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JAEPL, Vol. 18, Winter 2012-2013

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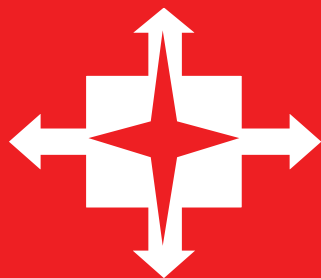
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JAEPL



The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

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The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

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JAEPL

The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (AEPL), an official assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, is open to all those interested in extending the frontiers of teaching and learning beyond the traditional disciplines and methodologies.

The purposes of AEPL, therefore, are to provide a common ground for theorists, researchers, and practitioners to explore ideas; to participate in relevant programs and projects; to integrate these efforts with others in related disciplines; to keep abreast of activities along these lines of inquiry; and to promote scholarship on and publication of these activities.

The *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning, JAEPL*, also provides a forum to encourage research, theory, and classroom practices involving expanded concepts of language. It contributes to a sense of community in which scholars and educators from pre-school through the university exchange points of view and cutting-edge approaches to teaching and learning. *JAEPL* is especially interested in helping those teachers who experiment with new strategies for learning to share their practices and confirm their validity through publication in professional journals.

Topics of interest include but are not limited to:

- | | |
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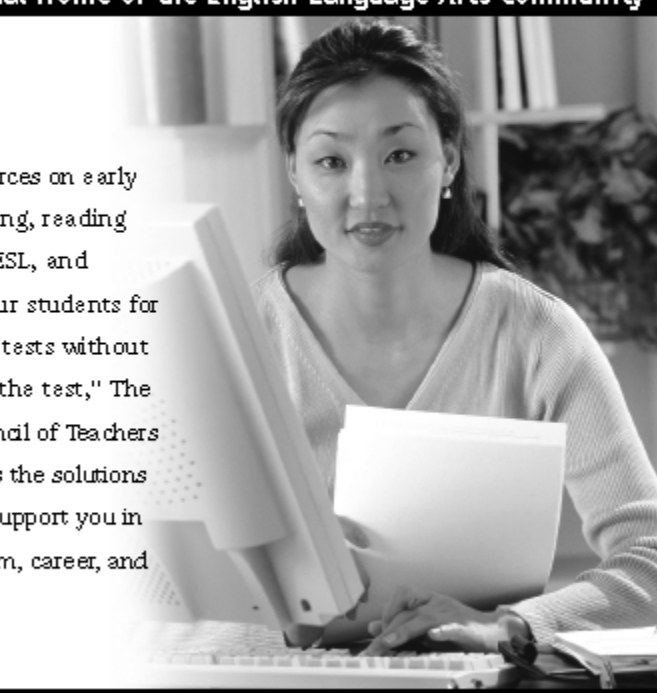
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NCTE National Council of Teachers of English

The Professional Home of the English Language Arts Community

A black and white photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a light-colored sweater, sitting at a desk. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. In front of her is a large computer monitor and a keyboard. She is holding a white folder or stack of papers. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a bookshelf.

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EDITORS' MESSAGE

"Mindfulness" served as our key term for the 2012 AEPL Conference in Estes Park, CO. This irony does not escape us in an election year when so much of the political discourse we've heard was influenced by anything but. Fortunately, we have Laurence Musgrove's whimsical cartooning to keep us mindful of what we lose in shoot-'em-up, shut-'em-out debates where neither opponent actually listens, relying instead on an

impoverished script. We wonder how this year would have proceeded, had our congress critters taken time out, as many of us did, to consider ways that mindfulness might change our professional and personal lives for the better.

AEPL keynote speaker, Doug Hesse, has explored how writing requires us to be alert to the fortuitous insights that time and timeliness—*kairos*—can give us.

Hesse tells us that no technology can vie with the mindfulness of which we're capable as writers, as teachers, as human beings. Be prepared for musical interludes and a hopefully mellow note from his trombone.

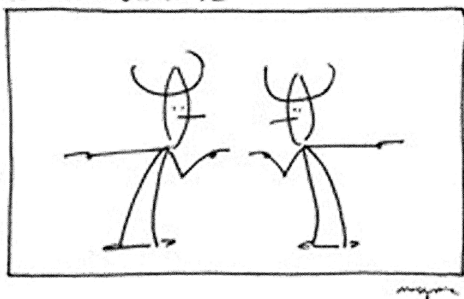
Liz Rohan continues the theme, theorizing how the impromptu, private texts we and our students scribble on the fly can gain real value, even if they never retain the "immediately communicative" qualities we try to give them. As a diarist, she explains that such writing, seen mindfully through Bakhtin's concept of "great time," adds up to "personal literacy inventories" which teach us who we were and who we've become, interwoven with the written worlds of others.

Moving from theory to technique, Christy Wenger shares with us the ways she brings students to mindfulness in her composition classroom—conjoining breath with invention, leading young writers to transformative effects. Certainly, the same rings true if we heed Lavinia Hirsu's call to develop a pedagogy that responds to student testimonies we don't always know how to witness, unexpected testimonies that force us to hear other's perspectives mindfully. Heather Trahan's essay goes on to teach us how the classroom application of activity theory can help us cope with the surprises that occur when we *do* remain mindful of students' different perspectives, but our good intentions don't put us on the path we want to take.

Are you interested, on the other hand, in seeing what could happen if our colleges and universities opened the doors to the community, inviting them in to reinvent themselves in writing? Shelly Sanders and B. Cole Bennett did that very thing and discovered wonderful new uses for writing center space that promise to reinvent their university's creative writing program as well. Mindfulness about space and place helps us remember that everything we have is borrowed and ought to be shared in as many good ways as we can imagine.

Mindfulness can also prompt us to reinvent where we do research—and how we do

Political Discourse



it. Richard Enos gives us an all-too-brief glimpse of what happened when he discovered that rhetorical scholarship combines quite agreeably with archaeology. His Out of the Box column will make you hanker after your own artifacts.

In this issue, too, we wanted to experiment with asking contributors to focus mindfully upon the ethics and spirituality they bring to leadership. Many of us have answered the call to serve in administrative positions, taking heart in what AEPL founder, James Moffett, said: “The spiritual approach to problems is to examine oneself along with the situation” (222). The four who contribute to this theme know they need self-examination to “enter another’s point of view” and find empathy—above all for those who choose to criticize, dispute, or even bully rather than work toward a common good (222). As Moffett would put it, stories such as the ones you will read can help us see more readily what administration really should be “because storying serves to induce understanding, to raise consciousness” (183).

For instance, Paul Puccio provides a surprising slant with his belief that we will have a direct impact upon shaping the kinds of leaders we want—and deserve—if we approach hierarchy with the intent to collaborate mindfully. While Puccio’s essay aptly frames our special section, Tom Truesdell follows him up with his claim that student tutors, in their own way, can become change agents, if their directors help them see their potential as advocates for and negotiators of new relationships with faculty. Truesdell stands what it means to administrate on its head by questioning the assumptions we make about student-centered learning vis-à-vis communal learning.

Perhaps the most moving and powerful essays in this issue come from Elizabeth Vander Lei’s and Beth Daniell’s respective views on how administrators must sustain mindfulness in the midst of intensely challenging responsibilities. Vander Lei draws deep from her upbringing in a Dutch Reformed community, crafting an administrative philosophy that remains under constant renovation even while it stands firmly on the two pillars of “peaceableness” and love. Daniell takes instruction from her ongoing commitment to truth-telling in the relationships she develops with students and faculty—a commitment that never allows her to appease or flatter but demands that she always conduct herself in “ways that are clear and kind.”

We hope, as always, that you will then turn to our book review section, where Judith Halden-Sullivan has collected savvy critiques on four new, useful texts that will refresh your mid-year perspectives on teaching and learning. And as you also turn to the classroom stories and poetry that Helen Walker has gathered from our colleagues, we hope they will inspire you to submit a tale or reflection that comes from your own mindful response to the work that we all do together.

Enjoy this issue, and by all means, lend it to a friend or two. Be mindful that AEPL members such as you are the best means we have of growing our assembly!

