problematic in courses like composition, and perhaps introductory courses in other fields. The problem arises from an institutional, academic conception that mirrors our service-oriented, ad-

ministrative understanding about writing courses—that they are not places for real thinking, only for teaching the more or less technical skills of writing, which are, oddly, abstracted from thought. But, how does anyone write convincingly without rigorously thinking about something to write about?

This was my rationale for the design of the composition course which produced my students' questions. Following Bartholomae and Petrosky's model of reading and writing, I wanted to give my students challenging reading and writing assignments. I chose the media—TV, movies, newspapers, and so forth—because they were texts students would most likely be familiar with. I wanted to engage my students' critical thinking skills in what I perceived to be real ways: to challenge their assumptions, values, beliefs about the way our world is constructed and the way it should be: In other words, I wanted them to discover the *ideologies* through which they perceive their world. But I didn't want to do it in an abstract way, as I had done the many other times I had taught composition. On the contrary, I wanted to enable them, through their writing, to discuss our *everyday* reality, and not present the sociological problems of reality, like classism, sexism, and racism as abstract concepts in articles from which they could too easily distance themselves.¹¹ I allowed my students to do something the constraints of the writing course usually do not allow them to do: to recognize themselves as always working within, and through, ideology. My idea was to take on Paulo Freire's call to cultural literacy, which systemically implicates language and writing with the reproduction of ideology. After all, as Pierre Macherey states, "everyday language...is the language of ideology."¹² Writing would become, and I think did become, a production of their own experience—their subjectivity—entangled within, or sometimes struggling against, ideology represented in material forms—the media in this case, though it could just as easily be literature, historical texts, political treatises or perhaps even a scientific text. Through acts of reading the media and writing their interpretations of it, they produce their own knowledge—about themselves and the world in which they live.

For example, one of our assignments was to create an analysis of advertisements. This is a stock lesson for many composition classrooms, but as I have observed from some of my colleagues' classes, what is usually emphasized is the graphic dimension of the ads, emphasizing aesthetics rather than ideology. Thus, what is usually privileged in these kinds of papers about advertisements is the creativity of the ads, how the ad makes them feel, and if the ad was successful because of the combination of creativity

and feeling. Alternatively, some colleagues discuss the representation of race or gender inherent in the construction of the ads—leading students to explore issues of racism and sexism. Both are valuable lessons; however, they do not always allow students to understand themselves, and their experiences, as already conditioned by and operating within ideology.

In contrast, I wanted my students to relate the graphics to an overall theme, to an underlying ideological concept, that will, potentially, “sell” the item. Many students mentioned in early drafts of their papers that they related to the ad because it made them feel a certain way. When I questioned what that relationship was based on, they looked rather shocked. My assumption is that when we relate to some feeling, a common ideological component of an image, a story, or an account of an event has been touched. I asked them to figure out what this component was. Together, by using collaborative groups and class discussion in which they analyzed ads they chose, we came up with three sources of this “relationship,” rhetorically represented in images and text: idol worship (as in celebrity endorsements of various products), which promotes monetary success and fame in order to sustain the notion of social mobility; personal improvement (as in makeup ads, household cleaning products ads, and so forth), which creates a constant feeling of insufficiency of one’s own self-worth—whether it be in terms of beauty or possessions—which, in turn, creates products by which one achieves a sense of “improvement”; and personal fulfillment (as in tobacco ads, body spray ads, alcohol ads), which creates artificial needs and desires for the marketplace to fulfill, and we respond by thinking we need them to live a fulfilled life. These categories are not meant to be inclusive and they may seem to some self-evident; but they are meant to show how the students were enabled, by analysis, to come up with substantial reasons how and why ads work. This does not mean that all students immediately rejected the consumerism they are already enmeshed in, as *I* might have hoped; to the contrary, some had much greater appreciation for the skills of the whole advertising industry. But it did allow students to become critically aware of their responses to advertisements and the reasons why they respond in the way they do; it allowed them a distanced, critical perspective from which they could understand the ideology of consumerism in a different way.

Their writing generally improved as a result of their critical thinking and because of their investment in their own ideas. They wanted to tell *me* things about the ads they chose. Contrast this to their hesitancy at the beginning of the course to express their own opinions. The improvement of their writing manifested itself in several specific ways. First, on the

syntactical level, students began to choose more deliberate and specific words in order to replace “placeholders” like “I relate to the ad....” Instead of overusing “to be” verbs in simple declarative sentences, they started reconstructing sentences in terms of cause and effect, using various kinds of subordinating clauses:

This advertisement is not as eye-catching as many other ads, but the girl in it gets the viewer’s attention. It shows a black and white picture of a little girl staring blankly straight ahead. The reason it is just black and white is to give the ad a depressing feeling. The picture wouldn’t have the same impact if it was in color, because it wouldn’t look as serious.

The students were, in a sense, forced to draw links between sentences and clauses because they would not otherwise be able to claim relationships between ideas and their graphic depictions. Second, they stated their opinions up front, which served as a more or less common thesis statement, usually somewhere within the first two paragraphs of the paper: “The media begins indoctrinating girls at a very young age that they *need* these products to be worthy of attention, worthy of love.” This is in sharp contrast to the first paper on TV, where many students had tacked an opinion statement (after I said I wanted to know their thoughts) onto the introductions of their papers, which generally consisted of a description of the show. Third, their papers became longer. My required paper length in Composition I is about three full pages. On the first paper, many of my students had trouble meeting that requirement; on the advertisement paper, however, none had trouble, and some papers were as long as five pages (of course, then students felt the need to okay a longer paper length with me). Finally, depending on the kind of topic they chose to write about, they experimented with different kinds of academic discourse that suited that particular topic. Sometimes students needed prodding if they were unfamiliar with, say, a compare/contrast format, or perhaps a problem/solution format. Others saw a good way to utilize these forms, which I assume they had learned and practiced in high school. But it was the ideas, and the topics they chose, which suggested the rhetorical format of their papers. Form and function were linked through their ideas. What my students, in some measure, achieved was analysis as a deconstructive endeavor and writing as a reconstructive endeavor. It is not just writing to define our place in the world, and our place within the discourse community of academia, but writing which questions those very definitions and perhaps begins to redefine them.¹³

If we can view composition courses in this way, how might we view literature courses? When I teach an area of literature, there are other kinds of ideological interference that make turning over the texts to students difficult: My own sense of how to “read” is usually quite different from that of my students in terms of the questions I ask and the answers I look for. My preconceptions about literature and its value are frequently in conflict with my students’, and sometimes even with my peers. This is, again, true for a variety of culturally determined reasons. Teaching literature, because of the heteroglossia of theoretical “narratives” about it, is quite a complicated endeavor: Reading—how you read as well as what you read—is always in question. While many English professors in my department assume that “close reading” is primary to any “reading,” even ones that extend from continental theories of literature, “close reading” is a result of one kind of way to read. Our students, in turn, have their own “ways of reading”—to borrow Bartholomae’s and Petrosky’s words for a moment.

When I taught an Introduction to Literature course, I asked my students, on the first day of class, to write down examples of what they thought “literature” was. They wrote down the traditional figures: Shakespeare’s plays, Dickens’s novels, Emily Dickinson’s poetry, and so forth. Then, I asked them why they thought we should study literature. Their responses were what I expected: We study literature because it enhances our understanding of ourselves as human beings; it makes us better people; it makes us more *cultured* people. I then asked them to write down the titles of books they had read recently. The responses weren’t varied: John Grisham’s *The Firm* and Stephen King’s *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, Patricia Cornwall’s *All That Remains*, and so forth. In our class discussion of their responses, I asked if they thought these were literary texts. Our discussion seemed to revolve around their perception of literature as “difficult reading to understand” but nonetheless “really worthwhile” reading; and the kind of reading they did on their own, if they did any at all, was just “pleasurable” and “easy.”

Now, I cannot determine whether this is what they really think about the literary/popular disjunction or if it is simply the answer they thought I was looking for: That is, that reading literature is more difficult because it has more levels of “meaning.” Whatever the reasoning behind the answers, the interesting thing is the important contradiction that is revealed: that even though they “think” reading literature will ameliorate them (whatever that means), they choose not to read literature, except in the classroom where they have a guide—the professor—to un-

lock the secrets of the text. It is a startling contradiction that confuses the level of reading difficulty with meaning and, most importantly, value. Literature, as their examples point out, is dead; popular literature is alive but not very meaningful. What they wanted me to do, in some sense, was to explain how literary texts were valuable to them—their meaning—and to show them how their lives fit into that narrative. In other words, the lessons they expected me to teach were lessons that they already had been taught by years of educational interference: that by decoding language, literature illustrates the universal value of human nature, and if one understands these values, one becomes a cultured, improved individual; hence, the students become more socially mobile.¹⁴ The social function of literature becomes their entrance into a, more or less, elitist club. This is the cultural capital they had hoped to accumulate; their knowledge would be my knowledge; my knowledge is the knowledge of my teachers, and so it goes. Their readings, they as readers, disappear.

But knowledge about texts, contrary to my students' desires, is not that straightforward. Teaching them to recognize themselves in the "representation" of ideology is to enable them to continue to "keep concealed" their values and assumptions, of literature, of education, of themselves. What they perceive as acquiring knowledge is not the process of inquiry, but the disengagement from it. Knowledge stems from acquiring the ability to *interpret* the structure of that representation. It is not reconciliation of the contradiction between the imaginary and lived relations of existence stated above that is important in the literature classroom, but the exploitation of that contradiction. Teaching literature may be different from teaching composition; after all, it is not "everyday language" that we are investigating, but literary discourse that is the "scene of an illusion" that produces ideology.¹⁵ But I argue that the purpose is the same: to produce the meaning of a text from a deconstructive analysis that disrupts "representation," and to construct meaning from the understanding of a text at play in its cultural conditions, through the act of writing. In others words, reading, like writing, is *social* action.¹⁶

If we look at the study of literature, particularly in the introductory classroom, in this way, student readers, along with their assumptions about what literature is, force a different perspective that reasserts a social context for reading literature and for the readers reading it. Like the student writers in composition, student readers in introductory literature courses do not disappear into the classroom's silence. They, in fact, reassert themselves by conversation. It is my students' "shared" beliefs, as-

sumptions, values, and language that makes the continuance of reading literary texts possible at all. This is why I started my literature course by talking about their beliefs, assumptions, and values regarding the study of literature.

While I was fairly critical of the direction given to group work earlier, I see it as a valuable import from the composition into the literature classroom. My reservations about how to use it come from my own failure to use it in the literature classroom in what I would call useful ways, or perhaps more pointedly, I was, and still am, seduced by the opportunity to express my interpretations of the literature I have spent so long studying to a captive audience. Also, because of the way in which I approach the study of literature, history plays an immense part in any reading of a literary text. Usually, students do not possess an expansive knowledge of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century British history. So, I have spent the last few years trying to walk the line between enabling my students to do a different kind of analysis—one that positions the study of ideology as its main focus—and offering them my interpretations of literature. Perhaps the dialogue between my interpretation and their own will serve as enough of a buffer to counteract the “reproduction” of the already-existing cultural prestige of the “literary.” But I am encouraged that group work and, in turn, collaborative learning can help give a greater social and historical context to literature’s “imaginary relations.”

To demonstrate how this is possible, let me offer an example from an introductory fiction course in which I taught several British novels written between 1690 and 1897. I used group work as a way to make historical connections between the novels’ context and content, and this might work in the reverse manner—a history or women’s studies course which examines the novel as a “producer” of cultural notions about feminine subjectivity at a particular historical moment. Making historical connections to the novel’s context and content is quite different from asking students to interpret points of character development or plot structure and discuss the differences they found. I asked students to read supplementary historical materials: For Jane Austen’s *Emma*, for example, I asked them to read a selection from Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon’s “Married Women and the Law”; for Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, I asked them to read selections from Friedrich Engels’s *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. My students worked in small groups of four, discussing their journal entries about both the novels and the historical readings. I asked them to specifically discuss if and how the historical material altered

their readings of the novels. Their discussions had a wide range: how the real conditions of the time were (or were not) depicted in the novel; how they better understood the social conventions (what was considered a “good” marriage, for instance); or how they better understood the context of a character’s actions (how scandalous it was for Jane Eyre to fall in love with Rochester), and so forth. By putting the text in its historical context, and by asking them to make connections between the text and history, I helped disrupt their usual reading and classroom practice, by distancing their assumptions about social relations and literary values as late-twentieth-century readers from the text’s. By doing so, students were able to examine how the novel genre serves to “aestheticize” ideological contradictions in real history, and, in turn, how it constructs their own expectations and notions about what fiction, and the novel, is, and how it operates ideologically. This examination enables students to recognize fiction not as a narrative—an ideology—in which they necessarily need to “recognize” themselves (the “the-characters-seem-real-because” phrase), but to recognize fiction as a way to understand the contradictions in which we are always and already implicated when we read a novel.

However, this was not what my students expected or, I think, wanted. I was unprepared for the resistance I received from both my students and some of my colleagues: My students did not see the reason they had to do “so much” additional work—they clearly saw it as a punishment; my colleagues saw my assigning historical material as zealous at best, and, at worst, a misunderstanding of the limitation of the course. The assumption on both ends was, of course, that the text already contains meaning which the students must learn to interpret. Later on, they can superimpose an historical context on that reading. In contrast, I tried to create a space in the introductory fiction course for ways to read that were not always a matter of closely reading the text to discover a “good” interpretation, one that would then be rubber-stamped by me. There are other ways to produce meaning, and the ways in which we read texts determines that production. Understanding a text’s intersection with history, even using different kinds of literary theories, allows us to construct a reading of a text differently. Therefore, while I understand my students’ resistance to reading against the grain, so to speak, I think such reading compels a fuller, richer understanding of the literature, while it also allows the students to construct and contribute their connections between the text, history, and ideology. More importantly, it allows us to investigate why we still, or still should, read these books.

James A. Berlin wrote

It is the role of English teachers to serve as the bankers, the keepers and dispensers, of certain portions of this cultural capital, their value to society being defined in terms of its investment and reproduction. Since this capital has been located almost exclusively in literary texts, it is small wonder that attempts to challenge the rhetoric/poetic binary on which the value of these texts resides is resisted.¹⁷

While Berlin correctly sees this problem as institutional, it is also pedagogical. However, by viewing the study of texts—both academic and literary—as the study of ideology, we can begin to deconstruct this dichotomy and reconceive what we study when we study writing and literature. What we study, in the end, are the ideologies, as Althusser would say, which “interpellate” us as subjects; that is, we are individuals who are constructed by those material forms in which our cultural beliefs, ideas, and values reside. To investigate those ideologies which we come to know and understand through literature is to investigate our knowledge of what we perceive as our societal and human bonds. This investigation and analysis of specific ideologies can only increase our students’ mastery over writing (whether their own, literature or other kinds of texts) and the content and form of their discussion of that writing. In addition, all other disciplines, psychology, history, even the hard sciences, have their own forms of discourse, and thus their own disciplinary assumptions as well as general ideologies “concealed” within them. These discourses construct “truth,” using rhetorical forms appropriate to each specific discipline. To analyze the construction of disciplinary truth—ideologies—in writing enhances our students’ ability to ask stimulating and rigorous questions and gives them the ability to answer those questions.

So, to answer my students’ questions, “Am I doing this right?” and “Is this what you want?” all I can say is, “I don’t know,” with enthusiasm.

NOTES

I wish to thank the participants in a year-long “Radical Pedagogy” reading group at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. I am grateful to S. Michael McCully, in particular, for his careful reading of this essay.

¹ David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, *Fact, Artifacts and Counter-facts, Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986), 27.

² On this point, see James A. Berlin, "Rhetoric, Poetic, and Culture: Contested Boundaries in English Studies," in *The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary*, ed. Richard Bullock and John Trimbur (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 23–38.

³ For examples of two poles of the spectrum, see Peter Elbow, *Writing without Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) and *Contending With Words, Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb (New York: Modern Language Association, 1991).

⁴ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 162.

⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory, An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983), 14.

⁶ Patricia Bizzell, "Marxist Ideas in Composition Studies" in *Contending with Words, Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb (New York: Modern Language Association, 1991), 55.