Work Cited

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Writing and Time, Time and the Essay

Douglas Hesse

In mid-May, I got to speak to an audience of student writers at DePaul University in Chicago. My youngest daughter Paige graduated from DePaul a couple years ago, so the trip was tinted with nostalgia. Paige now lives in Los Angeles, where she writes for Southern California Public Radio and additionally toils from 5:00 to 8:00 am at a Beverly Hills dog kennel. She can attest that the poop from dogs of B-list movie stars smells the same as the poop from your dogs.¹

Still, as I told those students, Paige is making money as a writer, and these days that might strike some people as a little exotic and odd. Ours is largely an age of sound and image, YouTube and Instagram, where writing gets dolloped in *tapas*-sized scoops, where reading is snacking except for occasionally following the exploits of dragon-tattooed girls or teenaged archers in a society that makes kids kill each other. Sure, there's lots of writing going on. It's just that relatively little of it happens in extended chunks drafted and revised over time. We link and comment. We master the *bon mot*, we excel at snark. For every fledgling essayist or memoirist, there are a thousand status updaters, tweeters, and pinners. Of course, that ratio has probably been true for decades or centuries. But what's striking about our current times is the seeming cultural desire to begrudge writing in general, to wish it away, to hope it simply pops up when we need it, to have it done quickly, for a quick fix, then on to the next thing.

As I mingled with young writers that pleasant night in Lincoln Park, I contrasted their spirit with one just a couple miles south, on Wacker Drive, at the edge of the Chicago loop. A company there is called Narrative Science, and its motto is "We transform data into stories and insight." Their home page is worth considering at some length:

As the volume of data continues to rise exponentially, companies need a better way to use, monetize and understand the data they already have.

Narrative Science helps companies leverage their data by creating easy to use, consistent narrative reporting—automatically through our proprietary artificial intelligence technology platform.

We also help publishers who are faced with the constant challenge of keeping up with the speed, scale and cost demands of content creation.

No doubt, reporting last week's widget sales or covering the Estes Park town council doesn't require quite the burnishing polish of a Jori Graham poem. But I have to wonder, quite seriously, what the end game is when we start presuming writing is too much bother to produce.

Or to read. Spring produced the latest flurry of articles about computers scoring student writing as accurately as people. As usual, psychologists and linguists devised algorithms that assign values to chains of words and synonyms, to sentence lengths and types, to other syntactic and stylistic markers. Machines can score for formal features, and

¹ With light editing, this is the keynote talk, albeit here without images, that I presented at the AEPL Summer Conference on June 30, 2012, in Estes Park, Colorado. —DH

in some cases, they're fairly decent at it. They're less good at deciding whether the writer has said anything intelligent or worthy. My friend Les Perlman at MIT has annoyed testing companies for years by coaching students to write nonsense essays that score very well. They can actually do okay with a sentence like, "When Benito Mussolini first synthesized hydrogen in 1492, it exemplified the nascent economic prowess of Paraguay." The key is using a sophisticated vocabulary, some key words like "thus" or "nonetheless," and above all, writing a lot.

Now, folks have pursued the grail of machine graded writing for 30 years. As someone interested in artificial intelligence, I find much of this work fascinating—but not because I hope we can figure it out. Addressing the problem opens another path to learning how people think and writing works. But I'm worried about our motives. I doubt that we'll somehow activate Skynet or conjure some Schwarzneggerian Terminator. Rather, I fear that if people look only at writing in formalistic ways, something adjudicated by software, writing loses its reason for existing in the first place, which is to create ideas, to create relationships, to constitute societies and subgroups, to sustain people.

In my dystopic future, the Narrative Science computers would just send content to the scoring computers. People would get out of the loop and let the machines talk to each other. At least, the imagined computers' book club wouldn't need tea cakes.

Several readers are probably too young to recall the original Star Trek series, though no doubt insufferable baby boomers have inflicted Kirk, Spock, and McCoy on you. In one episode they beam down to a planet locked in a centuries-old war. Suddenly, the planet's leaders announce that a major battle has just taken place. Kirk and crew are baffled. There's been no obvious fighting. It turns out that the two warring cultures gave up physical combat hundreds of years previously. The war now happens as a computer simulation, with the pointed twist that when the machine spews out casualties, people obediently march into disintegration chambers. As you might guess, Kirk finds the whole thing barbaric, destroys the battle computer, and as usual gets a few red-shirted guys killed.

Now, I'm not saying that machine writing and reading are like computer-hosted wars, and I'm not saying that writing is fighting, though sometimes it feels that way. I am defending writing as more than an annoyance to be gotten rid of, relegated to lackeys or sloughed to silicon chips. Writing is hard for a reason, in the same way that running a marathon or finding a spouse or attending your father's funeral is hard: it's a fundamental human act.

When I was 18, I assumed that people who were "real writers" nonchalantly channeled thought into prose, and I just needed to learn their tricks. Well, I've learned some tricks, and I teach them to students, but I eventually figured out that the tough stuff of writing *is* the thoughts. Of course, you don't have to write to think. But writing keeps you honest. Either you have a 45-minute talk on a Saturday morning or you don't. Either the talk is compelling or it sucks. Like a sadistic gym teacher, writing disciplines you into thinking and confronts you with your shabby results.

Perhaps for those reasons, I struggle to sustain writing these days. I write five or ten minutes before a question takes me to a Google search, and while I'm there I check email and Facebook and a listserv or two. Maybe that side hike sends me up a box canyon before back to the text I'm supposedly composing. My exceptions to this pious mode

of production—and I'll talk about one in a few minutes—happen on projects with no pressing rhetorical situation or expectant audience save me and my best imagined friends.

For other sorts of writing, the far down-the-road gratification of a published piece just barely outpaces the present pull to do anything but focus. Forget the future readers. Immediate ones wait now, and I can reach them as well with a link or a snapshot.

I have some tricks to keep my mind in the game, of course, mainly mode and place. I still relish writing by hand with a plentiful pen, both for the feel and for creating an obvious artifact. I know my laptop is full of me, but I have to open files to see the traces, displayed there in pixelated uniformity. Handwriting leaves the physical trace, the unique artifact. So when I'm playing verbal hooky, I go to the paper pad.

There's the trick of place, too. I'm not a coffee shop writer. I get nervous and guilty sitting there long, and a couple cappuccinos is my limit. I'm a library writer or a picnic table writer.

Last week I was stymied on this talk. This was even though I figured you for a friendly bunch, and I liked the topic I'd set. But I was writing in fits and starts, and I was starting to fret. Friends here in Estes Park offered me their cabin for a day. My wife was in Pennsylvania, and the cabin didn't have internet, so I loaded my dogs Maddie and Toby and drove north from Denver.

In the afternoon I wrote on the porch, watching hummingbirds tease the feeder. At one point there was great dog excitement. A chipmunk scurried through the dirt, and instinctively Toby lunged. To his great surprise and my dismay, he snipped and crippled it, then stood back in wonder, puzzled that the critter wasn't going to play. When I got there the poor chipmunk lay gasping on its side, legs a kilter. I reflexively picked up a heavy rock, enacting my rural Iowa roots to put it out of its misery.

I flashed to last fall. One midnight, Becky woke me up. Our fourteen-year-old cat, Blossom, was having some kind of final seizure, and Becky, having watched her share of pets die over the decade, couldn't deal with this one. We'd been watching Blossom in a decline measured by half-eaten bowls of food, and we'd decided against a third surgery.

Blossom lay on the basement floor, on her side, gasping, legs twitching, glassy-eyed, mostly in some other place. I wanted to do something, but the only thing to be done was to hasten her death, and the ethics of that situation were vexed. Actually, they were totally screwed. What counted as caring here? I've held a dog as a vet put her down, so I've been an agent of death, but in those moments I could imagine myself as comforter. Now there were no syringes or consoling protocols. It was midnight, and what was at hand were my hands. The idea of Blossom's last moments confused by a caregiver become killer was horrible. So I just sat with her for fifteen minutes, and she died. Though I thought then and now that I'd done right just to sit, I couldn't avoid that typically male, typically paternal doubt that I should have done something. I felt the same incrimination that E. B. White feels in "The Death of a Pig," the same wonder that Virginia Woolf recognizes in "The Death of the Moth," or decades later, what Annie Dillard recounted in her own version of a moth's death in *Holy the Firm*.

You see what I've done here, don't you, and you're possibly annoyed. I've gone from

describing a cultural antipathy toward writing to narrating my own collusion with it. From there was an anecdote that digressed to yet another anecdote, and now we're at least two mountain ridges from the topic of writing. It's ramble capped, complicated, and weakly justified by invoking writers in the nonfiction pantheon. I've performed the associative progression of the personal essay—composition by connection. If this is going to turn out as anything other than lazy self-indulgence, then everything has to be seen as fitting together in the end, the parts entailing one another, making a story by intention and design. When William Hazlitt described "The Indian Jugglers" in his essay by the same name, when he described how they kept four brass balls aloft "like meteors or flowers," Hazlitt of course was describing the essayist's challenge (126). He was writing in 1828, by the way, which I know because I stopped writing to look it up, and on the way I stopped by Facebook.

Ah, Facebook.