⁷ I am not using "class" in the sociological sense: that is, upper, middle or lower, which depends upon one's income level. I am using "class" in the economic sense of how one's money is made, and the complex social/cultural nexus that distinguishes the middle-class from the working-class. Class is defined here not by how much money one makes, but whether or not one is compelled to "labor" to fulfill material needs, and the social/cultural limits set by the type of labor done, the material benefits as a result of that labor, and the working conditions demanded by that labor. These dimensions of "class" are too lengthy to discuss here. But, oddly enough, most of my student define themselves as middle class, as opposed to working class even if their parent(s), or they themselves, have worked at the steel mills, Wal-mart, in civil-service jobs, secretarial or middle-management positions. This has to do with the pejorative sense in which we view "working class" as "low class." Education is one factor which supposedly ameliorates this situation.

⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1990), 57–58.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹¹ In a class in which racism, sexism and classism are the primary concepts to be investigated and analyzed, using examples of our everyday reality—which emerge on TV, in newspapers, in our own written experiences—as a way to engage students' own assumptions about these concepts might be a useful starting point for discussion.

¹² Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (New York: Routledge, 1989), 59.

¹³ Kenneth A.Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" in *College English* 46 (1984), 651.

¹⁴ This idea of the ameliorating the student by making him/her a "cultured" individual is reflected in my department's outcome assessment. In Spring 1997, my department sent all its graduates an Alumni Satisfaction Survey that was to become part of our five-year review. The survey included the statement "Being an English major has made me a more cultured individual" to which students were asked to respond: strongly agree, agree, possibly, disagree, strongly disagree or don't know. What is even more interesting are the students' responses: 65 percent either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement as opposed to the 10 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Twenty-four percent answered "possibly," and 1 percent answered "don't know."

¹⁵ Macherey, 55.

¹⁶ This idea is taken from the title of Marliyn Cooper and Michael Holzman's book *Writing As Social Action*, (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1989).

¹⁷ Berlin, p. 28

Blurring Boundaries

Rhetoric in Literature and Other Classrooms

CHRISTOPHER SCHROEDER

In my real life, I am a writer.¹ And when I'm at work, I'm also a rhetorician. For me, these identities complement each other, like peanut butter and jelly, and much, if not all, of my life is tinted by these rosy terministic screens. In addition to rhetoric courses, I sometimes teach literature classes, and in these classrooms where the tradition is to privilege others' writing over one's own, I still think first as a writer and second as a rhetorician even as I assume my role as a reader.

From my experiences, I've concluded that the presence of rhetoric can transform these classrooms that traditionally center around the consumption of texts in ways that attend to the needs of contemporary readers. In these classrooms, our students often arrive without the shared knowledges and homogeneous experiences that we expect them to have, and rhetoric can provide these inexperienced readers, and even those with some experience, with a context, like dissolvable stitches, that enables them to access texts and to generate meaning. Regardless of whether the class is an introduction to literature or a graduate seminar on the American short story, the presence of a rhetorical theory of discourse and of language establishes a dialogic classroom that provides readers with a critical literacy and that offers them a critical perspective on the relationship between language, knowledge, and power by contextualizing sanctioned reading practices and by providing a means through which readers can challenge dominant readings in favor of their own. In what follows, I explore first the theory and then the pedagogy that lie behind the role of rhetoric in literature and other classrooms that center around the consumption of texts. In doing so, I've situated myself within a postmodern

rhetorical situation in which I initially consider the historical relationship between rhetoric and the poetic in English departments and next explore how a rhetorical theory of discourse establishes a dialogic classroom and provides a context for reading. Then, I outline a rhetorical theory of language, and finally I consider the pedagogical implications and one approach to assessment.

In many ways, this text reflects the story of how, as a writer and a rhetorician, I learned to function in classrooms where the consumption of texts is the ostensive goal. The presence of rhetoric, I believe, can empower readers to transform their experiences in these classrooms, which explains why rhetoric has been called, to appropriate Edward P.J. Corbett's designation, "the enabling discipline."

SUBJECT

In contemporary English departments, a distinct line exists between rhetoric and the poetic. Until recently, the act of considering English studies from the perspective of rhetoric, as James Berlin acknowledges, was considered suspicious and subversive.² Despite emerging from a shared epistemology with the poetic,³ rhetoric is conspicuously absent from contemporary histories of English departments, such as Arthur Applebee's *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History* and Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*. In spite of an uneasy tolerance for the presence of rhetoric in English departments, it was not until 1982 that the Modern Language Association officially suggested that MLA publications need to incorporate rhetorical and composition theory,⁴ a point in time when, as Susan Miller argues, composition already existed as a stigmatized and alienated field.⁵ Although literature, as Raymond Williams demonstrates, emerged as a specialization of areas formally classified as rhetoric and grammar,⁶ it had, by the end of the nineteenth century, been separated from rhetoric, which ultimately resulted in the privileging of reading and the devaluing of writing.⁷ If one were to acknowledge the (d)evolutionary history of rhetoric in English departments, it would have to be a revisionist history that would begin with the shift in emphasis from speaking to writing, which, according to S. Michael Halloran, occurred as a result of the belletristic movement, the rise of the middle class and of professions, and the technological developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸

In contemporary English departments, the ongoing debate between writing and reading, or the rhetorical and the poetic, generally centers

around issues of knowledge, language, and power. As Peter Elbow identifies, modern readers, especially academic readers, regularly delimit knowledge at linguistic boundaries, while writers regularly attest to knowing more than they can articulate, and modern readers have recouped much of the authority to determine meaning even as classical readers were expected to ascertain authors' intentions.⁹ These shifts in power can be seen in the history of institutionally sanctioned reading practices. In classical modes of reading, language functions, according to Dana Harrington, as a force that acts upon the world while contemporary approaches to reading characterize language as a series of signs to be deciphered.¹⁰

Without a historical context, composition and literature have established divergent approaches to handling the business of the classroom. Teachers, as Miller argues, bring radically different expectations to texts in composition classrooms as opposed to ones in literature classrooms.¹¹ I once encountered a professor, himself an accomplished poet, who refused admittance to anyone who acknowledged an interest in writing poetry to his contemporary poetry course; as David Bartholomae points out, the teacher who claims not to understand an apparently confusing piece of student writing is often the same teacher who can explicate works of equally confusing authors, such as Thomas Pynchon or Frank O'Hara.¹² And while the postmodern critique is beginning to trickle its way down the department corridor, there is little guarantee that these potentially egalitarian insights are being implemented in early-American-literature survey halls as they are in composition classrooms. Contemporary theory, nevertheless, has begun to suggest a rapprochement.¹³ Literary theorists, such as Jonathan Culler¹⁴ and Terry Eagleton,¹⁵ and rhetoricians, such as Berlin,¹⁶ Elbow,¹⁷ Winifred Horner,¹⁸ and Richard Lloyd-Jones and Andrea Lunsford,¹⁹ have noted not simply the connections between rhetoric, composition, and literature but also ways in which rhetorical and composition theory inform a critical reading of literature. These insights, however, are not unique to the twentieth century. As early as the first century C.E., the Roman rhetorician Quintilian claimed in his *Institutio oratoria*, a lengthy work describing the training of the rhetor from the cradle to the grave, that writing, reading, and speaking are so inextricably connected that neglecting one of them necessarily inhibits the others.²⁰

Clearly, writing and reading cannot be separated either in theory or in practice. Normal writing, as Elbow demonstrates, is actually both writing-and-reading.²¹ Reading, as postmodern theorists have argued, is both

reading-and-writing. The teaching of writing and of literature, as Horner points out, is the praxis of closely connected and often inseparable theories fundamental to the understanding of language.²² Language does, I believe, represent the juncture where writing and reading, and speaking and listening for that matter, come together. And in spite of Patricia Bizzell's claims otherwise, a shared paradigm between the studying of writing and reading does exist.²³ It has for centuries upon centuries, and its name, as she suggests near the end of her article, is rhetoric. In contemporary classrooms, the act of reading is a loaded term that carries tendentious assumptions about language, knowledge, and the world. The presence of rhetoric can lead inexperienced and unfamiliar readers through the chaos of indeterminacy to meaning and understanding. In literature classrooms or any classrooms in which the primary focus is the consumption of texts, the power of a rhetorical theory of discourse and of language lies in its ability to enable inexperienced readers to *read* texts and to arrive at their own interpretations.

AUDIENCE

One characteristic that many readers in contemporary classrooms share is an absence of a backdrop against which the play of textual meaning can unfold. The students who enter a contemporary-American-literature survey, for example, have little, if any, exposure to literary theory or experience with sanctioned reading practices. This absent context—an unfamiliarity with genre structures, story grammars, poetic conventions, historical situations, interpretative theories, reading practices, and more—interferes with the meaning-making process of students, for readers must make predictions or, as Frank Smith explains, eliminate unlikely alternatives in order to understand a text.²⁴ The act of reading, Smith demonstrates, cannot be separated from the prior knowledges, purposes, and emotions of readers any more than it can be separated from texts, and it is in the conventions of texts that the expectations of readers and writers meet. While the fluency of readers depends upon both the characteristics of the reader and the text, even experienced readers, when faced with a difficult text, will read like beginners, who generally find most reading difficult.²⁵

For inexperienced readers, the presence of rhetoric in classrooms that center around the consumption of texts can provide a framework in which to read these texts. In establishing a framework, this rhetorical theory of discourse posits the meaning-making process as an interactive

dialogue among readers, readings, and texts. In each interpretative interaction, the elements of the dialogue can be classified as being comprised of either external or internal discourses. External discourses, such as conventional interpretations of texts or received knowledges proffered by teachers, emanate from a zone of distance, separate from and alien to readers. These external discourses, as established, authoritarian voices, resist constructive interaction, and, given their inertia and semantic rigidity, they cannot, as Mikhail Bakhtin points out, function as generative or creative voices that invite or encourage readers to enter into the meaning-making dialogue.²⁶ Unlike external discourses, internal discourses, as represented by individual readings of texts or connected knowledges generated by individuals, emerge from within readers themselves. Unable to remain static, these internal discourses situate readers and readings within existing discourses and reading practices, and, in their ability to engage both external and other internal discourses, these internal discourses elicit new and independent voices.²⁷

In identifying the dialogic nature of the meaning-making process, the presence of rhetoric serves to legitimize internal discourses, such as individual interpretations of texts or noncanonical knowledges of readers. In acknowledging the role of these internal discourses in the interpretative process, this rhetorical theory of discourse imbues them with power, thereby providing readers with an interactive voice in the meaning-making dialogue. Within this rhetorical framework, the traditionally silencing voices of external discourses recede, only to be supplemented by the voices of internal discourses. As a result, students in these classrooms are transformed from static, passive readers who react to and who are acted on by texts, into dynamic meaning-makers who proactively generate their own legitimate readings in a dialogic interaction with the authoritarian voices of external discourses.

PERCEPTIONS OF REALITY

Within this rhetorical framework, the presence of rhetoric in classrooms that center around the consumption of texts empowers readers to mediate external discourses and to articulate internal discourses by identifying and highlighting the rhetorical situation as the context in which the act of meaning is constructed. In doing so, this rhetorical theory of discourse exposes how the act of privileging a single element of the rhetorical situation offers readers direct access to the meaning-making process. This act of privileging one element of the rhetorical situation or another offers

readers interpretative vantages that both disrupt the unitary discourses of traditional interpretations represented by external discourses and provide readers with chocks or moorings to which they can secure their readings of texts.

This rhetorical theory of discourse, as an interpretative heuristic, offers a process through which readers can articulate their individual readings by situating these readings within the context of institutionally sanctioned reading practices. In literature classrooms, the elements of the rhetorical situation (subject, audience, perceptions of reality, and language) represent the matrices for dominant interpretative theories, which function as shared sets of culturally sanctioned reading practices. The privileged element of audience, for example, can be represented by any of the reader-response interpretative theories, such as those of Stanley Fish, David Bleich, or Wolfgang Iser, or reception theory, a historical version of reader-response theory proposed by Hans Robert Jauss. In privileging the audience, a reader could, for example, consider the divergent readings that different interpretative communities, such as African-American women and African-American men, would give Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. From the privileged perspective of the audience, some sites of contest that could surface in these readings include the abuse, the nature of love and relationships, and masculine and feminine forms of intimacy.

While privileging the element of the audience naturally lends itself to such issues as interpretative communities, privileging any of the other elements leads to alternative approaches. In terms of privileging the rhetorical element of the subject, readers might consider issues such as literary influence or the manner in which a text represents the psychology of an author or writer. Some relevant reading practices include the influence and anxiety of influence approaches to texts, phenomenological criticisms, and psychological and psychoanalytic criticisms. In terms of the element that addresses perceptions of reality, readers could examine the ways in which reality is described, whether in universal categories (archetypal criticisms), in economic or ideological referents (Marxist criticisms), or in terms of gender (feminist criticisms) or culture (New Historicism). Finally, the rhetorical element of language lends itself to a consideration of ways that the language of the text defers meaning (deconstruction), creates and resolves tensions (New Criticism), manifests definable poetic or literary qualities (Russian formalism), represents signs (semiotics), engenders speech acts (speech-act theory), constructs a first-order system of structures (structuralism), generates a spe-

cific style or means of literary expression (stylistics), or represents an aspect of the social institution of writing (*écriture*).

Within the rhetorical context, each of these elements provides a different vantage from which inexperienced readers could engage texts. In other words, the act of privileging one of the elements shifts the reader's reading of the world, and, as such, each perspective can reflect a different voice in the exegetic dialogue. The interpretations a reader offers Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, for instance, from the privileged perspective of the subject differ radically from those readings from the vantage of language as a signifying practice, each of which is no less legitimate than another. From the first, the story could become one of tension between hallucinations and reality for any number of characters, such as Sethe, Paul D., *Beloved* herself, or the ineffable narrator who offers the story. From the second, the story could coalesce around how the language of *Beloved*'s usurpation,²⁸ along with the language of the dedication and the epigraph, continually defers meaning, even as it provides a key to the text, by establishing and then decentering readings informed by subjectivity, race, sacrifice, and transformation.

In addition to assisting inexperienced readers with contexts in which to read texts, this rhetorical theory of discourse problematizes both the meaning-making process and reality itself, a problematization that mirrors contemporary discursive formations of the academic institution.²⁹ As a metanarrative, this rhetorical theory of discourse acknowledges the role of narratives in the act of meaning making even as it resists endorsing any single one as essential. The primacy of a single element, without denying the existence of the others, provides readers with access to the meaning-making process and offers a vantage from which to generate a conditional narrative to account for the text. As a postmodern narrative, this contingent reading is provisional and continually subject to dialogical interaction with other readings, as narratives of the texts. When readers experience the way that privileging an alternative element of the rhetorical situation changes the contours and alters interpretations of texts, they also recognize that reading practices represent ideological presuppositions and that reality is a dynamic process, not a static entity. This recognition fosters a critical literacy, which enables readers, as Paulo Freire attests, to develop their power to perceive critically the manner in which they exist with and in the world.³⁰

LANGUAGE

As a means of enabling readers to interrogate texts and sanctioned reading practices and to generate alternatives, a sophistic rhetorical theory of language lies at the center of this alternative theory of discourse. As a neosophistic theory of language, this rhetorical theory of language highlights the magical power of language to cocreate reality through generating readings of the world. Drawing upon the ideas of the sophists of the fifth century B.C.E., this rhetorical theory of language, in acknowledging the ideological basis of all choices, posits that readers interact with the world through a multivalent language that ultimately denies the existence of any universal, permanent, or neutral frameworks for arriving at truth or knowledge.³¹ As a subversive, yet playful process, this rhetorical theory of language exposes the contradictoriness and mutability of conventional belief systems and, like postmodernism, acknowledges that language is intricately involved in the construction of subjectivities and readings of the world, or metanarratives. This rhetorical theory of language exposes the purported unity of literary language as being comprised of many languages, only one of which is conventionally called poetic language.³² In the logosphere of classrooms that center around the consumption of texts, this rhetorical theory of language reveals the struggle between the centripetal forces of external discourses, sanctioned reading practices, and traditional interpretations and the centrifugal forces of heteroglossia, which reflect the languages of personal readings of the word and of the world generated by each reader.

In developing their linguistic awareness through becoming actively involved in the interpretative process, readers discover themselves surrounded by heteroglossia, not a single language. As language constitutes the boundary between readers and the world, it becomes readers' own, as Bakhtin points out, only when they appropriate it and adapt it to their own expressive intentions.³³ The word, as the essence of this rhetorical theory of language, exists for readers at three levels: as the word of the other, which belongs to and reflects the other; as the word of the self, which reveals the self and individual readings of the world; and as the word of the language, which legitimately belongs to, and reflects, the discourse community as a whole.³⁴ For readers, both the word of the self, which represents internal discourses, and the word of the other, either as other readers or as texts, exist as expressions of interiorized ideologies, and the word of the language, as a source of linguistic agency, stands as a potent force to be acquired and exploited. The composite word that

emerges from the dialogic interaction constructs both subjectivities and readings of the world. With this rhetorical theory of language, the subjectivities of readers shift from the distinctively postmodern constructions generated by social and material conditions to consciously constructed identities generated by the dialogic interaction of internal and external discourses. In place of proffered metanarratives, the language of each reader, in its linguistic encoding (at the semantic, syntactic, and discourse levels) and in the manner in which it reflects readers' dreams and desires, generates individual readings of both the world and the word.

This rhetorical theory of language, as it foregrounds the resistance to the unitary language of traditional classrooms, transcendent truths, and the banking mode of education, reveals the linguistic nature of reading practices and of knowledge. In classrooms that center around the texts of others, this understanding of language highlights the manner in which readers create, and are created, through their language and through the language of texts. In these classrooms, readers exchange their traditional roles as audience for new roles as subjects in the interactions between themselves and texts, between themselves and other readers, and between themselves and the world. As subjects in the process, the function of readers is to use the emergent word to name the world. Once named, the world, as Paulo Freire points out, reappears as a problem that requires a new naming.³⁵ This naming and renaming occurs through dialogic interactions of readers, mediated by this rhetorical theory of language, in order to name the world. In naming and renaming the world, readers write and rewrite new readings of the word. As such, this understanding of language provides readers with the ability to disrupt, to revise, or to generate alternative readings of texts and of reality. At the same time, readers can transcend the alienation of external discourse by using this rhetorical theory of language to articulate a difference, a critical distance that is essential for both resistance and, as Hephzibah Roskelly demonstrates, for socialization.³⁶

GESTALT

As a source of linguistic agency, the presence of rhetoric in classrooms that center around the consumption of texts enables readers to interrogate the relationship between language, knowledge, and power by encouraging students to investigate the meaning-making process, by raising their awareness to the existence of ideological assumptions in sanctioned

reading practices, and by empowering them to use this rhetorical theory of language to legitimize their own readings of the word and of the world. In these classrooms, the presence of rhetoric establishes a dialogue between the external discourses of sanctioned reading practices and traditional interpretations and the internal discourses of readers' readings of the world. As the means through which readers address the world, this dialogue cannot consist solely of external discourses in which some, such as teachers or sanctioned interpretations, name the world for others.³⁷ On the contrary, a genuine dialogue integrates external and internal discourses in a way that allows readers to read both the word and the world for themselves. Canonical texts and teachers' lectures, as authoritative discourses, must recede to the level of individual voices, and other voices, such as written responses, discussions among readers, and critical articles, must be incorporated into the ongoing dialogue. When this occurs, the traditionally passive readers acted upon by texts and by teachers become active meaning-makers engaged in a dynamic, continuous dialogue with themselves, with texts, with other readers in the classroom, and with the world at large.

In addition to a dialogic classroom, this rhetorical theory of discourse also establishes an intertextual environment. Besides a chronological or thematic schedule of readings, I'll generally separate the semester of a typical literature course into six sections, each of which focuses upon a different element of the rhetorical situation. In the first section, I'll ask the readers with whom I work to begin articulating their own meaning-making processes as we read the scheduled texts, and then I'll systematically shift our focus to a different element of the rhetorical situation as we enter each new section of the semester and conclude with the gestalt, or the sense of the rhetorical context as a whole, in the final section. With the beginning of each new section, I'll outline various reading practices that represent the privileged element under consideration, such as deconstruction for language or feminist criticisms for perceptions of reality, in order to provide a framework in which to view the texts. While the texts are marching forward in time or in themes, the interchanging rhetorical elements and their representative reading practices cut a swath across this progression in order to establish an intertextual classroom.

Even as this rhetorical theory of discourse provides inexperienced readers with a context within an intertextual environment, this rhetorical theory of language empowers readers to articulate a zone of difference in which they can reject, modify, or accept traditional readings of the word and the world. This zone of difference is a place where readers can ex-

periment with the relationship between readings of the world and readings of the word, and, in the act of exploiting this rhetorical theory of language, readers generate their own subjectivities and articulate their own readings of the world. Like the classical rhetoricians and their *progymasmata*, teachers in contemporary classrooms need to use a variety of writing assignments, such as expressive writing in journals, imitative exercises that capture style or modes, and critical responses to alternative readings of texts, along with presentations about the biographies of authors, the histories of genres, or other relevant issues, that ask readers to exploit this rhetorical theory of language. In classrooms that center around the consumption of texts, a rhetorical theory of language insists that teachers allow readers to become writers as well, and not just as critics but also as writers of the very genres and styles that they are trying to understand. A short-story writer's understanding, for example, of the relationship between a scene and the sense of time is quite different, but equally as valid, as an interpretative assessment by a critic, and there is no better way to understand the unique stylistic issues that surface with blank verse, to use another example, than to attempt to write poems in unrhymed, iambic pentameter. Along with the received knowledges of external discourses, the use of this rhetorical theory of language, as a means through which internal discourse can be articulated, leads to the constructed knowledge that integrates internal and external discourses.³⁸

Besides influencing the nature of these classrooms and the roles of readers within them, the presence of rhetoric in classrooms that center around the consumption of texts also shifts the focus of the learning that transpires in them. In problematizing the act of interpretation, the presence of rhetoric in such classrooms generates a critical literacy that foregrounds conventionally peripheral questions about the meaning-making process. In an attempt to address these questions in my literature classrooms, I establish a two-part process, which I outline during the first week of the semester, that both highlights the presence of rhetoric and assesses its efficacy. The first part of this process consists of a question that functions as a touchstone for our experiences and that remains central to the entire semester. In, for example, an early-American-literature survey, this question, which I present during the first week, is: what does early American literature *mean*? In order to answer this question, I tell the readers with whom I work, a second question must also be addressed: how does literature *mean* anyway? The presence of this rhetorical theory of discourse and language disposes readers to address these synthetic and metacontextual questions, which are integral to authentic learning. After

practicing working with partial answers to these questions over the duration of the semester, I'll typically ask readers to respond to them in a final text or a final exam. Besides establishing a tenor for the semester, this central question and its corollary orient readers toward synthesis and encourage them to consider how reading practices establish contexts and provide directions for their interpretations.

The second portion of this process asks readers to evaluate their own performances, which, in my literature classes, often assume the form of portfolios. With portfolios, readers can demonstrate or exhibit a range of different knowledges, which more accurately reflect all that transpires within a classroom over the course of any semester. In terms of the contents, I generally ask readers to include critical and imaginative texts, as well as samples from their reading journals that represent their burgeoning critical literacy and an introductory letter cataloging their choices. In addition to writing an evaluation of their own performance, I ask them also to critique the performance of a peer. The act of writing both of these evaluations requires that readers extend themselves beyond their own readings of the word and the world in order to recognize and to evaluate other readings. At the same time, these evaluations focus readers' portfolios toward more appropriate audiences than teachers, who represent specialized readers incapable of providing an uncontaminated reading.

EPILOGUE

Being a writer and a rhetorician, and having cut my teaching teeth in writing courses, I find that rhetorical theory inevitably informs my thinking and teaching in classrooms that traditionally center around the texts of others. For example, I feel compelled to demonstrate to readers through experiential learning how rhetoric enables the integration of external and internal discourses in order to generate a constructed knowledge. At the same time, I work to juxtapose divergent readings of the word and of the world with my own, and I also feel the need to demonstrate how my own readings of the world produce my readings of the word. As a tool for motivation, I try to call attention to the power and energy that is released when readers use these rhetorical theories to interpret texts in ways that correspond to, or in ways that ask them to (re)consider, their own readings of the world. Throughout it all, I continually work to diminish the amount of teacher-talk in my classrooms and articulate what remains in the form of open, genuine dialogue.

And finally, I try to remember that, given the nature of this rhetorical approach, I, too, will be transformed. Paradoxically, my role in these classrooms shifts from an author(ity) to an informed facilitator or monitor, and, as such, I learn each semester from my readers and from my own experiences more of what it means to be a writer, a reader, and a human being. As I've come to discover, the differences between being a writer and a reader are far fewer than I had been taught to believe, and the boundaries separating writing and reading continually become less and less distinct.

NOTES

¹ I would like to thank Ann Dobie for her patience and her wisdom and Michael Lowenstein, Alice Robertson, and Barbara Smith for their insights on, and assistance with, this text.

² James Berlin, *Rhetorics, Poetics, Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996), xii.

³ James Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900–1985* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 26.

⁴ Modern Language Association, "Report on the Future of the Profession," *PMLA* 97 (1982): 952.

⁵ Susan Miller, *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 47.

⁷ Berlin, in *Rhetorics, Poetics, Cultures*, attributes this separation to the shift from entrepreneurial to corporate capitalism while Susan Miller, in *Textual Carnivals*, claims that writing initially served as an ancillary to rhetoric and then later to literature.

⁸ S. Michael Halloran, "From Rhetoric to Composition: The Teaching of Writing in America to 1900," in *A Short History of Writing Instruction: From Ancient Greece to Twentieth Century America*, ed. James J. Murphy (Davis, Cal.: Hermagoras Press, 1990), 151–82.

⁹ Peter Elbow, "The War Between Writing and Reading—And How to End It," *Rhetoric Review* 12 (1993): 5, 8.

¹⁰ Dana Harrington, "Composition, Literature, and the Emergence of Modern Reading Practices," *Rhetoric Review* 15 (1997): 250–52. See also Jane Tompkins, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response," in *Reader-Response Criticism*, ed. Jane Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 201–32.

¹¹ Susan Miller, "What Does It Mean to Be Able to Write?" *College English* 45 (1983): 221.

¹² David Bartholomae, "The Study of Error," *College Composition and Communication* 31 (1980): 254.

¹³ Miller, in *Textual Carnivals*, lists her concerns with an integrationist approach to composition and literature. While her comments about the need for an awareness of the historical context and the social and economic limitations are relevant, I maintain that the central issues, particularly in spite of institutional biases (if this position is possible even as I work within the institution) center around readers, writers, and texts.

¹⁴ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

¹⁶ Berlin, *Rhetorics, Poetics, Cultures*.

¹⁷ Elbow, "The War Between Writing and Reading," 5–24.

¹⁸ Winifred Horner, ed. *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).

¹⁹ Richard Lloyd-Jones and Andrea Lunsford, eds., *The 1987 English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English and Modern Language Association, 1989).

²⁰ James J. Murphy, ed., *Quintilian on the Teaching of Speaking and Writing: Translations from Books One, Two, and Ten of the Institutio oratoria* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 10.1.1.

²¹ Elbow, 10.

²² Horner, 2.

²³ Patricia Bizzell, "On the Possibility of a Unified Theory of Composition and Literature," *Rhetoric Review* 4 (1986): 175.

²⁴ Frank Smith, *Understanding Reading* 4th ed. (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1988), 6 ff.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. and trans. Michael Holquist (Austin, Tex.: University of Austin Press, 1981), 344–45.

²⁷ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 345.

²⁸ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 210–13.

²⁹ Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1992), 5.

³⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1970), 64.

³¹ Michael Hassett, "Sophisticated Burke: Kenneth Burke as Neosophistic Rhetorician," *Rhetoric Review* 13.2 (1995): 373–77.

³² Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 295, 270–72.

³³ *Ibid.*, 293.

³⁴ For this understanding of the word, I am drawing upon Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 962; and James L. Kinneavy, *A Theory of Discourse* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 403.

³⁵ Freire, 69.

³⁶ Hephzibah Roskelly, "The Risky Business of Group Work," in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, ed. Gary Tate, Edward P.J. Corbett, and Nancy Meyers, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 145.

³⁷ Freire, 69–70.

³⁸ For more on constructed knowledge, see *Women's Ways of Knowing* by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 131 ff.

ESSAY 19

The ComPosition-ing of *Culture and Anarchy*

Recovering a Cultural Conflict in Arnold's Serene Text

ROB JACKLOSKY

My complaint is not that the postmodernists have “abandoned reason” nor that they are staining the purity of hitherto innocent academic disciplines and thereby destroying the universities. It is that they have given up on the idea of democratic politics, of mobilizing moral outrage in defense of the weak, of drawing upon a moral vocabulary common to the well-educated and the badly educated, to those who get paid for analyzing symbols and those who get paid for pouring concrete.

—Richard Rorty in *Dissent*¹

“Matthew Arnold—friend to the workingman!” is an unlikely rallying cry. Unlikely though it might be, I have found in Arnold a friend in helping working-class and other marginalized students find a place in his hitherto exclusionary culture. Arnold, if he is discussed at all in academic circles these days, is usually treated as something akin to “the dean” of culture—the nineteenth-century thinker most responsible for our modern sense of culture. His academic responsibilities in this metaphorical post have included defense of a serene, remote, almost indefinable culture consisting of, among other intangibles, “the best that is known and thought” and “sweetness and light.” Understandably, undergraduates often feel excluded from this variety of culture. And for many conservative admirers of Arnold, exclusion was precisely the point.² Arnold had fenced in culture, made it appropriately remote to those on the right of the political spectrum and largely irrelevant to those on the left. His reputation as the defender of culture comes in large part from his magisterial *Culture and Anarchy*, and it is this text that I’d like to reposition as one

that is volatile, relevant and capable of providing the “moral vocabulary” of which Richard Rorty speaks.

Culture and Anarchy, looked at properly, has buried within it a contentious, not serene, culture, and if the text is taught from the perspective of basic composition pedagogy, which asks students to answer back, question, and undermine Arnold, they will discover this conflict. Further, students will find that in responding to Arnold and interrogating his text in this way, they are mirroring the strategy of the text and its manner of composition, and in the process, enacting the conflictual culture that Arnold envisioned.

One of the premises of the basic composition class is that we are welcoming students with “skill deficiencies,” who have been marginalized by race and class, and we are introducing them into, and teaching them how to use, “fundamental cultural literacies.” The old academic model, informed by elitist, narrow, or simply ungenerous interpretations of Arnold, assumes those with different cultural literacies and uncomfortable with the dominant cultural discourse of the academy are for all intents and purposes “culturally illiterate,” as the E.D.Hirsch phrase goes. The standard argument is that these students need to be divorced and cleansed, in the way that Richard Rodriguez claims he was,³ of their class and ethnicity in order to be drawn to the center of the cultural discourse. Resistance is bad, to be discouraged, and “broken down” if necessary, with the violence that that implies. At the very least their “resistance” (and I mean here, for instance, rejecting a text as “boring,” or perhaps a reluctance or inability to integrate assigned texts into writing assignments) is an obstacle to be overcome. In the new paradigm, growing out of the composition theory which has gained ground in the last twenty years, difference and resistance are validated and struggle welcomed. This productive disruption (to the smooth functioning of the class and the dominant ideologies) is a major thrust of basic composition studies, especially the work of Min-Zhan Lu, Ann Murphy,⁴ and Mina Shaughnessy. Much of basic composition’s work has concentrated largely on ethnicity, but in the work of Kurt Spellmeyer,⁵ Shirley Bryce-Heath⁶ and the cultural anthropology of Paul Willis, the difference and resistance discussed can also revolve around class. It is this latter variety that I am interested in pursuing.

In the following pages, I will present my vision of *Culture and Anarchy* and the several issues or questions that my use of composition strategies allows me or compels me to confront. These questions include: how to best use historical context in the literature classroom; how to

highlight and harness productive conflict in a seemingly placid text; how to make a “boring” text relevant by helping students find a place for themselves in Arnold’s vision; how to handle student charges that texts like *Culture and Anarchy* don’t have a place in their pragmatically minded lives; how to refrain from a paternalistic approach that tells students that some texts may not be exciting, but are “good for you” and openly explore how we as teachers came to decide that there is good in the texts, and also to validate the students who don’t experience this good.