I'm struck by this new technology's unlikely connection to the tradition of diaries, notebooks, and journals. While writing may have started in cuneiform clay conceived for commerce, it wasn't long before people wrote to make art and wrote to make friends. Letters and postcards led to emails and tweets, to flicker and Facebook, for the sheer purpose of making ourselves extensive and connected. Writing inscribes us among others.

It also inscribes us for ourselves. Mark Zuckerberg and friends grasped that fact last year when they devised Timeline. I was fascinated by some of the earliest language used to promote it:

[Y]our profile will become a scrapbook documenting your entire life, all the way back to your birth. Facebook will become a record of your existence. . . . Facebook knows you better than you know yourself. (Cashmore)

Really? Really? In a strange sense that could be true, if you equated "knowing" with "remembering." The chance to capture fleeting experience has always been a promise of writing. I regularly read an old notebook or email and meet an experience I don't remember having lived at all. This happens more when you're in your 50s and paying your youngest daughter's student loans.

But "knowing yourself" involves more than memory. It involves more than documenting the bacon and watercress sandwich that you had for lunch, the awesomeness of that band and that club last night, your cryptic pissed-offedness at someone for some reason that you're not going to explain because you like the dramatic veiled victimage, thank you very much. Like the good folks at Narrative Science, Facebook recognizes that the data of your life is overwhelming and messy. Like Joan Didion at the beginning of "The White Album," Facebook recognizes that we live "by the imposition of a narrative line on the shifting phantasmagoria of experience" (11). But unlike Joan Didion, Facebook has decided to spare you from that imposition. It will do it for you and claim to know you better than you know yourself.

Two things intrigue me. Most obvious, of course, is how the technology replaces writers as agents of the selves constructed from their bits and tags. Consider the nature of the thus-made you, an accretion of blurbs, beads on a temporal string. What's missing is connection and reflection, exploring what you make of the beads, their relation beyond

“before” and “after.” Your time-lined you resembles those Norton Editions of *Jane Eyre* or *Wide Sargasso Sea* that have readers discern Bronte’s or Rhys’s lives from their chronologies in Appendix C. Disconnected dots flatter the reader’s ingenuity; they evoke the modernist despair of a fractured world. But making only dots, however artful, is an exercise in short moments, abjuring the deeper time of trying to state meaning—not only imply it.

I plea, then, for writing that takes time, both measured by episodes marked by butts in the chair but also episodes shaping over days and weeks. I’m not saying that such writing is nobler than the quick sprints of contemporary composition; it just provides a healthy counter-balance to frenetic fragmentation. Our writing ecologies need an increment of slow, and the sobering news is that we can resort to peculiar measures to find that pace and time.

Over a year ago, Nancy Sommers, Kathleen Yancey, and I set ourselves to a writing compact. The deal was this. We’d each choose an object or two and write about it for an hour each day, 30 days straight. No excuses. We’d present something from this experience at the CCCC meeting, which we did in March. After 30 days, I’d amassed 30,000 words and 60 pages of autobiography and exploration. Please indulge me for a few minutes while I give you a slice of that talk from Louisville. I promise a point at the end, and if you heard it there, just think of it as something like hearing Bob Dylan perform “Maggie’s Farm” for the sixth or twentieth time.

I chose to write about two objects, a music folder and a trombone. When I joined the Colorado Symphony Chorus in 2007, I bought its recommended folder, a pebbly cardboard thing, with a hand loop on the spine. A strap connects the sides, keeping its opening to 80 percent. Since 2007, probably 40 works have passed through the folder, from *Carmina Burana* to Beethoven’s 9th to now, the Mozart C-Minor mass.

The Colorado Symphony Chorus is my latest in a life spent singing. In third grade, I joined the children’s choir at Grace Lutheran Church, DeWitt, Iowa, Hazel Soenksen, director. We sat in four rows, youngest kids in front, the back anchored by sixth grade girls singing alto, and I thought harmony the most surprising delight. We had no folders. In this choir I sang my first solo, a third verse.

[sung]

Fair are the meadows

Fairer still the woodlands

Robed in flowers of blooming spring. (Anon.)

My trombone playing is almost as venerable as my singing. I started in fourth grade, with a horn handed down from my cousin Mitch, a varsity fullback already gone bald. There were three immediate challenges to a nine-year old trombonist. One was emptying the spit valve lest the horn started popping like a two-cylinder lawn mower. You died of embarrassment when Sherri Parrot, the cute alto sax player sitting in front of you turned around. Later I learned sloughing spit was no big deal for cool players, like Trombone Shorty. Only nerds were shy. By the way, there is no nerdier player than *Star Trek Next Generation’s* Commander William Riker, played by Jonathan Frakes, past member of the Penn State Marching Band.

Keeping your slide slippery was challenge two. Slide oil came in two ounce bottles

that looked like nose spray. My slide was untrue, its finish corroded. I thought more oil would help, and I'd apply so much that glissanding from sixth position to first was like inhaling exhaust.

Challenge three was sixth position. Trombones actually have seven, but no fourth grader can really reach sixth, at least not in tune. In fifth grade band, I was last chair trombone. Rehearsals terrified me. Miss Steele would go through the section and have each kid play, one at a time, until she discovered the source of discord, which became the source of your shame. Miss Steele resembled my current symphony chorus director Duane Wolfe, who's won two Grammys. His rehearsal technique favors quick reps, perhaps punctuated with "Awful!" or "Count" or "Make it better" or simply "Again." The second time you have a sense of how you screwed up previously, and the third time you're polishing, and the fourth time you've got it. The pedagogy of glower and grin. Duane figures that it's not as if your bad technique or wrong note was the consequence of some rationale decision. It's muscle memory and ear. Duane is a mean Peter Elbow.

By ninth grade, which was 1970, when I bought my Olds Studio Model trombone, I'd learned to use a creamy stuff called SuperSlick. You smeared a tiny bit, then sprayed a light mist, worked the sleeve back and forth, buffing. By ninth grade I could play sixth position in tune, and I could reach seventh. That year I bought the Olds Studio model for \$300, which was my life savings when I was 14.

Key Change

It's seventh grade, and I'm auditioning for the *Mikado*. Fifty of us sit in chairs while Miss Lamonica, the gym teacher, and Miss Eggleston, the music teacher, go down the row. They point, and you sing eight bars. Kids are surprised I can sing. I'm a dork, the last boy in school with a flattop haircut. I'm cast as Pish Tush and have the first song of the whole operetta, the exposition:

[sung]
Our great Mikado, virtuous man,
When he to rule the land began,
Resolved to try
A plan whereby
Young men might best be steadied.
So he decreed in words succinct
That all who flirted, leered, or winked
(Unless connubially linked)
Should forthwith be beheaded. (Gilbert)

The song starts on a low note that my twelve-year-old self can't yet sing, so they had me start on the higher octave.

I play the police sergeant in *Pirates of Penzance*. These first roles establish an acting trajectory of authority figures. In a schlocky musical called *Fly Me to the Moon*, I play a high school principal. I MC the school variety show. I'm the dependable kid who won't screw up. Mr. Brownlow in *Oliver*. The Captain in *South Pacific*. The only variation was my senior year, Sky Masterson, in *Gys and Dolls*. Decades later, from my thirties to late

forties, I do community theater, until my last role, the Rabbi in *Fiddler on the Roof*. The ego gap back to Masterson has grown too vast, so I quit the stage.

I started at the University of Iowa as a chemistry major. I was a member of the Marching Band, which in the mid-1970s was nothing like today's exuberant cults. In my second game, we played Penn State, and coming off the field at halftime, I knocked into Joe Paterno. Marching got old after sophomore year, so I auditioned for the Old Gold Singers, a 28 voice swing choir, a sort of *Glee* of its day. We did Broadway, pop, and jazz classics, all with choreography. We sang three weekends each year on campus, and we took spring tours to New York and New Orleans. But my favorites were shows we did around the state of Iowa, for Chambers of Commerce and high school assemblies. At the Clinton County Pork Producers, I sang a solo in a close-harmonied jazz song.

[sung]

When I give my heart,

It will be completely.

Or I'll never fall in love. (Young)

Now and then, I've been one of the better singers in an ensemble, but these days it's inevitably then, and the proof is decisive. Last August in Aspen, the opera singer Twyla Robinson chose to sing a solo from the chorus. I was standing in the center of the first row, so they put her beside me, figuring I'd be nice. I was. During pauses, we talked about her garden in Texas. I was stunned by Robinson's breathing. She'd start half a measure before coming in, a slow steady, powerful intake, storing energy like a braking Prius. Robinson was also soprano soloist for the Mahler Second Symphony, the Resurrection, which has four stunning movements. The chorus enters in the middle of the fifth, *pianissimo*, *a capella*, and builds from there to perhaps the most chilling dynamic marking in all of choral music, "Mit hochster Kraft," with maximum force. It's marked *fff* but really it means something like "Everything you've got; just go nuts."

So, I've spent most of my life in music, and yet I've known since fourth grade that I'm a musical poser. That year we all took an aptitude test that involved listening to several tones and deciding which was higher and lower, louder and softer, and so on. I failed. Recently, I tried to figure out what the exam might have been, most likely the "test of musical talent," invented by University of Iowa psychologist Carl Seashore. In these pre-digital days, Seashore had to design all sorts of machines that could render and measure sounds precisely. One of my favorites was the tonoscope, which determined and represented how precisely listeners could judge isolated sound intervals. Today he'd have made the Topic Sentence O'Scope. Anyway, the school sent results to help parents decide whether to spend money on a clarinet. Apparently I was a bad risk.

I think of all that would have changed had my parents heeded that test, or had I. I would not have played with the Findlay College band, when my colleague Jack Taylor needed a ringer and offered me a case of home-brewed ale. I would not have sung the Verdi *Requiem* in Vienna's *Stephansdom*. I would not have played polkas for a wedding reception in an Iowa barn or five services each Easter in a brass quartet. I would not have played my trombone beside my son Andrew when he was six and learning the cello, the two instruments being in the same range, at least for beginners.

I think of testing now, especially high stakes exams in writing, measures not only of students but also of teachers. It was probably true that, according to Dr. Seashore's test, I had little aptitude. However, that test didn't measure whether you'd sung "Beautiful Savior" as a third grader, whether your mother's favorite musician was Tommy Dorsey, whether you'd be willing to spend your life's savings at fourteen on an Olds Studio Model trombone.

I think, further, of schools stripping away music for basics, stripping everything for the basics, even writing done to its most transactional, practical, and testable. No time for the aesthetic and poetic. We can't afford it, and the kids really don't need it. They need skills, not arts. And they surely don't need to produce exploratory long writings in genres like the essay, combining experience, reading, and idea for the wayward purpose simply of figuring where the text might go. They need conciseness to the point, clarity and confidence. This is a competitive world, dammit, and if you shilly-shally, the Chinese will take your jobs.

Ok, you're thinking. Enough, Doug, you're thinking. Enough with this self-indulgent parataxis. You're right, so here's some analysis of four aspects of the Yancey-Sommers-Hesse writing experiment. First consider the duration over weeks, a thirty day commitment focused on one project. It's hard to make time these days for sustained writing, to know that tomorrow and next week you're going to be writing on this project—and just for the sake of writing, not to finish a dissertation, not to earn tenure, not for any goal except to write. Second consider the individual writing increment. I'm at my computer probably 6 or 7 hours a day, but I found an hour of writing concentrated in this fashion a surprisingly long spell. All sorts of gravitational forces, technological, vocational, cultural and personal, many of them pleasant and many of them not, wrench me away from the focused act.

The focus is the third element. Writing thirty hours in thirty days is one thing, but writing on a single object is quite another. Of course, I chose things saturated with meaning, so they were a pull. But I couldn't let myself exhaust them, even after day seven or day 22. The external demand to spend the time propelled me into surprising memories and ideas. There was no rhetorical exigency but, rather, the essayistic tradition that has made writers for centuries ponder the smallest matter to invest it with significance. It's what made my sadly suicided friend David Foster Wallace turn a visit to a Maine lobster festival into a biological and philosophical excursion into whether crustaceans feel pain and what either answer means for eaters. It's what makes a blocked writer on an Estes Park porch reflect on killing a chipmunk hurt by a playful dog.

The final lesson is the power in withholding publication, at least for a time, figuring out when the text might ready, going deep into the morass of prose. It's simpler to spin new language, to send the Facebook post, to browse the Internet, the day, the life. Trading the available "now" for the still-imagined "then" means writing for deferred reward. It bets on satisfaction that may not come, for audiences that may not care. To winnow and revise—to connect life's stuff, diffuse in chronology, concept, and place—is to barter the small sure thing for something hazy. Essays have no algorithms, and yet given time they have promise.

In writing this talk, you see, I've made a second return to those original 30 days of writing, revising my revision, embedding Professor Seashore's tonoscope in the world of Narrative Science and Facebook Timeline. I've spoken my trombone into a Louisville ballroom only to conjure it anew today, at a Y camp in the Rockies. In a sense, I started drafting today's talk long before I even received Wendy and Irene's kind invitation to Estes's rare air, before I knew your names and faces. During our thirty day experiment, Kathi, Nancy and I debated what counts as time toward our hour's allotment. Suppose mid-sentence I wonder about the Olds musical instrument company, so I look up the factory's history on line. Suppose the memory of Hazel Soenksen sends me to the basement, to find my band album from fifth grade. Am I writing if I'm looking things up midstream—because writing impels me to do so—but maybe not, if I haven't begun? What's "pre writing?" Isn't all of life?

Sure—though technically, you have to at least and at last write a few words. With contemporary expectations and technologies, that's a pretty low threshold. I ask for something more substantial than recording the occasional minutes of our lives, however voluminously, often in disconnected bits, siftable by technologies whose inventors fancy that they've thereby "written" on our behalf, sparing us the bother. I ask for living with writerly intent. By that, I mean believing that experience justifies writing, yes, but also that life warrants re-inscription. It means accepting that returns to past selves and texts take time, in an age not particularly conducive to waiting or uncertainty, accepting the possibility that coherence may elude essaying from things not lived coherently. A daughter in Los Angeles, Grace Lutheran Church, an Olds trombone, *Star Trek*, the *Mikado*, William Hazlitt, Gustav Mahler, a dying cat, a Saturday in mountains hazed with wildfire, three songs: all of these singly are but shimmered glints. With time and design, they stand gathered, however meekly, against the grand dispassionate Timeline. I appreciate your invitation today to make something of them and, perhaps, myself.



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The Rainbow Connection: Theorizing the Efficacy of Private Texts

Liz Rohan

Feminist scholars have long criticized the public/private hierarchy, which, roughly speaking, has privileged the study of mostly male-authored public texts and belittled or ignored the study of private or semi-private mostly female-authored texts. Literary scholar Jane Tompkins summed it up for many in her now iconic 1987 essay, “Me and My Shadow,” when she claimed most emphatically: “The public-private dichotomy, which is to say the public-private hierarchy, is a founding condition of female oppression” (169). Meanwhile, otherwise well-meaning contemporary scholars of writing can also perpetuate the perceived hierarchy between the public and private by celebrating the production of texts such as blogs, websites and wikis *because they are not private* and, more specifically, hail audiences beyond the classroom. Nearly ten years ago, Christian W. Weisser predicted the importance of public texts in composition studies when claiming, “The orientation toward public writing. . . seems to be a logical and progressive development in the field” (90). A few years later, Paula Mathieu explicitly identified a “*public turn*” in writing instruction which, defined as such, “asks teachers to connect the writing that students and they themselves do with ‘real world’ texts, events or exigencies” (1).

Wired magazine writer Clive Thompson recently picked up on this longstanding, and even a tacitly agreed upon hierarchy, between private and public writing when making claims about Andrea Lunsford’s research on student writing in the Information Age. He asserts:

The fact that students today almost always write for an audience (something virtually no one in my generation did) gives them a different sense of what constitutes good writing. In interviews, they defined good prose as something that had an effect on the world. For them, writing is about persuading and organizing and debating, even if it’s over something as [ordinary] as what movie to go see. The Stanford students were almost always less enthusiastic about their in-class writing because it had no audience but the professor: It didn’t serve any purpose other than to get them a grade.

It’s exciting and refreshing that scholarship in writing studies is making it into the popular press, that students are writing more than ever, and that new technologies are encouraging better and practical opportunities for text production. However, conversations about audience in conjunction with new media can promote a limited view of what texts can accomplish in the long run as the audiences for these texts change and their contexts shift. Furthermore, as for the power of texts having an effect on the world—what does that mean? Which world and for how long?

This analysis of private text production of several stripes, including those I’ve produced, doesn’t admonish efforts to open up what students can and should write in the classroom, nor does it admonish the so-called “public turn” and its advocates. It rather ideally opens up discussions about what different types of private writing is, what it can do, why it matters, and why we need to think about and study it more. As

Kevin Roozen similarly argues, “The growing interest in undergraduates’ more public extracurricular writing underscores the need for further attention to the full range of their literate activities, especially the private writing in which they engage” (545). In short, if the “public turn” opens up what “counts” as undergraduate writing, we might be mindful of what kind of writing might on the other hand get implicitly “discounted” while also better articulating the synergistic relationships between what we call public texts and what we call private texts.