When I bring *Culture and Anarchy* into my English literature classroom, I bring with it this composition-based approach and with it as well my own scholarly interest in discovering conflict in Arnold’s text. My strategy, both in the classroom and in this essay, is to take *Culture and Anarchy* off its pedestal and make it more approachable. The essays I teach in my composition classroom, on the other hand—essays like Richard Rodriguez’s “Hunger of Memory,” Paulo Freire’s “Banking Concept of Education” or Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Speaking in Tongues”—don’t need to be taken “off a pedestal” because they are presented without much fanfare, are themselves often hostile to the notion of “pedestals,” and are clearly in service to the primary thrust of the course: the students’ own writing. Students are told from the first day that they will be “using” these essays to test their own ideas against, and will be encouraged to question, even undermine, them. Further, these essays are not being presented as part of any “historical tradition” as is clearly the case in my Traditions in English Literature course, where Arnold appears. I hardly ever, implicitly or explicitly, make claims for their “importance” or “centrality,” and usually present them without any distancing historical contextualization, unless such context is necessary for making sense of a feature of the essay. It is only a self-consciously “literary” approach (and by this I essentially mean literature-classroom approach) to a text that requires one to provide an historical scene-setter that puts the work in some context.

Here is the first challenge for a literature teacher trained in a composition classroom. As certain as I am that historical contextualization is essential in understanding literary texts, there is still a part of me (trained in five years of teaching composition) that feels that whenever I provide this kind of detailed background material, I am narrowing the field of possible interpretation or shutting down discussion. This is especially the case when we tell students to approach the text with the openness and aggressive reading-against-the-grain style that composition class encourages.

Because starting a class with 20-minutes of historical contextualization can stultify classroom discussion, I've learned in composition classes to begin with more open-ended questions like, "Did you like this text?" or "What is Arnold's tone in this paragraph?"—questions that seek to give students some purchase on the text, and empower them as "expert" arguers or as able to question a text's intentions as the professor. By providing the historical circumstances of a text's production, I wonder, am I violating some law of "authorial intentionality" or at the very least sandbagging students with "secret" or "inside" information that can be completely disempowering? Often, when I have waited until students have ventured their interpretations of a text, and have only then interjected political or historical background as an epilogue, gloss, or frame, I'm met with, "How were we supposed to know that?" Anticipating this response, I usually wait for my opening and use the historical context to support the arguments students have already made, to confirm their intuitions, or gently prod their conclusions in another direction. But no matter how difficult it is to introduce history while maintaining the openness that composition class values, history is what liberates *Culture and Anarchy*, and it must be introduced.

I will begin with the essential kernel of history that opens up the text and briefly discuss its potential effects. I will then look at several more delicate historicizing issues and pursue these at greater length later in the essay.

My project suggests that the debate between Matthew Arnold and a lesser-known contemporary of his, Frederic Harrison, offers an alternative version of culture which thrives on, rather than avoids, productive conflict. In the late 1860s, Matthew Arnold and Frederic Harrison engaged in a debate conducted in the popular press about culture. Harrison was an Oxford-educated gentleman lawyer who could without irony think of himself as a friend to the workingman. In fact, he called himself a "Radical of the Bright school," referring to the fiery working-class orator John Bright with whom he is often linked in *Culture and Anarchy*. In his autobiography Harrison recalled that he waged "a campaign all my life against social oppression and the insolence of the rich" and this is the war he prosecutes in *Culture and Anarchy*.⁷ While Harrison's contribution to this debate has been largely lost to modern-day readers, Arnold's half of it is immortalized in *Culture and Anarchy* and institutionalized in a culture based on disinterested ideals. Harrison is crucial to dislodging this reading of Arnold and discovering a sense of the productive conflict in *Culture and Anarchy*. As a presence in Arnold's text, Harrison helps

reconstruct the “difference” within the cultural debate. As an intellectual with close ties to working-class politics and an early champion of trade unionists, Harrison also helps us discover a working-class presence and an openness to dissent already implicit, but submerged, in Arnold’s text.⁸

In other words, I believe that the conflict was in *Culture and Anarchy* to begin with, but basic composition’s notions of struggle within texts, between texts, and inside the classroom, have given me a frame within which to think about *Culture and Anarchy* and to understand its implications for students. Min-Zhan Lu, for instance, validates the struggle of working-class students to negotiate the contradictions between academic language and their own class backgrounds. She, in fact, insists that students and teachers learn to live with the contradictions that occur when one lives in the borderlands between the two discourses—that of the academy and that of everyday life. In “From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle,” she advises “don’t teach students to ‘survive’ the whirlpool of crosscurrents by avoiding it. Use the classroom to moderate the currents. Moderate the currents but teach them from the beginning to struggle.”⁹ Rather than practicing disinterestedness or policing the boundaries between the two languages that often serve as boundaries between classes, we should explore the value of violating them. We should, as Mina Shaughnessy puts it, stop “guarding the tower” and “converting the natives” and, instead, “dive in” to the crosscurrents.¹⁰

One of the ironies of teaching an enormously influential, sacrosanct, and intimidating text like *Culture and Anarchy* to undergraduates is that although they may be intimidated by the density of Arnold’s language, once invited to find fault with the text’s intentions and practices, assumptions and strategies, students invariably zero in on the essential contradiction in the work. Given the opportunity, they see that although *Culture and Anarchy* pretends to be serene and aloof, it continually seeks out conflict and baits its opponents. One way to provide this opportunity is, as I’ve said, to hold off on “contextualizing” Arnold in the beginning of class, and invite student criticism of him. In a literature class that is built on a composition class’s open, conversational model and rewards direct engagement with the text, students can often find their own way into *Culture and Anarchy*. Students feel free to criticize Arnold for being disingenuous in his search for serenity and see him as actually spoiling for a fight. In doing so, students remake *Culture and Anarchy* into what it originally was: a document born of conflict.

As I’ve hinted earlier, part of the way in which *Culture and Anarchy* has been received is based on the way in which it has been taught in

literature classes. And the way in which it is presented is tied to the anthologies most often used in introductory classes. The *Norton Anthology*, for instance, excerpts it in a way that underlines universal qualities like “Sweetness and Light,” and overlooks conflict-laden segments like the “Preface” or “Introduction.” *Culture and Anarchy*’s style, alternatively authoritative and playful, also defies students’ attempts to question it or seek a point of critical entry. The selection of passages, when coupled with its tone, produces writing, to borrow a phrase from Roland Barthes, at its most “readerly,”¹¹ which authoritatively places the reader in the position of student. Despite its forbidding appearance, as most critics but very few students know, this formidable “book” is essentially a collection of magazine articles published in the *Cornhill Magazine* over the course of a year, written in rebuttal to arguments made by Frederic Harrison and others.¹²

Establishing that this apparently disinterested, aloof text was written in a piecemeal, give-and-take fashion in the popular press, immediately makes it more available for criticism: An aloof text might be delivered from on high in lecture form, but a text produced by an antagonistic audience’s critique invites more of the same kind of critique from the students. But there is a second, attendant, irony in the way the text was produced, especially for the modern English professor who delivers *Culture and Anarchy* in sedate, lecture form. The irony is that its earliest version was given in the form of a lecture called “Culture and its Enemies” at Oxford University, in June 1867, by the spiritual forefather of all modern English professors. Arnold gave the lecture in his capacity as the first lay professor of poetry to lecture in English (rather than Latin) at the end of his ten years at the university. In this, his final lecture, he said he was striving to achieve a tone as “Oxfordesque” as possible: “Having often trod on the toes of Oxford, and yet having a sincere affection for her, I wanted to make my last lecture as pleasing to my audience and as Oxfordesque as I could.”¹³ But even in this most traditional, Olympian, authoritative, and even elegiac moment, Arnold gives a lecture that is essentially a retort to an “attack” by Harrison and an invitation for more of the same.

In this “attack,” Harrison had called Arnold’s discourse on culture “the very silliest cant of the day.” He calls culture “a desirable quality in a critic of new books [that] sits well on a professor of ‘belles-lettres’” and writes that it really “means simply a turn for small fault-finding, love of selfish ease, and indecision in action.”¹⁴ In his lecture, Arnold sought to reclaim Harrison’s misuse of the term “culture” in order to

redefine it as something less effete and remote. But Arnold's response suggests how problematic it is to pose as one who wishes to disinterestedly explore "what culture is, what good it can do, what is our own special need of it" while continually being confronted with and even imaginatively seeking out confrontation with very "interested" men like Frederic Harrison.

His habitual return to Harrison, his rereadings of him, in fact make his argument possible. Even in the very definition of the word "culture," he must first quote Harrison's:

I take culture to be something a great deal more than what Mr. Frederic Harrison and others call it: "a desirable quality in a critic of new books."¹⁵

He uses Harrison's term as something to define himself against, but here, as indeed throughout, he resists explicitly defining "culture" himself, preferring to say that he praises it, serves its "interests," and thinks it is a "great deal more" than what his critics contend. As much as he seeks to rise above conflict, Arnold finds that in the meantime, he must continually include his real, obstinately practical reading community in order to create his discourse on the ideal. In doing so, he must try to patch over the ruptures that occur between the ideal, Hellenizing culture he speaks of and the practical, Hebraic culture he finds himself immersed in. So even if he refuses to define it, he ends up producing a hybrid culture: one that is thoughtful, but completely engaged.

Not incidentally, for my purposes as a teacher of writing (which I am, of course, in literature, as well as in writing courses), he models for students an almost ideal blend of awareness of audience, close reading of quotations, passionate engagement, and extreme sensitivity to the criticism of his "peer readers." In fact, *Culture and Anarchy's* manner of composition predicts the "writing as revision" process that David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky champion in their much-used composition anthology *Ways of Reading*.¹⁶

Arnold quotes the Harrison passage so many times, embedding it and re-embedding it in his text, that it becomes clear that, for him, it holds some charm beyond the simple point that Harrison is making. He writes at one point, "Mr. Harrison is very hostile to culture." This hostility, this fierceness that he "finds" in Harrison, may in fact be his own fierceness that he has projected onto Harrison. Harrison's misreading of him excites and prompts him to find anger in the Harrison passage. He feels compelled to "revise" Harrison, to try to intuit his motives.

Whether the existence of the initial conflict is real or imagined is not as important as the value of conflict as a generative force. The way that Harrison's conflict leads inevitably to Arnold's sweetness recalls Vassilis Lambropoulos's point about the title *Culture and Anarchy*. Lambropoulos argues that Arnold offers not thesis and antithesis, not culture "or" anarchy but two terms that are dependent on each other: a text or a culture which embeds or tolerates anarchy within itself in order that it might at the proper moment produce itself: Anarchy begets culture.¹⁷ In what seems to be an extension of his opposition of his own "sweetness and light" to what he sees as Harrison's "exasperation," Arnold writes, "he who works for machinery, he who works for hatred, works only for confusion. Culture looks beyond machinery, culture hates hatred."¹⁸ "Hatred" is the enemy of culture, but paradoxically is also the means by which culture achieves sweetness and light. In Arnold's clever formulation we are told "culture hates hatred." For culture to be able to "hate" raises the specter of a culture which meets hatred (or the perception of hatred) with a (perhaps playful) hatred of its own—a clash which is not completely redolent of sweetness and light. Despite his efforts to shape an ideal discourse that transcends the sterility of everyday conflict, he finds himself compelled to use this conflict to construct or generate the discourse.

It is one thing, however, to claim that composition theory gives one a "way in" to a text as formidable as *Culture and Anarchy*, a prism through which the conflict inherent in it can be laid bare. It is an important thing, and one which made and makes my project possible, but it is a thing that is securely rooted in the realm of literary scholarship. As such, it might seem to have very little relevance in teaching the text of *Culture and Anarchy* to undergraduates in a survey course. In the following pages, I will discuss how presenting *Culture and Anarchy* in the way I've described can make Matthew Arnold's text not just interesting to undergraduates (no mean feat in and of itself), but crucial to helping them find a place in their own culture.

In both literature and composition classes, when selecting course readings, I have unwittingly alienated students in at least two different and diametrically opposed ways: First, by assigning forbidding canonical texts (anything from Thomas Carlyle to Simone DeBeauvoir) and presenting them as "important," "central," and seminal without allowing students any ownership of them. They may respect such texts, but they won't be engaged by them, and they won't see their relevance to their lives or goals. Second, by building composition sequences around "ac-

cessible” texts on popular-culture topics like “fashion” or “comedy” and trying to convince undergraduates unacquainted with the field of cultural studies that Calvin Klein or *Married With Children* is worth their serious consideration. In the midst of a semester of struggling to engage students’ interest in these “worthwhile” texts on one hand, or “fun” texts on the other, it is easy to become angry and blame students for being chronically “bored” with a whole range of texts, from elite to popular. I would argue that such a reaction to student resistance (and I have this reaction myself every semester) is a misreading of what is happening.

In this regard, Arnold’s text presents a rare opportunity for instruction, for teachers and students alike. It is ostensibly a keystone of “inaccessible” elite culture that would like to quash difference, but that actually has within it an invitation to take issue with it, and so be a part of the culture. A document whose lofty and shifting definitions of “culture” could be used to exclude and obfuscate, can end up giving working-class students what Bourdieu calls the cultural capital they come to college to obtain, and so therefore serve as a means of liberation. Terry Eagleton’s description of “cultural capital” makes this clear:

In the field of education...symbolic violence operates not so much by the teacher speaking “ideologically” to students, but by the teacher being perceived as in possession of an amount of “cultural capital” which the student needs to acquire. As Bourdieu argues...a similar form of symbolic violence is at work in the whole field of culture, where those who lack the “correct” taste are unobtrusively excluded, relegated to shame and silence.¹⁹

If working-class students understand that cultural capital means monetary capital and societal power, they will have little patience with pedagogies that seek to throw aside great books for the sake of their liberation from “received notions” or the “banking concept of education.” What this brand of liberation might feel like to them is the withholding of the “cultural capital” and “correct taste” that the professor supposedly possesses. Donald Lazere discusses how even Paulo Freire’s liberatory methods might actually feel oppressive to working-class students:

Freire’s pedagogy for the oppressed is grounded on the premise that their alienation and acute awareness of their socioeconomic powerlessness will serve as a strong motivating factor for acquiring the literacy skills and knowledge that can help liberate them... Where such applications are apt

to run into trouble in the United States is with students who are neither poor nor ostensibly oppressed and alienated, or with students who are, but who have decided on pursuing upward mobility and integration rather than rebellion or separatism.²⁰

Lazere points out that proponents of leftist pedagogy often promote their theories at elite institutions, and preach essentially to the scions of the “ruling class”—and so avoid all contact with the students they ostensibly seek to “liberate.” These are students who already possess the keystones of cultural capital that is being questioned or derided, and whose own status will be unaffected by liberatory pedagogical methods or their professor’s readings of Madonna or hip-hop culture, no matter how “radical” they are. On the other hand, at institutions that cater to first-generation college students, such non-authoritarian pedagogy (de-emphasis of great-books curriculum, conversational classrooms, group work rather than lecture, emphasis on process rather than product, a de-emphasis of grades) might produce resistance from working-class students because they sense that some part of elite culture is being withheld from them, that they are being patronized.²¹ The beauty of Arnold’s text is that it can both confer cultural capital and allow historically marginalized students to discover that a position of opposition has been reserved for them within Arnold’s elite culture. And that this position will allow them to take ownership of the culture, question it and still pursue the “upward mobility” that they have come to college to obtain. This has the attendant advantage of helping to convince students that opposition to authority (Arnold’s, even the professor’s) is something validated even by the very canonical, stodgy text being studied. Gerald Graff reminds us that even (especially?) we left-oriented teachers who proclaim to be open to students’ oppositional approaches end up shutting down debate by making our own theoretical position the hegemonic one.²² Even if our position is that of the Freirean “liberation” pedagogy, students can just as easily be overwhelmed or left out by this as anything else, especially if, as working-class students, they have come to gain access to the middle-class life that culture promises. If students suspect that college is not equipping them with the ability to “rise,” they might rightfully suspect the entire enterprise. In attempting to respond to a student’s class-position by offering accessible texts, instructors can in fact alienate them.

Paul Willis writes of this in his landmark ethnography of the English school system, *Learning to Labour*. He observes that the subversive behavior (refusal to do the work, absenteeism) of a group of young men

in working-class schools (who call themselves “the lads”) reveals an intuitive—or a common-sense—understanding of the role that their school is preparing them for. Their rejection of the school’s disciplinary routine and assertions that these working-class “lads” can “rise” is a kind of “penetration” of the dominant ideology of the school system. Despite the institutional rhetoric of equal opportunity in a democratic society, choice of careers, and the ability to rise through education, these boys sense that in most cases, their futures have been decided for them. They understand that the kind of working-class role they assume, construction worker or factory hand, is of little consequence: Their class designation is what will delimit their existence.