My main contribution to a discussion about the efficacy of private texts is this, which might seem rather simple: the power of private texts and also texts written as schoolwork can be underestimated when considering foremost that these texts may have additional functions, including new audiences and contexts as time passes. Peter Medway, for example, critiques the assumption that a text, such as one produced for a teacher or for school, can “be immediately communicative”; this assumption, he argues, “rests on an over simplistic understanding of social action” (143). A text produced for one context may later have a broader or different function when it is reused or repurposed and becomes, at the very least, a mnemonic artifact. When studying student notebooks kept by students for an architecture program, Medway asserts that, although the audience for the notebooks was limited to the composers, the texts were also “indirectly communicative” in that they were composed “with an eye to future compositions, oral, written and graphical” (143). The sketchbooks might serve additional functions as mnemonics for the writers later when these writers revisit these notebooks over time. And, Medway argues, the writing “is partly rehearsal, of specific arguments and more generally of a discourse, for an expected or imagined performance” (144). The exigencies of these texts are not fixed but fluid.

As a diarist, I am not alone in my interest in the significance of time when measuring experience and assessing the value of texts. Tristine Rainer, who wrote a signature book on diary keeping that is now considered a classic, notes that diarists generally become interested in time—primarily because diarists who reflect on their past diary entries inevitably gain perspective about their lives with the critical distance from lived events possible via hindsight (262). By using my own experiences as a writer, I showcase also the relevance of scholars’ personal experience when developing theories and pedagogies, a trend which Eli Goldblatt encourages in his recent “literacy autobiography” when he claims,

I have often asked my undergraduate and graduate students over the years to write literacy autobiographies in order to help them see the intimate ways that reading and writing influence their lives. Teachers should be prepared to undergo the same trials they set up for their students (3).

Teacher’s literacy autobiographies should not be less relevant to our canon of research and best practices in the field of composition than those of students. After all, we are likely *more* conscious about the relationship between identities and the consumption and production of texts than novice scholars, particularly undergraduates, who are just coming to the concepts. To further my theory, I will provide a primary and quite personal example of how my experience as a diarist helped me develop a theory about time for measuring texts and their value and will provide some examples of how students have and can employ

the tool of time as a method for assessing texts for which the audience and purpose have become more or less fluid as the contexts for these texts have changed.

Measuring the Efficacy of Texts with the Tools of Time

Mikhail Bakhtin encourages a diachronic approach, or long-term approach, to text analysis when distinguishing between “*small time* (the present day, the recent past, and the foreseeable [desired] future) and *great time*—the infinite and unfinalized dialogue in which no meaning dies” (*Dialogic* 72). For Bakhtin, a “chronotope” represents one type of time space compression that can shape the depiction of narrative that does not necessarily represent time and space as it’s actually experienced. As one example, during the chronotope of “*adventure-time*,” the hero resolves his conflicts and gets the girl as depicted in an ancient Greek narrative and perhaps also in contemporary Hollywood romantic comedies (*Dialogic* 87). Yet this *adventure-time* chronotope, as Bakhtin argues, “lacks any natural, every day cyclicality. . . tying it to the repetitive aspects of natural and human life” (91). The constraints of *small time* or “*adventure-time*” might not only help us productively measure the difference between our lives and those of Jennifer Aniston’s onscreen ones, but might also work as a metaphor to consider the timespan of an average college semester. Within this adventure time chronotope, students might also produce texts for various publics and live audiences with a class blog when writing for a community organization or when sharing an essay with classmates. But how might these texts stand up overtime when the audiences are no longer immediate? Consider the relatively short time students spend with us and with each other during the “adventure time” of a class period, a semester, or even the span of the average college career. The chronotope of the “great time,” which takes into account “the repetitive aspects of natural and human life,” a phenomenon also noted by diarists, might be a better measure for assessing the value and potential of all texts and with it also, private, ordinary texts.

As a lifetime diarist, and a scholar who uses historical methods, I am often moved by texts for which I have been barely an audience, or not a perceived audience at all, as new contexts for these texts have proliferated. Private texts can be highly meaningful because they are candid or even because they were *not* “immediately communicative” to the highest degree. Stephen Witte similarly argues for better theories about the relationships between otherwise disparate texts, be they private or public, what he calls “text, context, and intertext,” to consider their interplay—even when analyzing the sophisticated set of contexts that inform writing as ordinary as a grocery list. “[S]uch a reconceptualization,” Witte argues, would bring together the seemingly disparate terms “*text*, *context* and *intertext* closer to the Latin root they share with one another, *texere*, which refers to weaving, interweaving, and plating or braiding” (264). Over-distinguishing the difference between public and private texts and those produced for school, but not for “real audiences,” can undercut an investigation of the synergistic “weaving, interweaving, plating and braiding” of texts, no matter their label. Also borrowing from Bakhtin, Paul Prior and Jody Shipka synthesize a framework to describe writing processes over time, and across genres, via what they call “chronotopic lamination.” While the term “lamination” connotes permanence, Prior and Shipka in fact emphasize literate activity as complex and dynamic *action* that evolves across genres, across disciplines and over lifetimes, the great time, and also the

weeding and braiding together, not only of texts, but their means of production as well, the “dispersed and fluid chains of places, times, people and artifacts that come to be tied together” (2).

Emotional Spying, Repurposing, and the Tying Together of Public and Private Texts

A private text, like a public text, can also transcend its “adventure time” when these texts are repurposed, or when we act as what songwriter Darrell Brown calls “emotional spies,” using others’ lives as fodder for our creative or scholarly projects—in effect repurposing others’ texts. Over the course of several years and as part of my dissertation project, I was an “emotional spy” when I studied the diaries of a deceased American woman. Janette Miller, who came of age at the turn of the twentieth century, kept a diary as a teenager and young woman, and then, when she turned thirty, gave up the practice upon leaving for Africa in 1910 to be a missionary. Typical of nineteenth century diarists and void of the confessions we associate with more contemporary diaries, Miller’s diary records are spare with little introspection, containing as she puts it, “bare records.” She began keeping a diary as a teenager and eventually realized she valued the diary as a mnemonic device and a means of behavior modification. As she put it in 1908, after reading Samuel Pepys diary: “I find I can review my days and bring myself up short when on the wrong track better when I see it written before me.”

Because Miller devoted most of her diary records to every day comings and goings, it was most profound for me as a reader when I stumbled upon passages that revealed her inner life. This was the case with an entry in her 1909 diary, containing her thoughts as she contemplated leaving her career as a librarian in Detroit to become a missionary. She wrote:

I cannot stand another year of irresolution and miserable sense of failure. Better attempt something with hope and courage than stand irresolute on the brink, or settle back to give up This thought of beginning life again at age 30 does not daunt me, but to live life useless fills me with terror. There has been an undercurrent of deep dissatisfaction this year with merely working to earn a living and living to earn my bread. Library work is interesting and pleasant and educational—as delightful work as I could find, it is not doing any special service for the master. I promised to serve so I ought to have everyday work which would be service.

When I first read this passage in Miller’s diary, I was the same age as her when she wrote it, 29. At the time I was contemplating getting a Ph.D., but I also was establishing connections at a posh suburban Chicago high school where I worked in the writing center. If I got my teaching certificate, I could probably have had a pretty nice job and a nice life. But I was drawn to scholarship. In certain moments when I thought about giving up on writing and scholarship, it felt deathly. So, like Miller, I was “on the brink” between going for it and settling for less. I eventually used this passage from Miller’s diary as fodder for writing personal statements about why I wanted to pursue a Ph.D. I wrote that Miller’s choice inspired me, which was true. Miller indeed became a missionary, which I knew, so I was able to put her private texts about her burgeoning choice to be a missionary into a

greater context, the result of that choice.

This greater context that shapes private, ordinary texts also challenges any assumed binaries between the public and the private, particularly when the discourse in private texts predict the content or production of public texts, and even public action. Miller wrote about becoming a missionary in private. Miller's choice eventually became public, a choice not only embodied by her arrival in Angola, but in public texts as well when she had the opportunity to publish a narrative about the factors that led her to become a missionary, in a 1910 edition of the missionary magazine *Mission Studies*. This magazine was published by the Midwestern division of the Congregational Woman's Board of Missions, called Woman's Board of the Interior or W. B. M. I. According to the article, Miller's "school life was interrupted by frequent removals as her father's business took [her family] from place to place" ("New Recruits" 263). Miller also assisted "a younger brother in obtaining his education" while she worked for several years at the Detroit Public Library. Given the arguable relationship between Miller's private texts, with which she made a choice, and an obviously public text, in which she describes this choice, Miller's collection of texts, private, semi-private, and public, highlights the interplay, *the tying together*, and not necessarily the hierarchy, between texts with various functions and audiences.

Furthermore, although the public text about Miller hints at some tensions—her father's career led to moves; she took care of and supported her brother—the article is, of course, absent of the emotion characterizing the 1909 private text where Miller admits she is dissatisfied with library work. As an emotional spy, I find the 1909 private texts more interesting than the 1910 texts. But reading them together, or tying them together, can be quite powerful and makes the reader a witness to the process of a young woman making a life for herself on her own terms, at last. We can see, for example, that Miller's private texts were a type of "rehearsal," as Medway might put it, for future text production, embodied in the decision to become a missionary and the texts that followed were a result of this decision. Or, as Prior and Shipka argue, "[A]ny experience at any time or place might become salient in some writing process" (15). The *Mission Studies* article is made all the more meaningful when considering the long road that led Miller to her career as missionary, a career she pursued until her death in 1969, and a career she chose with the help of her diary.

Later, when I could better assess Miller's methods as a diarist, I realized that she cut up letters and put them into her diary as in a scrapbook. I determined that this passage about finding "every day work which would be service" was from part of a letter Miller wrote to her former high school teacher and friend, Miss Hull. This letter scrap is therefore an example of the complicated relationship between writing and social action and also complicates the assumption that a text might be "immediately communicative." First, the idea "work which would be service" was embedded in a letter by Miller to Miss Hull, who was the original audience. Next, the letter was repurposed as part of a collection in Miller's diary, a diary that she used both as a mnemonic device and to monitor her behavior and values. Then the letter became scholarly fodder for my personal statements while also persuading me to take action by pursuing my Ph.D.

Miller is deceased, and conclusions about the interplay between public and private texts in her literate life are therefore inevitably speculative. However, fiction writer Katherine Towler, also a diarist, provides some insight about how a diarist, who employs

the tool of time, might come to recognize this theorized interplay—and how she might also become more self-aware about the role of time in identity formation and text production because she keeps a diary. Towler says,

By keeping a journal, I learned to be an observer of my own emotions and shifts and thinking and beliefs. I learned to look for patterns in my responses to these experiences. I came to understand myself as a being who changed over time. Writing an account of the ways I continually surprised and disappointed myself, how I made the same mistakes over and over. (39)

Towler's observations as a diary keeper, or "journal(ist)," shows how private text production can teach writers about time as both linear and cyclical, as history repeats itself. Towler's self-awareness as a person, which she learned from producing and studying her private texts, made her fiction better, she claims. Perhaps this self-awareness gave her characters more authenticity, or the observation of her own conflicts helped her better depict why and how people—fictional or real—make choices. As she puts it, "This practice of trying to truly know and understand myself was what I drew on most when I began to write novels" (39). Towler's experience, like that of Miller's, not only foregrounds the significant interplay between private and public texts, but once again shows how time can be used to better assess this interplay. Towler was able to see the connection between her personal emotions and those she developed for her fictional characters. Towler's experience also reinforces Medway's assertion that texts which are not "immediately communicative" (like Towler's diary entries), can serve as mnemonics, and can also help a writer "rehearse" for future text production. Diarist Joanna Field (the pen name for Marion Milner) has made similar discoveries about the efficacy of private texts over time, and about reflection, which she describes in part as thus: "I came to realize that the facts of my life were not so many fixed items which only needed adding up and balancing. They were rather continually receding horizons of the traveler who climbs a mountain" (44). As with Towler, Field's personal writing was not necessarily "immediately communicative," but it was efficacious in the long run, giving her insight on life: the relationship between problem solving and time.

Insights about Time from my Literacy Autobiography

The chronotope of the great time also shapes my perspective and my craft as a diarist. Unlike Miller's diary, which is rich in facts about her daily comings and goings but short on introspection, my diaries—particularly those written in my young adulthood—are too long on introspection and skimpy with specifics. Nevertheless, when reading these diaries I can usually find some insights that ring true and stand the test of time. Field also distinguishes her more authentic sounding diary sentiments from her less authentic sounding diary sentiments. She trained herself to notice, "the little motions of thought" rather than "look[ing] for something busier and noisier" (180-181). Jennifer Sinor likewise says it's one thing to write in time as a quality of "dailiness"—when the writer composes "in the days rather than of the days" and "is unable to create the critical distance we associate with reflection" (17). It's quite another to write in the "time when" the writer can

put daily events into a greater context (17). Diarists are invariably writing of experience in the thick of it. Sizing it up with any kind of authenticity or accuracy on the spot is a challenge and determining how to write about experience without “blind thinking” takes training (Field 181). As Trainer also describes the significance of time to diarists, “A dream, a coincidence, or an intuition preserved in a diary reveals its full, cumulative significance with time” (264).

Miller’s passionate claims about her desire to become a missionary, as expressed in her private texts, and as later manifested in her choice to become a missionary, might illustrate how a diarist could re-read and reflect on a text used for interpersonal development, or related purposes, to ascertain that writing might “predict” the future, even when the writer is well aware or even semi-aware of how and why she is making her choices. As a diarist I have also come to share Field’s observation that reading private texts can show us how problems are worked out on their own over time. Field describes the experience of reflection and how it relates to the process of rereading a diary, over the course of the “great time”:

Sometimes the meaning of an experience would only begin to dawn on me years afterwards, and even then I often had to go over the same ground again and again, with intervals of years in between. In fact, I came to the conclusion that the growth of understanding follows an ascending spiral rather than a straight line (55).

The chronotope of adventure time is too short to assess the value of a text as well as the experience it might represent. As Bakhtin argues about the value of time as assessment: “Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival” (“Methodology” 73).

The meaning of some significant texts I produced as a diarist did indeed have their homecoming festival in a set of events that technically took place over the course of almost thirty years as I acknowledged and revisited a connection I had to my middle school boyfriend Dave—about whom I wrote about in various contexts. My experiences as a witness to Dave’s life, as well as his public texts over time, draws attention to Field’s claim that diaries can be teachers of non-linear time and highlights the usefulness of the great time for measuring the meaning of records, spare or otherwise, a “time when” perspective. Dave became a significant *topos* for me as a writer partly because Dave was my boyfriend when I first began keeping a diary in seventh grade, because his persona evolved as a kind of icon in my dreams/subconscious, and because Dave and I have inevitably become kindred spirits as longtime fellow writers. This anecdote about Dave, and particularly a dream I recorded about him, will serve as a primary example from my own “literary autobiography” about how my diary taught me to value time as a tool of assessment for a text’s value and purpose.

This somewhat ongoing lesson in text analysis with Dave as *topos* began again and anew during a relatively recent signature experience when I visited downtown Detroit during the city’s Super Bowl celebrations in January 2006. The city dressed up with a Winterfest, complete with strobe lights and ice sculptures. I thought of Dave while downtown that night because he is a writer for *ESPN* and the NFL is his beat, so I figured he would be the only one I’d know going to the actual Super Bowl game. I hadn’t seen

or talked to him in years. Dave has a special online *ESPN* column for which his column at our high school newspaper, the *Northpointe*, was no doubt both foreshadowing and preparation. In this *Northpointe* column, which he developed as a high school senior, he wrote with both self-effacement and bravado about his world as a high school wrestler. I had read a few of Dave's *ESPN* columns over the years. Often, he writes of his boyhood home in Detroit with nostalgia, from his present home in North Carolina. As a result, I composed his column in my head that evening during my winter stroll downtown. At home that night, I read Dave's actual online column, which was a near facsimile of my imagined text, plus facts about football. I then emailed a link to the column to my friend Bill, who had worked with Dave in high school at the *Northpointe*, fell asleep on the living room couch, and had a dream about baby boys. Something bad was happening to them, and it was my fault as I lay on a cold metal operating table. These baby boys were sliding off the table and falling into an abyss one by one.

I shuddered awake, could not get back to sleep, and then, for something to do, checked my email. Bill had written back.

"It's too bad about Dave's son," Bill wrote.

What?

I went back to the *ESPN* Super Bowl column and noticed a link aside it, which led to a description of Dave's new book and an excerpt from it. The book describes Dave's journey to process his grief when his son died in the womb of a rare disease, shortly before he was supposed to have been born.

The dream about baby boys in association with Dave's actual life was jarring. I revisited my adolescent relationship with Dave, during which I had experienced some similar phenomena, and I had used my diary to measure its meaning. That evening, I remembered some ancient and buried emotions from childhood that I thought I had entirely buried, but as texts produced in "great time," they began their homecoming.