The working-class “lads” that Willis studies reject what they see as the charade of education and seek to keep themselves aloof from the oppression they see in mental labor. Their rebellion, class solidarity, and rejection of the capitalist glorification of individualism is ultimately self-destructive: Rejecting the mental labor of school as invasive and oppressive guarantees a life spent in hourly wage manual labor. As Willis puts it

The rejection of school, and the cultural penetration of the unfairness of the “equivalent” it offers can be seen as the rejection of individualism. It is also however, simultaneously the rejection of mental activity in general... Individualism is rejected not for itself but for its part in the school masque where mental work is associated with unjustified authority, with qualifications whose promise is illusory. Individualism is penetrated therefore at the cost of a practical division of human capacity and a yielding of the power to properly exercise one half of it. As one kind of solidarity is won, a deeper structural unity is lost. Although the “lads” stand together, they do so on this side of the line with individualism and mental activity on the other.²³

The lesson that the “Lads” teach us—at the tragic cost of their own doomed resistance—is that the working-class youths are free in at least one way: “The working class does not *have* to believe the dominant ideology. It does not need the mask of democracy to cover its face of oppression.”²⁴ The “lads” penetrate the charade, but in rejecting intellectualism outright, are unable to outmaneuver it.

In my classroom at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in the Bronx, I feel as if I’ve discovered a more complex form of “resistance,” or, depending on your perspective, “penetration.” At this college historically dedicated to first-generation college students, students can readily see the institutional commitment to helping them “rise,” so they know the

school is not “tracking” them toward a working-class future. Unlike the lads, these students are here by choice, and do not reject their schooling or suspect that “mental work is associated with unjustified authority.” They believe in the practical benefits a college degree can bring them: It will ultimately deliver them into the middle-class position they desire. Still, they might feel that many courses in the “liberal arts” core curriculum (one very much indebted to Matthew Arnold’s conception of the “best that is known and thought”) are not necessary to this end, that they are courses “required” more for institutional goals than their own. Literature courses are chief among them. The students most dedicated to the proposition of rising are sometimes most impatient with those courses and texts that seem to have no part in their practical upward movement—even if their career goal is teaching. A recent poll conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles suggests that seeing education as a “means to an end” is a national and not a local phenomenon.²⁵ The students seek the pragmatic “mechanical” means to success so much deplored by Arnold (in this case, grades, certification, courses in education, student-teaching) and see being able to discuss 130-year-old British texts as perhaps a “desirable quality for a professor of belles lettres” but not for the New York Public School teachers that they will be.

In fact, it is not at all unusual to find education majors (who choose English Literature as their “content” area) who feel that they have “penetrated” the fact that the study of literature—especially British nineteenth-century literature—is beside the point. To them, this course work is more about keeping me employed within the department than finding them employment in elementary schools. In such pragmatic-minded students, it is not helpful to take an Arnoldian high road and argue for the ennobling nature of “the best that’s known and thought,” but that doesn’t mean that *Culture and Anarchy* is without resource. It instructs us to “rise above our ordinary selves.” And this injunction parallels composition theory’s injunction to strain to understand the “Other’s” position even if it threatens us.²⁶ I know that I might more profitably rise above my own belief that *Culture and Anarchy* is valuable and relevant, in order to *make* it relevant to their lives.

I would go so far as to suggest one of the hallmarks of literature teachers trained in composition classrooms is that they are especially mindful both of their student “audience,” and the relationship between the classroom and the popular culture. Perhaps as a group, we are therefore more likely than past generations of literature professors to key texts to contemporary events and issues students are interested in. In the trenches of

composition classrooms filled with restive first-year students, we develop, I think, a double consciousness: aware not only of the argument being made by the essays, but also of connections to the student's world and possible parallels to contemporary issues. Such a doubleness of consciousness might prompt me to bring in copies of *Elle* magazine when reading Mary Wollstonecraft's "Vindication of the Rights of Women" to demonstrate how the eighteenth-century cult of femininity she describes still persists today. It might cause me to describe what Arnold or J.S. Mill might say about recent congressional efforts to defund the National Endowment for the Arts (and the Republican members of Congress might be surprised to find themselves disagreeing with these particular "dead white males"). But looking for such opportunities grows out of an everyday stance of responsiveness to students and awareness of the necessity of making texts speak to present-day problems that seems to me a positioning more than a pedagogy.

In what more programmatic ways have I tried to transcend my ordinary self? Well, exposing how my authority as a teacher *can* be based on the tactics of obfuscation and intimidation (that *Culture and Anarchy* is sometimes accused of using) is one way to make both myself and the text more vulnerable. Allowing the students the opportunity to forthrightly reject a beloved text as boring and irrelevant, and opening the floor for discussion of how little choice and "authority" students have in the matter of text selection is another. Finally, I have asked students in a Victorian literature classroom to do free writing and group work on how their religion, race, or class status push them to the margins of the contemporary culture in the same way that religious "nonconformists," like Catholics, or minorities, like the Irish (especially effective at a heavily Irish and predominantly Catholic college), were marginalized in Arnold's time.

A writing assignment I've used along these lines resembles those described by Lindsay Pentolfe Aegerter in a recent issue of *College English*²⁷ which ask students to examine their own identity before they consider the text at hand. In the past, I have used a three-step assignment sequence borrowed from my composition training. After having students write a standard three-page "objective," academic response to Arnold's treatment of "nonconformists," or the working class in his text, I ask students in a free write to consider the times in their own lives when they have been marginalized or treated as an other because of the way they looked, their gender, their religious beliefs, or economic status. Alternately, if students feel they have never had such an experience, I ask them to question why they think that they have never had their identity called

into question. I use this second step of the assignment sequence as a way to surface either feelings of estrangement, of being left out, on one hand, or as a chance to look at their, perhaps, unexamined entitlement on the other. After they have done their personal reflection, I ask students to connect these feelings with the Arnold readings, especially their “academic” treatment of them in the first exercise. With this “locating the self” exercise, personal feelings can come into contact with Arnold’s archly intellectual argument. Of course, students’ discussion of their own experience will be more passionate than their academic argument, and we explore this fact. But hopefully there will be some minimal connection between their personal experience and their academic argument.

In a best-case scenario, this sequence will demonstrate how our personal subject positions inform the arguments we make, and possibly make the Arnold passages resonate a bit more. Sometimes we might even discuss the rhetorical advantages and disadvantages of being Arnoldian, and “rising above” our selves in order to make “disinterested” arguments (as they did in the first step) when compared with using the “self” to make the argument. At the very least, students can get closer to why they are left “cold” by Arnold’s argument or why they find it so foreign to their experience.

It might be at this point (and I emphasize *might* because the comfort level of the class would have to be fairly high in order to take this route) that I reveal my own working-class background and describe why I think this fact informs my interest in and approach to Arnold. Why growing up in a house noisy with conflict might attract me to a figure famous for avoiding or rising above it. Why, given my own early sense of exclusion from the cultural elite, I would be attracted to a figure who should have logically repelled me as a representative of all things exclusionary. Why, as a working-class “scholarship boy” in the classic Richard Hoggart sense of the phrase, I desired to master the cultural terms which were the means of exclusion. And why I was eager to find the cornerstones of high culture that professors, and public intellectuals (which for my book-, magazine-, and newspaper-free house meant televised intellectuals) like William F. Buckley possessed and that my father, a brewery fork lift operator, decidedly did not.

From one point of view, no one could be more alien to my experience than Arnold. But Arnold’s arch, urbane tone, his cosmopolitan wit, his absolute sense of right and wrong, of what was culturally worthy and culturally wanting, held a charm for someone looking for the royal road to culture. Later, I would find other, perhaps more sophisticated, pleas-

ures in Arnold, but even these—an appreciation for his verbal playfulness, or his desire for “conflict” in his apparent repose, for instance—grow out of my class background. Though I might have come to Arnold looking for an escape from my class, there is no escaping the self. I point out to my students that these relationships can only be found through reflection on one’s own position and drawing out what identity we bring to the essay to see where exactly the points of contact are between Arnold and the student reader, and failing contact, where the points of conflict are. Doing personal reflection exercises while reading Arnold has the added benefit of allowing students to see that Arnold is a person (not an inconsequential point for students who are subjected to a parade of names—Mill, Carlyle, Ruskin, Wollstonecraft—unconnected with personhood) with passions, biases, habits, failings, in short, a life which gave him reasons for making the arguments he did.

Of course, taking these “personal” approaches opens one to charges of irrelevance and special pleading, and it can open up divisions and create discomfort among students who only moments before had all been happily united by their belief that the Arnold text they read the night before is dull. And on some mornings, I might find placidly moving through the syllabus a more attractive option than trying to make Arnold “relevant” and either failing miserably or succeeding in raising race and class issues that polarize students. Ever mindful of what Arnold would say, I’m reminded that he criticized statesmen who gauged their actions by the ordinary self of their constituents “on whose favor they depend,” and said that leaders were not relieved of the responsibility for replacing their own party, class, or constituency’s interests with a willingness to put ideas to the test of honest contestation. In fact, it is incumbent upon Harrison and Arnold to “betray” the interests of their party, class, or personal self-interest, in order to have a chance at self-understanding and actual progress. If we succeed at, as Arnold puts it, “knowing oneself and conquering oneself,” we then have a chance that our ideas might, after entering the contest, be reformed and reconstructed and emerge better for the strife.

Arnold speaks of the “remnant” or best self that exists in every class, which would allow members of that class to transcend its “ordinary self.” Arnold’s admonishment, as it turns out, is consonant with modern anthropological methodology of respecting alien cultures. Modern anthropology recognizes the difficulty of interpretation when, as was the case with traditional anthropology, “self-absorbed Self...lose[s] sight altogether of the culturally different Other.”²⁸ An enlightened-us,

benightedness dichotomy speaks to the relationship between teacher and student. The paradigm of the “self-absorbed self gazing at the unknowing Other, Kurt Spellmeyer points out, was the norm by the nineteenth century. Discussing nineteenth-century missionary ethnographers, Spellmeyer describes how early ethnographers served in effect as “missionaries of Reason,” a designation that has significant resonance for Arnold’s modern “status as a hero of reason” as Gerald Graff puts it.²⁹ Missionaries like William Swan saw their duty as imposing “reason” on colonial subjects which would rescue them from the teeming, incomprehensible, pagan life-world and make them not only comprehensible, but tractable. Spellmeyer writes

A return to reason with the capital “R” might enable us to see the prevailing chaos of different values from a new and reassuring perspective, not as a collision of rival truths, but as a contest among rival claimants to the Truth, each positioned somewhere between stark ignorance and perfected knowledge.³⁰

Of course, indigenous peoples were assumed to be much closer to “stark ignorance” than “perfected knowledge” and Reason would be one thing (religion, guns, and capitalism might be others) that would drag the benighted into the light of Western values. Spellmeyer writes that “those of us taught to hold reason in unreflecting esteem would do well to recollect that the West’s colonial adventure was at the same time a history of reason’s relentless, and subversive invocation.”³¹ A more enlightened ethnographic project would not use missions as something so much to convert as to understand the native populations with whom they had contact, and ethnographers would have to reconstruct their own roles (or reposition themselves, as Renato Rosaldo puts it) and in the process would reconstruct the natives. Anthropology gradually shifted away from missionaries like William Swan, who was heartened when he “exposed the futility of native arguments for a multitude of gods, etc.” No longer would ethnographers mock the ignorance of native cultures in the following manner:

They would say “this is too much for our minds,” (meaning such subjects were beyond their reach). In fact, they are in general very ignorant, even of the tenets of their own superstition [Buddhism], nor is it requisite, according to their ideas, that they should know them, their duty consisting merely in reading prayers in an unknown tongue... and performing other bodily exercises; so that they are saved completely *the trouble of thinking*; on this ac-

count, their religion is more suited to the indolence of their minds, as well as the depravity of their nature, than one which addresses the understanding.³²

Swan's cure for this brand of intellectual indigence was taking pains "to excite in them a spirit of enquiry," which sounds benevolent enough, until he describes how he will excite this spirit:

The people should be taught to *think* and to consider this as their undoubted privilege. When they learn that freedom of thought and action in religious matters is their inalienable right, their eyes will then begin to open upon the deceitful maxims of their own priesthood.³³

Of course, Swan limits the "freedom of thought and action in religious matters" that is "their inalienable right" severely when he asserts that the "inculcation of Christian principles" is the necessary aim of his version of free and open-ended religious enquiry. This early description of how reason works sounds not unlike Arnold's formulation of the way culture works, by letting "reason and the will of God prevail." Only for Swan, the emphasis is decidedly on "God." For "culture," according to Christopher Herbert, was what was habitually counterpoised to the anomie of native cultures. In England as well as abroad, "culture" was linked to Christianity and Godliness, while native (and working-class) cultures were linked, of course, to anomie and depravity.³⁴ And, too often, "culture" was not the free play of ideas that Arnold repeatedly insisted on, but a very limited, directed, inculcation of Christian and Western values.

Missionary work of this kind essentially meant the export and imposition of the "centre of power" and the requirement that indigenous populations accommodate themselves to this alien, ostensibly objective Reason. Impatience might follow if the "beneficiaries" were slow to abandon the "deceitful maxims" that comprise their own center of power, but never the inclination to draw the European center of power outward to meet the subject positions of the native populations. Even as we criticize the narrow-mindedness of nineteenth-century missionaries from our position of "ideological superiority," we should examine whether the academy's attitude toward entering students from different class backgrounds differs that markedly from missionaries toward natives. Even as a product of a working-class background myself, my own disappointment with working-class students who are uninterested in literature might be one place to begin. Another might be the way in which working-class students are generally met by the academy: with a combination of paternal-

istic solicitude and quiet-knowing that we know what's best for them. ("I know you think Arnold is boring, that Carlyle is too difficult to read, but these things are good for you. You'll get used to it.") These students, the institutional logic goes, should as quickly as possible shed their class markers, their "rival truths," and embrace the Reason (with a capital R) of the Academy. They should, in other words, relinquish their fetishes, be "taught to Think and to consider this their undoubted privilege."

In the last twenty years, a zone of comfort has been established in admission of the traditionally disenfranchised members of gender and ethnic groups that has not been completely extended to those disenfranchised by class. After a long struggle, gender and racial differences are finally being, as they should be, prized. But even as difference of one kind is championed, it is done in an atmosphere where sameness as it relates to class remains the rule. The message seems to be, we are all middle-class, or at least we all *should* be. Oppositional behavior, or behavior which seriously calls into question the sometimes homogenizing project of education, is treated as an impediment which calls for retrenchment and adamant defense of the "centre of power." To students who seem hostile to efforts to introduce them into academic literacy and language, our attitude can be remarkably like that of Swan's. They will be accorded "freedom of thought and action" and soon "their eyes will then begin to open" to the "rightness" of our Reason.

I have already briefly touched on Paul Willis' seminal study of the way working-class students are educated for their inevitable roles, and at the same time effectively excluded from the center of cultural power of which Arnold speaks. I would like to conclude here by connecting the space I think Arnold has opened up with his invitation to cultural dissenters, and other disruptive radical presences, with the space occupied by working-class students. Paul Willis writes that part of the difficulty in properly interpreting the way in which working-class disruptions play themselves out is that we don't associate these local disruptions with broader class patterns:

A pool of styles, meanings and possibilities are continuously reproduced and always available for those who turn in some way from the formalised and official accounts of their position and look for more realistic interpretations of, or relationship to, their domination.... Neither the institutionalised, customary and habitual forms in which domination is mediated from basic structural inequality, nor the regional forms in which they are broken out of, opposed and transformed, are recognised for what they are.³⁵

Forms of creative resistance and counter cultural behavior, efforts of others to turn away from the place the dominant culture has reserved for them in favor of their own “styles” and “possibilities” are frightening to those invested in the existing institutions. But Arnold’s point is that these others are made more frightening because we misunderstand their actions. In Arnold’s day resistance might mean a religious dissenter’s refusal to leave the “hole and corner” Nonconformist churches he saw them hidden in, or working-class protestors knocking down Hyde Park’s fences. In our day it might mean a student’s unwillingness to participate or “engage” the texts (remaining in an intellectual “hole and corner”) or, in rare cases, an angry rejection of the course’s requirements or aims. In either instance, if we do not see such actions as necessarily isolated, anarchical, unthinking, and as proof of “the indolence of their minds, as well as the depravity of their nature,” perhaps the resistance would not be so frightening. Perhaps recognizing that working-class resistance can be an active inquiry into the positions to which they have been relegated, and the first steps in coming to terms with it, will make quite clear that resistance does not mean students are hoping to be “saved from the trouble of thinking.” Even as Arnold rails against that archetypal “rough” who is “assembling as he likes, bawling as he likes, hustling as he likes,”³⁶ he has helped make the oppositional acts more comprehensible and has helped construct the space for them. Helping make sense of oppositional acts, straining to understand them, rather than steeling ourselves against them, still seems like a viable strategy.