The connection between my texts, their intertexts, and their contexts linking me to Dave's grew greater when I was motivated to read Dave's book a year later, the summer of 2007. I had made an important discovery going through old notebooks from graduate school. I hadn't kept a diary during the years when I was getting a Ph.D., but sometime during 2000, I happened to jot down in a notebook a dream I had about Dave.

I discovered why I was compelled to record that dream somewhere, since I wasn't keeping a diary at the time. I had been collecting dreams about Dave for years in which he has starred as a distant but instructive presence in narratives often riled with melancholy tension and hope. Witte might refer to these dream entries about Dave as "memorial texts" (265). However, as I compared the 2006 dream to my 2006 dream, I realized that the 2000 dream was actually a nightmare. In the 2000 notebook dream, I bumped into Dave as he ran down his childhood street. Dave was holding his son, who was very sick. I gave Dave my condolences.

Dave's son died in 2000.

The tying together of this memorial text to its "homecoming festival" is made even more meaningful by considering the interplay between my diary and Dave's book.

Although I had written Dave few times over the years, I hadn't talked to him since the last year we were both back at home from college, living in suburban Detroit. That summer, in 1987, Dave had acquired someone's tandem bike and took it to ride around.

He happened to stop by my friend Libby's house one July evening when I was sitting on the stoop, a bit forlorn.

"C'mon, I'll ride you home," he said. It was about a mile ride from Libby's house to mine.

On the back of the tandem I was singing the song, "Rainbow Connection" from the Muppet movie that was popular that year. "Kermit sings this song, too, you know. On the bike. In the movie," I said. Several double rainbows had appeared that summer when a tropical weather pattern hung over the city. It had rained almost every afternoon, and then cleared up. Rainbow weather, I call it.

When we arrived at my driveway, Dave and I had quite a frank conversation about love and marriage, which included a cryptic discussion about the meaning of our long childhood acquaintance. I wrote down in my diary everything I remembered about our encounter the minute I got inside the house. In fact, most of that summer's diary included snippets and recap of this conversation as I thought about it, the last summer I'd spend with my childhood associates. As a result, the conversation has echoed like a transcript in my head over the years. I slowly recognized the meaning of that night as a kind of closure to my childhood. I also began to recognize the role that my diary, and inadvertently Dave, had in shaping my perspective.

May of 2007, I read Dave's book about his son in one sitting. I literally could not put the book down. Dave and his wife Kim decided to name their son Noah while Kim was pregnant. Noah never made it into the world, but he made his spirit present on the day of his funeral. A rainbow appeared in Kim and Dave's backyard.

The book itself is actually structured like rainbow weather. It begins with the excruciating details of Dave's slow horror that he would not be a dad, just yet. Noah would never live outside the womb, where he had already become a beloved son. The book ends with Dave's life as a new father—with the birth of his daughter. Kim is the real hero of the book. I could not imagine enduring a pregnancy when still raw from such a profound loss. While Dave's book chronicles an adventure-time, a year of grieving, the interplay of our collective texts over the course of almost thirty years adds a layer to "great time," for me at least, as a longtime student of my own private texts, demonstrating how diarists (producers of quintessentially private texts) hone their intuition as well as their memories, and, in doing so, can better identify themes shaping their lives as well as the lives of others, through time and over time, as their memorial texts repeat history in different contexts.

Some Pedagogical Applications

The experiences shaping my perspective about the efficacy of private texts over the great time may seem farfetched to some, particularly to those who have not used their texts, private or otherwise, as mnemonics. Yet the application of my personal experiences and philosophy to my pedagogy might resonate with those looking for practical applications of a theory valuing the production and teaching of private texts and also ordinary schoolwork. Discomfort that readers have with my attempt to share the meaning I have extracted from reading and writing private texts might furthermore draw attention to the paucity of theories about ordinary, private text production and analysis, particularly

those that are highly personal. (Rainer, on the other hand, catalogues the experiences of many diarists who describe experiences of intuition developed by diary keeping much like mine.)

I have applied my theories about time and its relevance for measuring texts through an assignment that I have developed called the “personal literacy inventory,” which I have written about elsewhere (“Everyday Curators” 57). This assignment requires students to retrieve and reflect upon texts they produced in the past, preferably as young people before arriving to college, but not necessarily—texts which they valued enough not to throw out. As one example of how time can be used as a form of assessment, one of my students, Patty, created a collage of artifacts she saved over the years that embodied her interests and values.² When assessing the collage, a significant artifact emerged—an informal paper that she wrote for a school assignment ten years prior that outlined her goals to be a teacher. These goals remained relevant as Patty pursued a teaching certificate in college. Of this connection between a text she produced years ago and her current goals, Patty asserted, “You are the same person no matter. I’m still interested in all stuff that I totally forgot about. Identity is a bit more constant [than we might think it is].”

Another student, Ilana, writes a literacy inventory that further demonstrate the interplay of public and private texts—the interplay between texts produced and consumed for school and those consumed and produced for personal enjoyment. Ilana also shows how time can be used to assess the connection and hierarchy among and between myriad texts. Tucked along with papers that Ilana had written and saved from her first year of college decades previously were poems she wrote about a painful breakup, flyers for music events, invitation to parties, articles from a local hipster paper, and one cartoon. Quoting Margaret Finders, who borrows from James Gee, Ilana described this collection as her “identity kit” which reflects her “seeing, acting, thinking and talking in the world” (3). All of the texts in Ilana’s collection, which included graded schoolwork, served as mnemonics to help Ilana remember and reflect on a certain time and place when she was coming of age. Time provided the critical distance which allowed the tying together of these texts thematically as she ascertained their meaning, the tension between them and also their connecting threads. Comments by teachers on Ilana’s writing also served as mnemonics to help Ilana remember her attitude about school at the time and her efforts to negotiate the demands of the academy that didn’t always make sense to her and about which she was relatively cynical. As she puts it, “I obviously knew what the instructor wanted to hear and was able to feign interest in a bunch of essays I don’t remember being particularly captivating.” The perusal of these artifacts helped Ilana assess how her “identity kit” of yore featured a time and place as well as a continuum. Time in this case, compressed the interplay between the public and the private, schoolwork and interests outside of school. Time also transformed the audience of her schoolwork from her teacher, to her younger cynical self, and finally to her older and wiser self, a self who was able to sort out the significance of the items in her collection as they related to a range of literate practices that she had been experimenting with and was being encouraged to develop, inside and outside of school.

My work, Patty’s work, and Ilana’s work reflecting on our literate inventories, while

² To maintain consistency with earlier scholarship, I have changed the names of the participants.

also using the tool of time as a form of assessment, might be considered a form of memoir writing promoted by Kristie Fleckenstein, a type of writing which she also regards as a prerequisite to social action. For one signature assignment, Fleckenstein encourages students to assemble a range of artifacts through a scrapbook journal to represent their “selves” and their values, what she calls “bricolage,” and which arguably encourages the “tying together” of various texts for which the contexts have been, and are, fluid. As Fleckenstein explains, the assignment “relies on cutting up the specious stability of memoirs into fragments and then reordering them into patterns,” ultimately encouraging students “to participate more fully in the material implications of a text for action in the world” (184, 155).

In the cases cited here, Patty, Ilana, and I have also created a form of bricolage, if unconsciously, during the “great time” of our lives beyond a semester. This bricolage includes texts and artifacts produced in school, outside of school, and tangentially related to school. They could be labeled both public and private, given the contexts. We have used time as an assessment tool in order to shape an analytical frame about the bricolage in our “tool kits,” linking these disparate materials not only to each other, but to larger theoretical concepts, or broader topics such as identity formation, romantic attachments, and coming of age. Like Fleckenstein’s project, the literacy inventory project draws attention to the interplay between the public and private and how a range of texts—including those designed for school or a limited audience—can represent or encourage “social action,” over the “great time.” So was the case most concretely, if also speculatively, with Janette Miller, who developed her goals to be a missionary over time and used writing to do so. These projects can help writers like us recognize the trajectory of our lives in relationship with larger societal trends, in relationship with our evolving and transforming selves, and also in conjunction, in tension, or even in harmony, with the lives of other people.

Conclusion

Keeping a diary has taught me the significance of time and the necessity of waiting when it comes to judging what is ordinary or extraordinary, as well as the complicated relationship between, texts, intertexts, and their contexts. Like Joanna Field, I have taught myself how to use a “time when” perspective in order to measure the phenomenon of non-linear time—when the past informs the present and/or history repeats itself, a phenomenon that might be illustrated by the “rainbow connection,” the evolving history of Dave’s life linked inadvertently to my ongoing literate practices as a diarist and memory keeper, literate practices which Dave, perhaps ironically, also inspired.