For my purposes, even students’ rejection of *Culture and Anarchy* can itself act as a point of contact because it mirrors the reaction of some of Arnold’s contemporaries to it. I can use their rejection as the starting point for discussion of the text itself and why such texts are studied, as long as the students’ objection is informed and specific. As I often say to my students, finding a text “boring” is not reason enough to reject it. If we were to drop every nineteenth-century British text that late-twentieth-century students, at first blush, found boring or inaccessible, we’d have a very short syllabus. As I’ve noted earlier, in a composition class, essays can be dropped if semester after semester, they are met with indifference, produce uninspired student writing, or force the students to spend more energy avoiding them than they do using them. Because composition courses are not content driven, but product driven, we have this luxury. In a literature course, however, there is still an expectation of coverage. I remind especially the English teachers-to-be that they will be expected to have mastered a body of knowledge, and

having confidence in the knowledge they possess is a great aid in teaching confidently.

Obviously, working intensely with texts in the way that I have demonstrated with the Arnold identity assignment sequence can only be done twice a semester at most, because it would interfere with the goal of coverage. But I ask students to use the mental process demonstrated in the “identity sequence” to pin down their relationship with each work we cover (asking themselves “What is the relationship between the self I have identified and the text? Why do I feel alienated by the text? or, drawn to it? Is it the language or the argument? the length, vocabulary, or the tone?). After a show of good faith in straining to understand these less-appealing, less-accessible texts, they may end only in coming to better understand why they find the texts difficult, or unappealing. And what I have done in the past is to let them know that if they find Thomas Carlyle difficult or unappealing, they are not alone. Many of his acquaintances found him difficult; many of his contemporaries found him unappealing. Being candid about texts’ flaws or limitations (a common practice of mine in composition that took quite a while to transfer into literature classrooms) can free up discussion—it shows that I’m presenting this tradition, not necessarily defending it. It shows students that “liking” and “enjoying” texts are not the only pleasures to be had in literature, or even the most pleasurable ones. Samuel Johnson’s wickedly funny criticism is especially helpful in making this point. Intensely disliking something (with just cause), or working hard to trace our difficulties with a text are equally valuable, as long as we can be precise about where our responses are coming from.

I’ve validated conflict throughout this essay, but the prospect of unending conflict over each item on the syllabus would, of course, be counterproductive and wearying. What is preferable is an up-front admission that negative responses to texts are not only welcome, but fundamental to a course’s vitality. And as students register their complaints about texts, invariably, the way in which I present the texts will be altered. I will bracket them with comments past classes have made. And if I can’t drop William Wordsworth completely, even if students demanded it, I can add the poems of Dorothy Wordsworth, Ann Yearsley, or Mary Robinson. This is my own small, but ongoing, effort to “strain to understand,” or as Arnold put it, to transcend my own “ordinary self,” accept criticism of my own position and empathetically explore the subject position of an Other. A willingness to engage, aided by a reinterpreted “disinterestedness,” allows for a productive conflict (over texts for instance) that won’t

result in retrenchment and unthinking defense of the “established fact.” Rather, it produces a stance which welcomes contention and thoughtful opposition, and an expectation that creative resistance will result in the Hellenizing dynamism that Arnold sees as essential for creative problem solving.

Finally, and bringing us back to Willis and the problem of misrecognition once more, the ethnographic model reminds us how easily professionals, ethnologists, and academics can fall into an almost willful misrecognition of an “alien culture’s” forms or styles and participate in a hostile response to that culture based on this misrecognition. Arnold, even in his desire to include religious Nonconformists in the national stream, cannot resist referring to them as “worshipping the fetish of separatism”³⁷ with its echo of pagan rites in very much the same way Swan refers to the “tenets of their own superstition [Buddhism].” But here is where Arnold departs from his contemporary, William Swan. When he uses the word “fetish,” it seems not entirely in the way that Swan uses the word “superstitions”—but in order to suggest unthinking attachment to machinery—an attachment that the statesman and even the representatives of the Anglican establishment were at least equally susceptible to. Swan writes of the incomprehensible attachment the natives have to their obscure and meaningless rites: “their duty consisting merely in reading prayers in an unknown tongue [Tibetan], and performing other bodily exercises; so that they are saved completely the *trouble of thinking*”³⁸ Arnold moves away from the obscure rites of marginalized peoples and speaks of the similarly incomprehensible and unthinking attachment of another set of natives for their own obscure rites: “The centre of power being where it is, our instrumental statesmen have every temptation... to ‘relieve themselves,’ as the *Times* says, of troublesome and irritating responsibilities” of thinking of creative solutions.³⁹ Both Arnold and Swan target the avoidance of “thinking” as signature problems in so-called ‘primitive’ societies. Both agree that machinery is inextricably linked with this inability to think creatively. But Arnold sees that this unreflective inflexibility is not characteristic only of “primitive” people, at least not “primitive” in the way that Swan thinks of the term.⁴⁰ As hard as Arnold is on the working class, we should remember that it was the aristocratic class he called “Barbarians”—that class most incapable of change. He sees inflexibility as an impediment to change that cuts across all boundaries: from the Nonconformist attachment to the fetish of separatism, to Parliamentarians’ attachment to institutions and machinery over ideas. Whenever we begin to see undergraduates entering the acad-

emy as somehow “primitive” people who must be told what to think, we perhaps should see ourselves as belonging to that class of “primitives” whose blind investment in machinery of Reason tends to inhibit creative solutions. Perhaps an effort to escape from these terms, an effort of straining to understand, would remind us that the machinery of “Reason” in the academy may be our own fetish.

NOTES

¹ Richard Rorty, “Intellectuals in Politics,” *Dissent* (Fall 1991): 483–510.

² For a helpful overview of Arnold’s status in the academy see Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* ed., Samuel Lipman. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), especially Gerald Graff, “Arnold, Reason, and Common Culture,” 186–201.

³ See E.D.Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); and Richard Rodriguez, *The Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 143–72.

⁴ Ann Murphy, “Transference and Resistance in the Basic Writing Classroom: Problematics and Praxis,” *CCCC* 40 (May 1989), 177.

⁵ Kurt Spellmeyer, “Too Little Care: Language, Politics, and Embodiment in the Life-World” *College English* 55.3 (March 1993): 265–83.

⁶ Shirley Bryce-Heath, *Ways With Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁷ Frederic Harrison. *Autobiographic Memoirs (Vols. I and II)*. (London: St. Martin’s Press), 78.

⁸ The book-length version of my argument discusses how the new vocabulary that Harrison and Arnold construct ends up informing George Eliot’s representation of workingmen in *Felix Holt, The Radical*, which is the final link in helping reshape the way we think of (or represent to ourselves) working-class students. Questions of representation, both literary and political, lie at the heart of this new vocabulary—but one that is largely misunderstood because Eliot (with the help of Harrison and Arnold) has created an unprecedented workingman who straddles class boundaries and rejects Victorian middle-class ideology in his refusal to adhere to the bildungsroman’s frequent definition of progress: that of rejecting one’s own class. Instead, he hovers between classes and offers the readers a new paradigm for the working-class man. His efforts to educate the workingmen of his village (which mirror the efforts of Harrison) and wrest them from the control of cynical political agents end in violence. Ultimately, he is punished as much for the radical reconstruction of the workingman he attempted as for the actual violence he commits. All of this remains invisible

without the context provided by Harrison's and Arnold's sense of a culture inflected by dissent.

⁹ Min-Zhan Lu, "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle," *College English*, 54.8 (December 1992): 447.

¹⁰ Mina P. Shaughnessy, "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing," *CCCC* 27 (October 1976): 234–39.

¹¹ Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text," in *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Anthology*, ed. Robert Young (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

¹² Samuel Lipman claims that the lecture was a response to a James Fitzjames Stephen's attack in the *Saturday Review* but the primacy and sheer frequency of Harrison's appearances, make him a more likely candidate. In any event, adding Stephens as potential correspondent only underlines the collaborative nature of *Culture and Anarchy's* composition. See Arnold, xv.

¹³ Martha Vogeler, "Matthew Arnold and Frederic Harrison: The Prophet of Culture and the Prophet of Positivism," *Studies in English Literature*, 2 (1962), 44–62.

¹⁴ Frederic Harrison, *Order and Progress* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975), 150.

¹⁵ Arnold, 40.

¹⁶ David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, Introduction to *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Vassilis Lambropoulos, "Violence and the Liberal Imagination: The Representation of Hellenism in Matthew Arnold" in *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence*, ed. Nancy Paxton (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1989), 172.

¹⁸ Arnold, 73.

¹⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1991), 158.

²⁰ Donald Lazere, "Back to (Radical) Basics: A Force for Oppression or Liberation," *College English* 54.1 (January 1992): 16.

²¹ Such strategies can also cause students to suspect that the teacher is shirking her responsibility when she demands that students revise each other's work and take responsibility for the direction of the class. See Jane Tompkins, "Pedagogy of the Distressed" in *Changing Classroom Practices*, ed. David B. Downing (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994), 169–78.

²² Gerald Graff, "A Pedagogy of Counterauthority, or the Bully/Wimp Syndrome," in *Changing Classroom Practices*, ed. David B. Downing (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998) 179–93.

²³ Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 145–46.

²⁴ Ibid., 123.

²⁵ Ethan Bronner, "College Freshmen Aiming for High Marks in Income," *New York Times*, 12 January 1998, A14, late edition. Bronner reports that in the UCLA survey taken in the fall of 1997, "74.9 percent of freshmen chose being well off as an essential goal and 40.8 percent chose developing a philosophy." Analyzing the phenomenon of disengaged students that most college professors have experienced firsthand, Mark W. Edmundson, Professor of English at the University of Virginia, writes "School has become more about training and less about transformation.... You go there to prepare yourself for the future, to learn a skill, a capacity that you can convert into dollars later on. And being trained is boring. Being educated is not, but that is going on less and less."

²⁶ Spellmeyer, 265–83.

²⁷ Lindsay Pentolfe Aegerter, "Michelle Cliff and the Paradox of Privilege," *College English* 59.8 (December 1997): 898–915.

²⁸ Renato Rosaldo, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 1, 7.

²⁹ Graff, "Arnold, Reason, and Common Culture," 188.

³⁰ Spellmeyer, 273.

³¹ Ibid., 274.

³² William Swan, quoted in C.R. Bawden, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals: The English Missionaries in Siberia* (London: Routledge, 1985), 235.

³³ Swan, quoted in Bawden, 252.

³⁴ Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 211.

³⁵ Willis, 60.

³⁶ Arnold, 80.

³⁷ Ibid., 30.

³⁸ Swan, quoted in Bawden, 235.

³⁹ Arnold, 34.

⁴⁰ Arnold might make an argument that the majority of Britons are, in fact, primitive people of a sort, trapped as they are in their Hebraic stage of development.

ESSAY 20

Case Studies in the Writing Classroom

Theory and Practice

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I attended a conference on college teaching in May of 1995 at which Rita Silverman, a professor of teacher education at Pace University, gave a workshop on case-based learning. When I was asked if I would attend, I demurred. I was skeptical of a case-based approach for a number of reasons. As an English professor teaching writing at the undergraduate and graduate level, I felt pretty sure that I was already providing my students with ways to produce and critique, rather than simply receive, knowledge. Moreover, I associated case-based learning not only with schools of education but also with law and medicine, postsecondary schools that had traditionally been associated with the lecture, the one-way street in which students learned and teachers taught, schools in which case-based learning was a much more radical departure from tradition than it would be for a compositionist whose field had, for the last thirty-five years, been looking for ways to engage students in actively participating in the construction and critique of new knowledge.

The workshop convinced me, however, that case-based learning could be useful in writing courses not because it is so well suited to such courses but because it lays bare some rhetorical problems of constructivist writing pedagogies. Because case studies are so focused upon solving problems—because “it raises questions and provokes action on the part of the participants”¹—but not necessarily upon how the discursive/rhetorical situations and the writing of the participants in the case are involved in the solution, case-based learning nicely points up the *distance* between what individuals know, what individuals say, and what individuals do. What I found, in writing a number of cases and using them in two different courses, was that the distance between language, knowledge,

and ethical activity became quite evident to students, some of whom found this distance quite productive, some of whom found it extremely frustrating and counterproductive.

In this essay, I will briefly lay out what case-based education is supposed to do and how I applied it to my courses. I want then to talk specifically about a case I used in a writing-intensive course on the history and theory of rhetoric and show how it did and didn't work. Finally, I want to make a point about the distance between doing and knowing implied by the theory and practice of case-based learning, and about the ways in *which failing* to bridge that distance may be more worthwhile in the writing classroom than successfully doing so.

WHAT ARE CASE STUDIES?

By and large, case-based education is nothing new. It's been around in law schools and schools of medicine for the last twenty years, and one could argue that presenting a specific case after laying out the theoretical and general foundation of any subject matter at all is the heart of successful pedagogy in any academic setting. Certainly rhetoric and composition pedagogy over the last two generations has insisted that we should be concerned not with "correctness" so much as with literacy, a literacy that involves knowing how to read, how language impinges upon context, and context upon language.² "Writing as a way of knowing" has almost become a cliché in the last several years, but the phrase suggests an indissoluble link between what Silverman calls "the collective common sense and experience of the participants"³ and the reflective critical practice that forces those participants to read and interpret that experience in consensual, and sometimes antagonistic, ways.

Case studies, however, bring context and the reading of that context to a critical juncture by engaging participants in a single situation, a situation designed to be controversial or at the very least embedded with multiple and conflicting material and ideological constraints. The cases themselves are designed in order to "provoke a sense of intellectual disquiet in participants and stimulate them to find out for themselves what the case process revealed that they did not know."⁴ Typically, a case consists of a brief narrative description of a scenario that involves at least two people, a scenario that leads up to—but does not resolve—a potential conflict or crisis. A good case study, according to the material provided by Silverman, includes a focused story "based in reality," and contextual information including background, characters, and an institutional set-

ting. In the case presented by Silverman at the teaching workshop, the narrative described an experienced teacher who is confronted by an African-American student who contends that he was evaluated under different criteria than a white student he sat next to. The case begins as the student leaves the teacher's classroom, and the description of the confrontation, as well as the circumstances leading up to it, are told in the form of a recollection by a third-person narrator. As the case unfolds, the narrative explains the teacher's history, gives a description of the university and its faculty, and even lays out the criteria on which students would have been graded in the history course. The case ends where it began, with the teacher wondering how to resolve the situation fairly.

It is the combination of the various situational strands woven through the narrative and the open-ended conclusion to the case that engages students so thoroughly. After students have had a chance to read through the case—and I've found that it is especially effective to hand out the case and read it out loud—the teacher's job is to elicit as many responses about the case as she/he can, and to eventually lay out the issues involved. The ultimate aim of the discussion once the case is presented is to make a decision about how to resolve the conflict inherent in the case. However, it is more valuable to understand the difficulty of coming to a resolution of the conflict than it is to actually resolve it. According to Silverman, the first steps in discussing the case involved determining the available facts about the characters, the setting, and the chronology of events. Once these are determined—and as I'll show in a moment, these facts are often difficult to define—students should decide upon how perspective, the application of different theories, and multiple interpretations of the facts imply a logical outcome. In the case laid out by Silverman, a good deal of the energy of the workshop came as participants tried desperately to maintain a distinction between "what they knew" and "what they thought," between the barest material circumstances of the case and the interpretive and perspectival frame with which to view those circumstances.

It seemed to me at the time—and it became clear as I taught cases in writing courses—that it was just this energy that could best be focused by seeing the activity as a rhetorical one. This didn't mean only that I wanted students to "write" the solution either; though the first thought I had was, "let's get the students to write a paper outlining what the solution to this problem ought to be," I realized that, rather than helping students, this process would likely prevent them from learning. Some of the most elegant solutions offered to the case presented at Silverman's

workshop—that the student bring a grievance to the Dean, that the teacher meet with the students and an arbitrator or ombudsperson—skirted the thorniest issues at hand in the case: the material dynamics of racism, the unreasonableness of anger, and the impossible position of the teacher, to name only three. If the focus in the presentation of the case becomes the solution of the problem (and, at least for Silverman, case-based education is “a dynamic and individually empowering problem-solving model,”⁵) then the focus of the writing would be the examination of the facts of the case and, in sorting through what can be known and how to interpret it in the given situation, how to proceed ethically. This is an eminently rhetorical activity, an activity that is perfectly consistent with any number of constructivist or (what Berlin and others have called) newrhetorical models of learning. That is, if writing is intimately connected with action in a polis tending toward the good (loosely defined as politics), then one could see case models as engaging students in the production of knowledge that will lead to ethical (political) activity. But my point in this paper is that although the elegant solutions proposed to any problem laid out in a case may indeed lead not just to a sense of the ethical and the role of writing in creating that sense, those elegant solutions have a tendency to render all knowledge as “visible,” or logical, when in fact any course of action we take may be based less on what we know than on what we believe or, maybe even more problematic, what affects us in ways we *don’t* know at all. The material dynamic of racism, to use only one example from Silverman’s case, has a material dimension that is altogether unreasonable, and that has effects that we can only begin to render logically (a person in the situation of the student in the case may well have been chased out of bodegas because the shopkeeper believed he would be robbed). But by focusing, in the writing, on a solution to a problem, the complexity of these circumstances may well be lost.

THE STRUCTURE OF CASE STUDIES, THE STRUCTURE OF WRITING

It is, in fact, the complexity of the circumstances that is the first object of examination in any case. Included in the material Silverman distributed at the workshop (which is also included in several of the publications of the Center for Case Studies in Education at Pace University, CUNY) is an outline of the three-part discussion structure of any open-ended case. These three parts are what Silverman calls “WIGOH” (shorthand for

“what is going on here,” the identification of the facts of the case), an analysis of the facts, and the action to be taken, which includes not just the solution of the problem but an analysis of the solution. What I want to suggest here (and I’ll show how it works in a moment) is that the first two steps of the process, the identification of facts and the interpretation of them, are very difficult, if not impossible, to prize apart, and that part of the tension that exists in the examination of any case is the result of this difficulty. In fact, I would say that the reason any “solution” to the problem posed in a case seems unsatisfactory is because a solution assumes that we can produce adequate knowledge of the case when in fact what is produced, at the interstices of fact and interpretation, is something very different from knowledge.

It is in the presentation of the facts of a case that this becomes most clear. In theory, at least, the facts in the case would seem relatively easy to establish: who are the characters involved, what are the relationships between them, what is the setting in which the case takes place, what is the chronology of events?⁶ But none of these components of the case are easy to establish. For one thing, the facts are only available as part of a written text, a text that leaves a great deal unsaid in spite of the completeness of the case. We only know what we are told, and we are told in the language of narrative. Though most cases I’ve read (and written) strive for a certain amount of verisimilitude, it is just this facet of the narrative that sometimes leads students to examine and write about aspects of characters about which they simply cannot know. In the case of the African-American student presented by Silverman, we learn very little about him: he puts his head on his desk during discussion, he comes to class unprepared, and he could not continue the discussion with his teacher because he had to leave for work and could not return “‘til late.”⁷ In attempting to write profiles of the characters from this case, students would have only the merest glimpse of the catalyst for this situation, and the risk you run, as a teacher, is that students will fill in, “round out,” the characters based upon stereotype and upon what one may think one knows about a particular kind of person. Though the character and the situation of this student, in this case, may appear believable, neither character nor situation is a demonstrable fact since both are presented in ways that demand an interpretive dimension, that demand—in short—that the reader make guesses as to what counts as fact in the first place.

Again, this is a rhetorical problem *par excellence*, but it’s not one that has a particularly lovely rhetorical solution. Aristotle’s solution to the problem of establishing facts was to propose a catalog of “types,”

and to demand that rhetors fit the members of their audiences into these types in order to decide how to proceed in the argument. These types were constructed through observation over time: the rhetor would observe the behavior of different types of individuals (elderly, young, wealthy, impetuous, etc.) as they were engaged in different activities, and by appealing to common sense (things about which a great number of people would agree), would form an idea of the regularities by which these types would behave in the hypothetical situation of an argument or oration.⁸ But this solution can't account for the material circumstances that have contributed to the types, not to mention the individual cases, used to construct the composite. For Aristotle, this wasn't a particularly glaring problem: after all, those material circumstances weren't the province of rhetoric anyway, but were the province of the demonstrative sciences such as physics or statecraft. But because the solution of a problem presented in a case relies so heavily on first establishing those elements of the case about which we can know for certain, the blurring of the line between what can be established with certainty about the material circumstances of a situation and what must be interpreted or, in fact, "invented" seems to undermine the very foundations of the process by which students begin to unfold the case.

The other problem, of course, is that—along with the individual material circumstances of the case, some of which we have to either leave uninvestigated or take guesses about—the interaction of those circumstances in the case may be hard to predict. It's one thing to be able to say with relative certainty that the characters in a case have a history, that the chronology of events is established, and that even the issues involved in the case are easily elucidated. But it's another thing entirely for students (or anyone, for that matter) to be able to write those circumstances in ways that account for their *unreasonableness*. During the discussion of the case of the teacher and her apparent bias toward her African-American student, one of the participants in the debate said of the student, in a tone of disgust, "Well, he's such an *asshole*." Is this characterization an element of the (fictional) student's character? Is it an issue or a problem that makes up one of the strands of the case? One response could be that the participant's reaction was the result of a combination of a number of different assumptions and conclusions reached through a description of characters, setting, and the chronology of events combined with the issues and problems at hand (racism, learning disability, a short-tempered teacher). But the point is that it's a reaction, not knowledge. How does

one write the facticity of the student's ability to evoke an emotional response? Such a reaction, I would argue, is just as much a part of the case as is the history of the teacher's career at her urban university, but it is very difficult to classify except as an (at least partly) unreasonable facet of the case that changes as the perspective of the problem solver changes. Not everyone had this reaction to the character; in fact a number of other participants said that they "sympathized" with the student. But the point I'm trying to make is that these perspectival decisions may well count as fact but they are extremely difficult to account for if the problem-solving task is divided into stages that divide "facticity" from "perspective," "observable patterns" from "unseen but felt material circumstances." And, as I'll say more about below, it is just this incommensurability that is most valuable in applying case studies to the writing classroom, though it is also this incommensurability that suggests that case studies don't do what they're supposed to.

THEORY/PRACTICE

I want at this point to show how all of this played itself out in a case that I presented in a class on the theory and practice of rhetoric. This was a course initially designed to be an historical survey of rhetoric course for graduate and advanced undergraduate students that involved very little writing. I taught it that way once—a lot of reading, more lecture than I liked to do, a few short essays—with some success but with the nagging thought that the students weren't so much working with and examining ways of knowing as they were being handed a commodity, "knowledge," and being asked to stash it away somewhere. In reformulating the course I decided that the chronological arrangement made it difficult to engage in questions about rhetoric's connection to other fields of knowledge, and so the next time, I arranged the course conceptually by pairing rhetoric with other fields—literature, science, composition, politics, and others.

What I really needed, though, was a way to engage students not just in answering the question that guided the course—"what is rhetoric?"—but in encouraging them to find perspectives from which to answer the question such that the questions themselves would lay bare some of the component parts of the answer. "What is rhetoric" has a different answer in an Aristotelian paradigm if you are a slave than it does if you are a young man of privilege. As we made our way through the middle part of the course, it occurred to me that the case studies that

had worked so well for Silverman (and for me in a previous course on rhetoric and politics) might also work here to help students find ways to, essentially, write their way into the complexities of language and the limits of rhetoric.

At that point in the term, we were reading essays by Alan Gross, Paul Feyerabend, Richard Rorty, and other philosophers of science, and my aim was to help students see whether knowledge constructed rhetorically was different from knowledge constructed scientifically, and whether there were assumptions common to each. I had a paper assignment in the back of my mind somewhere, but in order to make the questions concrete, and in order to let students get their hands dirty, I wrote a case that I hoped would lay out some of the issues and problems involved in sorting through the differences between what is perceived to be the objectivity of science and the contingencies of rhetoric. So, I designed a case that explicitly dealt with the problems of prizing apart rhetorically generated and scientifically generated knowledge and to see what (knowledge, something other than knowledge) if anything was left over. I had in mind, in writing the case, what Sandra Harding and others call “standpoint epistemology,” which requires a study of “the subject as well as the object of knowledge to be a necessary object of critical, causal—scientific!—social explanations.”⁹ That is, I tried hard to include in the case a way to distinguish purely “objective,” scientific study of a phenomenon—the outbreak of a new strain of tuberculosis in a densely populated area of a large city—and a “subjective” analysis not just of the people involved (i.e., those with the disease), but also those whose lives are directly affected by the object of study, including the scientist/investigator himself. Given the discussions of science and rhetoric that had preceded the case in class, I wanted to generate writing that would grapple with the very blurry line that divided the realm of the contingent from the realm of the certain. What follows is the case, and a description of what happened as I presented it.

Bill Walsh hadn't seen anything quite like this in the fourteen years he'd been at the Centers for Disease Control. One of his lab assistants here in the New York office called him yesterday afternoon—a Sunday; he'd just finished a feature article in the *Times* on the new strain of tuberculosis he was researching—when he'd had a phone call from one of the mayor's aides requesting that he, and his lab staff, come to a meeting with the Mayor to discuss the crisis. Now, this morning, he was pulling

on his clothes to ready for the meeting when he saw, on the ubiquitous CNN station he always had on whenever he was away from the Atlanta office, that there would be a major health announcement from the mayor's office later on in the afternoon. *That's* what the mayor wants me for, he thought.

During his time with the CDCs, he'd seen a lot. Two experiences had formed his life like nothing else had. In 1982, after he'd been in Atlanta for about a month and a half, he'd been told to pack up and go the airport, to get on a plane with six other scientists from the CDCs headed to Zaire, and to examine what was killing hundreds upon hundreds of people there. That time it was Ebola: the virus invaded the bloodstream when mosquitoes, who had feasted on an infected host, bit the victim. Within days, blood ran out of the eyes, the ears, the victim died within about a week of having his insides leeches out through the mucous membranes. There was nothing he could have done. By the time he and his colleagues had identified the virus, it mutated into a harmless version of itself and stopped killing people almost as soon as it had started. But it had claimed seven thousand victims, and the best the CDCs could report was that they had a hypothesis: the virus was carried by monkeys.

The second experience came about a year and a half later. By that time, he'd heard of HTLV and the "gay plague," but the CDCs hadn't been serious about doing anything but isolating the virus. They had by 1984, but no one knew anything about how the virus was transmitted. Then hemophiliacs began dying in droves, and he had been one of two scientists who'd hypothesized that it was carried, like Ebola, in the blood and other body fluids. That had been the turning point. In the laboratory during the months and years after Ebola, the CDCs' scientists, and their colleagues in France and Belgium, had spent most of their time examining how the virus looked under the microscope and how it behaved under isolated conditions—what it did when it was heated, what sorts of antibodies had what sort of effect upon it, the stages of white cell death, and so on—and the work was done mainly in the lab. But in 1984, Walsh and his friend Ed Aniston made a profound discovery: by tracking the virus through the sexual contacts made in the bathhouses in San Francisco and New York, they had a very clear picture of how the disease was spread in the homosexual community. Now that they had the hemophiliac deaths to figure in to the equation they knew something else: this wasn't just a gay disease, and the virus could survive for an undetermined length of time in a test tube without mutat-

ing, and could then be transfused into another blood recipient and infect that person in much the same way that it infected the donor. For the first time, the CDCs had a chance to link the laboratory work that had been their mainstay of operation since their founding decades ago to field-work that had previously only been considered the province of social workers and community liaisons.

Of course, all hell had broken loose at that point. Aniston had been forced to quit his job during the affair because he'd had the audacity to suggest to leaders of the gay community in San Francisco that they close the bathhouses. Arnie Ewald, a leader of the organization that would in the later part of the decade be called ACT-up, had said that no pencil-pushing government bureaucrat with an expertise in bugs should tell any member of any community how they ought to live their lives. Within a day or two, Ewald had found out that Aniston's brother was gay, and that Aniston had had very little to do with him since he came out, and used that to tar him as a bigot to boot. Forced to come back to Atlanta and explain what happened, Aniston found himself at a loss for words—they'd made a major breakthrough not just on the nature of the disease but on how the disease was transmitted, and just at the point when they ought to be doing all they could based on this new knowledge, they were instead scrambling to make excuses for why they'd told the gay community how to police its members. Aniston blew up, called Ewald by an epithet he knew better than to use, and was fired on the spot. The CDCs backed off, the office did not issue its warning on the bathhouses, and for another year gay men continued to have unprotected sex and spread the virus before the Pasteur Institute in France made its own recommendation to close down public bathhouses and illegal prostitution based on the very same information the CDCs had had a year earlier. Only then did they resuscitate the order, and the bathhouses in San Francisco were closed.

The current situation was altogether different, and yet something rang incredibly familiar. For the last three years, there'd been a startling increase in the number of homeless and poor in the Five Points section of Manhattan with what looked initially like pneumonia, but which was much more serious: coughing up blood, shortness of breath, frequent heart-attacks brought on by labored breathing, and in 95 percent of cases, death within six months of diagnosis. When the CDCs were officially called upon to research the case, Walsh and his colleagues were sent dozens of specimens of a bacterium that had been found on victims of the disease. Because they'd initially believed it to be a form of pneu-

monia, they'd run batteries of tests that came out differently than they'd expected. Moreover, they couldn't figure out how the victims had caught the bug, let alone what they had in common so that they would come down with it at the same time. The only thing Walsh and his colleagues knew for certain was that nearly all the victims were poor and homeless. After the initial run of tests, they ran another series of tests, and were astounded by what they found: it wasn't pneumonia, but a strain of tuberculosis that was different from anything they'd seen before. It had mutated in such a way that it was immune to most forms of antibiotic medication; the commonest medicines that had been found to wipe out anything from ear infections in kids to the most powerful infections didn't do anything on this thing. As far as they could tell, it was invincible.

But there was one more difference: none of the victims lived near one another, and none of them was related. All forms of tuberculosis were transmitted by sputum and by ingestion, not by airborne particles. So this was a bafflement: how did these strangers get it from one another? During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, all the research told Walsh, victims were related because they coughed onto one another's food, which was ingested and which then infected family members. But these people only had in common a section of a borough, and more and more victims, mainly poor, but increasingly undifferentiated as to class, from other boroughs were getting the disease and dying.

When Walsh had visited Manhattan to do his research closer to the site of the infections, he still couldn't understand what the reason for the spreading non-pattern of infection could be. He finally decided he had to go out on foot with a field kit to test random homeless in the Five Points section and in Hell's Kitchen, right down the street. He was unsurprised to find that four out of five homeless he tested carried the germ, but he was surprised by what he found out: none of these men, and they were all men, had families. The disease wasn't being spread by ingestion, because none of these men had common food—if any food at all, most days—and it wasn't being spread by sputum, because they didn't live close enough to one another to have had casual contact frequently enough to have spread the disease. So, he decided to follow eight men for two days each, and what he found was chilling to the bone: the men all panhandled on the subways, entering subway trains at the back car, and working their way up to the front, begging for money from the passengers. By the time any single train had made five stops (which was about a forty-block journey),

the men had traveled the length of the train to panhandle. And each of the men had had coughing and sneezing fits at least three times in each of the cars, which meant that they were spreading the germ this way. This form of tuberculosis had mutated so as to become airborne, and anyone who came into contact with it this way had a singularly good chance of catching it.

This had tremendous implications. First, this mutation was immune to antibiotic medication, so it couldn't be stopped by routine treatment. (This was especially true of the indigent poor: if they were given medication to take three times a day for ten days, they would rarely do so, mainly because they were in transit all the time and had no place to store the medicine. It usually got thrown out in the first day.) Second, this mutation would not be confined to the homeless community, because its spread was much more liable to be wide now that it was known to be airborne. (Walsh still didn't know whether it could lie dormant, for how long, and whether it could remain dormant indefinitely.) So this meant that the new strain of tuberculosis could make its way into the population at large relatively easily and quickly, unless the small populations that could be identified that already had the disease could be quarantined. Finally, a new antibiotic medication would have to be found to which the strain was not immune, a medication that would surely require heavy doses, would be very expensive, and take a long time for treatment to be complete.

The simplest recommendation, that he'd come to in a night of restless turning, was to quarantine all the homeless in the lower section of Manhattan, and probably a good portion of the rest of the island as well. It would also mean releasing to the public the information that the disease was being spread on the subways and other enclosed places (like buses, taxis, phone booths), and this would mean telling people to stay out of such places until the CDCs could be sure of who had the disease and how it could be controlled. But it also meant that those populations that also were susceptible to catching the disease in the earliest forms of mutation—the poor, who were, at least in lower Manhattan, largely nonAnglo—would also need to be quarantined. And everyone would need to be treated, though no one knew how expensive treatment would be. It was sure to be more expensive than Medicaid would be willing to cover.

Walsh thought of Ed Aniston and how he'd been treated by Arnie Ewald in the middle 1980s because he'd suggested closing the bath-houses. Now here *he* comes, suggesting to quarantine all the poor and

indigent of the island of Manhattan south of 65th Street. Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, the ACLU and everyone from the Anti Defamation League on down the line would just wait to take turns to eviscerate him. And he was going to make this recommendation to the mayor, who was already seen as a heartless bureaucrat who gleefully cut social services and the foster-care network? The only other solution he could think of was to go ahead with the formulation of the new more powerful medication and simply put it on the market and let market forces drive down the price of it, as happened with AZT two years earlier, so that those that could afford it could have access to it right away, while it would take longer for the poor to get their hands on it.

Or, he could simply make no recommendation and go back to the CDCs and continue doing research on the strain to find some angle he'd overlooked that might provide new information on how to kill this thing. But this could take years.

He had to meet with the mayor in fifteen minutes, and as he looked down from his window, he saw the cab-filled streets of the city, wondering which one he'd take to Gracie Mansion, and what, if anything, he'd say when he got there.

The first thing I did was go to the board in order to record students' views of the facts: Just what *was* going on here? As anticipated, students began to say what they knew about the various characters in the case—Bill Walsh, Ed Aniston, Arnie Ewald, Al Sharpton—and what they knew (or thought they knew; some of my research was partial and some of my facts were just plain wrong) about the circumstances of the case—that the Ebola plague had moved Walsh to sense the urgency of HTLV (HIV) and, later, the mutation of tuberculosis; that the disease was spreading through a largely poor and only partly visible segment of the population of the city. But what students began to notice at once was that the categories of “fact” and “perspective” began to break down immediately. The sense of panic in the character of Walsh was due in part to the nature of the strain of tuberculosis (its rapid transmission at a relatively distant range) but due in part also to Walsh's memory of the HIV crisis in San Francisco. (My “invented” memories were largely based on the account of the crisis written by Randy Shilts in *And the Band Played On*.)¹⁰ And the point of crisis in the case—the mayor's need to formulate a policy to deal with an impending health crisis that is at once scientifically sound and also politically sensitive—had a great deal to do with what one knew about this particular strain of tuberculosis and how it spread, but also about the so-

cial dynamic of the homeless, of commuters from downtown to midtown Manhattan, and of the psychology of fear and its material result. My classroom that semester had large chalkboards on two walls, and my intention was to divide the first board down the middle and write on the right-hand side the “facts” of the case, and on the left-hand side the “problems or issues” to identify, while I’d leave the second board for analysis and the application of the rhetorical principles we’d been discussing. As it was, I found myself running from one board to the other, trying to keep track of where “facticity” ended and where “interpretation” began, desperately trying to segregate the histories of the characters from the perspectives the histories allowed each character to take of the issue.

One of the most important things to bear in mind about case-based learning is that, regardless of how you use writing to generate knowledge in any given case, it is extremely important to pry loose as much as possible during the presentation and discussion of the case. Because much of the writing that takes place in the first stages of the case is in the form of notes or questions to probe later on, the teacher’s job in this first, incredibly chaotic stage of the case is to push respondents to examine how they came to conclusions about facts and perspectives in the narrative. In the scenario I used in the rhetoric course, the examination of conclusions reached through objective study was itself the center of the case: What happens, Bill Walsh asks, when you stop doing only scientific work and start doing social-scientific work? As Walsh finds out in the case, it’s impossible to do only scientific work, because science requires that you consider issues of interpretation as well as observation and testing. As my students found out as we worked through the early stages of the case, it’s nearly impossible to work back to “first causes” using only reasonable or fact-based premises. As students would respond to my queries, “what do you know about” the characters, or the geography of the city, or about the procedures followed by scientists in the lab or in the field, I’d often follow up with the question: “How do you know that?” Students would respond in one of two ways. It was either “in the narrative,” or it was *not* in the narrative at all but in assumptions the student made about the narrative. Both of these responses, it seems to me, point up a feature of case-based learning that may get short shrift in Silverman’s assessment of it, but which is indicative of how case-based learning strongly problematizes, rather than simply represents, “constructivist” notions of writing and pedagogy.

Those students who responded to the question of how one knows the facts in a case by pointing to the language of the case itself were treating

the case—and in fact, not just the language of the case but the material situation that formed the basis of my imaginary scenario—like a text. Touching upon portions of the student's paper not published here, I asked questions about Walsh's overcautious reaction to the mayor's questions about the policy implications of the tuberculosis epidemic. Many students responded that it was due to Walsh's memory of Ed Aniston, who'd been confronted angrily by the policy implications of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s and was eventually fired. When I asked how they knew that this is what motivated Walsh's caution, they inevitably pointed to the text, but when pressed some students emphasized the phrase, "[Aniston] was fired on the spot," while others pointed to the fact that, in the year between the order to close the bathhouses in San Francisco and their actual closing based upon information gathered at the Pasteur Institute (a point not emphasized in the text of the case), countless people would have contracted the disease from casual sex. The point here is that the text of the case is not a transparent record of some state of affairs that may or may not have occurred, but a re-presentation that mediates that state of affairs and our reception of it. The "facts" of the case are rendered textually, and are therefore open to interpretation. For those of us who've been working with composition theory and practice for a number of years now, this comes as no surprise. But for the members of my class who were grappling with the line between scientifically or objectively established facts and rhetorically established knowledge, this made the line much more blurry. This was borne out in papers received after we'd been through the case: Many early drafts were effectively arguing for a distinction between "textuality" (rhetoric) and facticity (science) while using evidence and analysis that clearly showed a suspicion of the distinction. In short, the difficulty these students had in maintaining a distance between what is written about the occurrence and the occurrence itself suggested to me that those using case-based learning, particularly in the writing classroom, ought to make plain the textual nature of the cases themselves, and remind students that what they're dealing with isn't transparent.

Those students who responded to questions of how they knew what was going on by pointing to evidence founded upon belief rather than upon textual evidence pointed out to me another facet of case-based learning that gets overlooked by Silverman but that makes the strategy all the more rich. Particularly when we got to the point where we tried to understand the motivations and the results of any policy decision based either upon natural or social scientific assumptions, students answered

questions of fact—what are the facts that underlie Walsh’s potential recommendations to the mayor; what are the observable differences and similarities between Ebola, AIDS, and the mutant tuberculosis strain—by referring to fear, assumption, perspective, and “feeling.” One point that came up again and again in our discussion, though it appeared nearly not at all in the text of the case itself, was the idea that Walsh’s policy recommendations would be based not so much on any facts that could be adduced but to a nagging sense that people who are already afraid of the homeless would be even more afraid were they to be quarantined or in any way set apart from the rest of the population of the Five-Points area. When I pressed students on this point in class, students moved from fear of the homeless to a discussion of the homophobia that motivated the firing of Ed Aniston and the very uncomfortable feeling that a constituency like ACT-up might come to the fore in the tuberculosis crisis. In spite of the fact that none of these motivating factors could be found to be in evidence as “facts” in the case, they became increasingly important as we tried to distinguish between those objectifiable, quantifiable facts—either scientific or, in the text of the case, reasonable/rhetorical—and things about which we could know only through interpretive, rather than scientific, analysis. And of course I couldn’t have wished for anything better: What Harding has suggested about the need for a “strong objectivity”—a method of analysis that accounts not just for the object under scrutiny but the ways in which the object may appear different and may exhibit different “properties” depending upon the interpretive framework that one uses—made itself present in my classroom. Regardless of the analytical work that goes on at the CDCs in coding a strain of tuberculosis (or that goes on in a writing classroom in examining the reasonable and not-so-reasonable ways to address a given problem), there will be real, materially evident motivations and impingements upon any solutions that aren’t immediately visible in a problem-solving approach either in medicine or in teaching.

My suggestion, then, is that we understand case-based learning as a way, as Silverman suggests, to “provoke a sense of intellectual disquiet in participants and stimulate them to find out...what the case process revealed that they did not know,” but *not*, as Silverman also suggests, as an “individually empowering problem-solving model.”¹¹ What this case revealed to my students—and what they wrote about in their papers, without any prompting from me—is that the difficulty they experienced in distinguishing fact from knowledge, and knowledge from the solution to a problem founded upon knowledge, is due to incommensurabilities be-

tween knowledge and fact, between what they can say about an object or individual and the effect that object or individual has upon the world. But rather than throw up one's hands and say that the incommensurability amounts to the impossibility of solving the problem at hand, we should see it as evidence that there is something—a domain of real objects or relations existing and acting independently of their (conflicting) descriptions—quite real that lies behind what we can know or write about it. This kind of “incommensurable” knowledge is superior to what we might think of as “objective” knowledge—the kind we get when we believe we have solved a case—because it forces us to account for not just knowledge but also those things we can't quite know, but which affect us just as profoundly—the irrational component of our actions, our beliefs, and our dealings with others.

CONCLUSIONS

So what does the foregoing say about the use of case studies in the writing classroom? There are three conclusions that I'd like to make: One about the practical use of case studies in the writing classroom, one about the shape case studies should take, and one about the theoretical implications of case studies for writing pedagogy. First, it is clear that case-based pedagogy worked especially well in my rhetoric course (and other rhetoric courses I taught both before and after the one I examine here). The discussion that takes place immediately after the presentation of a case is an especially helpful one for students in generating the component parts of a rhetorical situation: In Aristotelian terms, what are the available means of persuading a particular course of action in any given case? Though I didn't do so in the example I've used here, I could very easily have spent time examining the audience for Walsh's policy recommendations, and the common knowledges shared among Walsh, the mayor, and those involved in the implementation of policy as well as those who would be directly affected by it: the homeless in the Five-Points, commuters, and those who live in the neighborhoods downtown and who work in midtown. And I might just as easily have moved from an analysis of the case to the type of persuasion that might have been most effective given the facts at issue—a logical, ethical, or emotional appeal—and what the results might have been. As it played itself out in the History and Theory of Rhetoric course I taught two years ago, however, the discussion of the case didn't generate as much useful rhetorical knowledge as it did very difficult and complex theoretical aporias between the solution of

a problem—the *ethics* of the case—and the knowledges one brought to bear upon the solution—the science and rhetoric of the case. As I tried to suggest earlier, solving the case was not nearly as interesting or generative as it was showing that any solution to the case was unsatisfactory because any solution would have ignored effects of the situation that simply don't fit a reasonable, rational (i.e., scientific or rhetorical) heuristic. More students chose to investigate the problems inherent in scientific and rhetorical knowledges rather than chose to find a solution to Bill Walsh's dilemma because, as one student explained in an anonymous course evaluation, it was "more interesting and told me more about rhetoric's problems and how hard it is to write" to do so. In practical terms, then, case studies in the classroom can be useful so long as a teacher keeps the focus on the problems inherent in the method itself rather than on the specifics of the case.

Second, in order to make sure the focus is on the method, the case itself has to be designed so that the rhetorical dilemma is at least as noticeable as the ethical one. In the end I'm not so sure that the case I've presented above is a very lovely one: As I said earlier, I've got my facts mixed up, and it also runs too long and (as a colleague told me) it assumes a great deal of background knowledge on the part of some college undergraduates. Still, its advantage over the case I described earlier—about a teacher accused of discrimination—is that it explicitly addresses the issue of the division between observation-driven and interpretation-driven knowledge, the division upon which the first two stages of casebased learning is based. That is to say, this case worked as well as it did in my course because it was self-reflexive enough to allow students to see a direct connection between the problem represented in the case and the problem faced by the students themselves in generating knowledge of the case. In order to solve his problem, Bill Walsh had to figure out where his biases ended and knowledge began: to what extent did a policy on quarantining the homeless rest on the fact that he was gun-shy about a lawsuit from the ACLU? To what extent did the research he'd conducted at the CDCs in Atlanta become more or less useful when he considered the complications of the traffic patterns, the political geography, and the drug use of the homeless, all of which had little to do with science but everything to do with stopping a potential epidemic? Students had to deal with similar issues in answering these questions: How much did their own biases toward the homeless or homosexual behavior determine how they read the scientifically generated evidence to come up with a policy recommendation for Bill Walsh? To what extent did their ability or in-

ability to find language to describe what they knew limit their ability to conceive a connection between rhetorically generated knowledge and scientifically generated knowledge? Though none of the early drafts of the papers generated from this case were particularly strong conceptually (later drafts were stronger), they all grappled with exactly the same rhetorical issues that were depicted in the case. The extent to which students chose (or chose not) to follow through with them has more to do with my abilities as a teacher than with the failure of the case itself.

Finally, a word about case-based learning and the constructivist paradigm in composition pedagogy. My sense is that despite what Jim Berlin, Lester Faigley, and various other constructivist (or “post process”) theorists have been telling us for years—that the material circumstances of writing are not always revealed but sometimes concealed by the writing itself, and that the constructedness of knowledge forces us to consider the *ways* in which it is constructed—most of the pedagogy that is derived from the paradigm comes down to the following proposition: Since knowledge is made not found, our job is to help students find ways to make it. In the words of Patricia Bizzell, constructivism (at least of the historical materialist type) “should complicate our communal relations with one another, share more, reveal more...” and be willing to “explore contradictions,” contradictions that are concealed by our tendency to believe that things have always just been this way.¹² But what is troubling about constructivism is that it often falls back onto the comfortable language of—in the case of Bizzell—“sharing,” “revealing,” “communal relations” and democracy, or it becomes just one more way of solving (social) problems as though we could do so by helping our students become more adept at understanding a need for diversity or finding a way for a white teacher and an African-American student to work out their differences. In fact, I think Rita Silverman would agree with my initial sense that case-based learning is perfectly consistent with a constructivist pedagogy in that it allows us to recognize how “situations” are constructed and how the knowledge that we may generate of them is multifaceted and that the process of investigation reveals as much about the problem-solving method as it does about the problem and its solution.

My concern, however, is that this isn’t quite what my experience using case studies has shown. The “intellectual disquiet” that is generated in students (and in the teacher, to speak only for myself) isn’t quelled once the problem is solved and new knowledge of both the case and the method is generated. Instead, those involved in the process begin to un-

derstand that knowledge isn't so much constructed or generated as it is demystified or denaturalized. As I mentioned earlier, if the papers generated in this part of my course are any indication at all, students began to sense that there is a distance between what one knows and what one learns, that there is a distance between what a person can say or write and what a person in fact does. None of the policies proposed by the students in my course were satisfactory to them, because each student saw (to, admittedly, different degrees) that any action that could be taken did *not* accord with the knowledge upon which that action was based, and that it could *not* be explained in completely rational terms. Clearly this is not the conventional view of constructivism that rests content with the knowledge that what we understand both constructs and is constructed by discourse. What we learned in my course was that it is more important to see that what we *do not* understand also constructs and is constructed by discourse. As I suggested at the outset of this essay, case studies can have a very important role in the writing classroom, particularly the constructivist classroom. In part that role ought to be to remind us that even though we realize that language and ideology shape our world, there's a good deal more to that world than an analysis of either language or ideology can show us.

NOTES

¹ Rita Silverman and William M. Welty, "Case Studies in Diversity for University Faculty Development" (included in packet of materials on case studies for faculty development distributed at the Center for Case Studies in Education, Pace University, New York, 1993), 2.

² See Andrea Lunsford, "The Nature of Composition Studies," in *An Introduction to Composition Studies*, ed. Erika Lindemann and Gary Tate (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 10–12, for one concise statement of this trend.

³ Rita Silverman (included in untitled packet of material distributed at the Wakonse Conference on College Teaching, Pace University, New York, 25–31 May 1995), 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸ See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts and Ingram By water (1954; reprint, New York: Modern Library, 1984), 2:3–17; 1:2.

⁹ Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is 'Strong Objectivity'?" *Centennial Review* 36.3 (Fall 1992): 460.

¹⁰ Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin's, 1987).

¹¹ Silverman, 2.

¹² Patricia Bizzell, "Marxist Ideas in Composition Studies," in *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb (New York: Modern Language Association, 1991), 65, 66.

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