I offer one more example from the bricolage of texts that ties me to Dave’s literate practices as a writer: because Dave and I both wrote for the same school newspapers—when we were middle and high school students—I have a copy of an article that Dave wrote in eighth grade in the early 1980s for our middle school newspaper, *The Parcels Post*. It, too, is part of my longtime collection of literate artifacts. This article about the Detroit Lions lists the “good” and “bad” facts that supported and challenged hopes among Lions fans, that the team could make it to the Super Bowl that year. As he put it, “I like

the Lions, and it would be great to see them win the Super Bowl. But to be faked out by all of these unreal facts would be bad.” Dave was prescient in withholding optimism about this football team that has yet to have a significantly successful season, although it came close last year when making the playoffs after a 10-6 record. The initial audience for this artifact was to some extent ideal from a more recent and contemporary perspective, represented quintessentially by Clive Thompson’s cited earlier. The article, sponsored by a school journalism class, was written for a public audience, for peers and not “just” the teacher. Presumably, it was developed from the writer’s personal interests. Yet the artifact’s context and its audience over “great time” might be more interesting as part of a bricolage, considering that Dave now writes about the NFL for ESPN. The article could be compared also to the informal paper that Patty wrote for a school assignment in which she articulated her vocational goals, and might also be regarded most broadly as Dave’s rehearsal for future text production as a journalist. It furthermore might serve as a final example of how the great time as an assessment tool can draw attention to the linking together of otherwise disparate people, texts and themes, in surprising and profound ways. That the article might be a more significant artifact over the “great time” as part of a larger bricolage of literate activity, mine and Dave’s, suggests the limits of legitimately measuring texts that “affect the world,” in the short time span of a writing teacher’s metaphorical “chronotope,” one semester of school.

The “rainbow connection” that linked Dave’s experience with mine over the years has depended upon my literate activity as a diarist. The texts produced because of this literate activity, as well as the coinciding subjects of Dave’s public texts and my private ones, hopefully reinforce a point I make here and elsewhere: we lack language/theories to discuss texts that are not “immediately communicative.” Schoolwork, for instance, written for a teacher in the short run can have multiple functions later when re-read or even thought about in connection with other bodies of texts written for school and/or personal use. At the same time, texts produced during a semester can serve as mnemonics at the end of a semester when writers reflect on them to recognize progress they’ve made, patterns or ideas they’re attracted to, and errors they’ve made again and again, a method of reflection sanctioned by diarists when re-reading diary entries. Finally, while it’s great that new technologies are encouraging people young and old to write more and to reach new and authentic audiences, I hope we all can agree that all if not most texts can have efficacy and perform cultural work to various degrees, and therefore, we might develop better terms and vocabulary to reflect this agreement.



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Writing Yogis: Breathing Our Way to Mindfulness and Balance in Embodied Writing Pedagogy

"Your practice is your laboratory" —BKS Iyengar, Light on Life

Om, shanti, shanti, shanti. (Om, peace, peace, peace)

"To grow as a writer is to grow as a person" —Student

Christy I. Wenger

“All right, everyone knows what to do,” I say. “Be sure to sit up straight in your chair and plant your feet firmly on the ground, letting that connection give you a sense of stability and rootedness, like how you feel in tree pose.” Some students shift with these words, but many remain still, already practicing the attentiveness we’ve been cultivating over the past few weeks. They have learned that being relaxed and being attentive are not separate states but can be coupled for greater awareness, and they are using their bodies to achieve this harmony.

“Now, close your eyes softly,” I tell them, noting with pleasure that a handful of students had closed their eyes well before my verbal prompt. “Bring the lids together, touching but not squeezing them, so you feel the horizon of your sealed eyelids. With this action, let the pupils of your eyes begin to migrate slowly toward the back of your head.”³ I look out and see my twenty writing students with their eyes closed, waiting patiently for my next verbal cue to continue our classroom practice of mindful breathing, also known as *pranayama* in the tradition of Iyengar yoga.

“Scan your body for tension and release it. Allow your shoulders to drop away from your neck and observe your tongue. If it is pressed up onto the roof of your mouth, relax it down onto the floor of your mouth. Let the inner walls of your throat spread away from one another, so you feel the hallway of your throat becoming wider and wider. Tune your ears inward, and begin to listen to the sound of your own breath.” For a few moments, I pause to relax and listen to my inhalations and exhalations, collecting my thoughts and readying myself for my instruction and our imminent class discussion. With some effort, I let go of everything beyond the present moment of sitting in front of this class, my eyes closed, breathing with my students. As I hear our breaths mingle, I feel bonded to my students and peaceful, removed from the rush of morning meetings and lesson planning that began my day.

“Pay attention to your breath, the inhalations and the exhalations, without trying to change them,” I say after a long pause without opening my eyes. “Now, based on how you are feeling today, choose which breath is right for you. If you are tired, work on our three-part inhalation, sharply inhaling to your lower, middle, then upper ribs. Pause after each inhale and once you reach the top ribs, release your breath in a steady exhale. If you

³ The verbal prompts I’ve reproduced here are faithful to the same I used to guide my writing classes in meditative breathing. They represent an amalgamation of standard yoga exercises advocated in such books as *Yoga: A Gem for Women* (2002), those taught by my own yoga teacher and based on the traditions of Iyengar yoga.

are stressed and anxious, begin to deepen your exhalations, so they become longer than your inhalations. See your inhalations as “small” and your exhalations as “big.” You can try inhaling for three slow counts and exhaling for five slow counts, if this helps. If you are feeling fairly balanced already, simply concentrate on smoothing out your inhalations and exhalations, making them soft and quiet.”

“Allow your inhalations to give you energy and your exhalations to expel all the worries and stresses of your day. Find peace in your breath.” I look for peace in my own breath as I give students a few moments to find a similar calm in themselves before guiding us back to regular breathing. “Let your breathing return to normal, but keep it smooth and calm. Keeping your eyes closed, pay attention to your feelings of peace, awareness and steadiness. Resolve to carry these into the rest of your day. The peace you feel now is yours to return to at any point; you just have to remember it and work toward it once again. Similarly, if you have found focus and awareness now, you can find them again within.”

I end the breathing exercise by asking my students to invoke a goal they are ready to embody: “Now, take a minute to set an intention for yourself. Your intention could be grounded in the learning goals you have for our class or for all of your classes. It may even encompass your social and academic lives. What do you hope to accomplish today or this week as a writer and a learner?” I am silent as I set my own intention and let students set theirs.

“Now that you have set it, remember to revisit your intention later today and perhaps even later this week. Use it as a guide for your behavior and a checkpoint for yourself. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes.” I ask my students to freewrite for a few minutes as a way to continue our observation of quiet mindfulness and to begin directly applying it to our writing. In her freewrite, Megan questions the form of her developing essay on body image dilemmas for young, female athletes; she isn’t happy with the argument she has produced. She writes of her intention to listen to her “gut” regarding what changes she needs to make to her essay’s form instead of too easily allowing other readers to sway her choices, a problem she has documented before. Jimmy sets an intention to find a central focus to his wandering thoughts, to put them “inside one of these focused breaths,” and Adam promises himself the freedom to explore his ideas instead of just sticking with the first one he has. Adam notes that this is a social goal, too, since he tends to be stubborn in his writing and his daily living. After a moment to find our voices, we begin the day’s lesson with renewed energy and focus, plunging into our classroom work with mindfulness.

Harmonizing Breathing and Writing

I share a version of guided *pranayama*—the Sanskrit term for our meditative, focused breathing practice—I’ve used in my first-year writing classes in order to provoke new ideas about how we might engage our students’ writing bodies in our classes. Western conceptions of the body have tended toward devaluation and dismissal of our flesh. Jane Tompkins’ early call in “Me and My Shadow” to embrace the personal and embodied dimensions of our writing have since led to treatises on embodied pedagogy, including Jane Hindman’s “Making Writing Matter” and, recently, Kristie Fleckenstein’s *Embodied*

Literacies.⁴ While no two embodied writing pedagogies are exactly alike, they are all united by the common purpose of engaging the body in education by self-consciously attending to the somatics of learning and the physicality of writing.

As far back as the 80s, James Moffett drew our attention to the ways Eastern practices like meditation could sustain the development of somatic awareness where our own cultural practices fell short. My embodied experiences have also led me to situate embodied writing pedagogy not only between Western binaries but also among Eastern practices, specifically yoga. Yoga and embodied writing pedagogy harmonize well because both take the body as an epistemic origin so that embodiment becomes the means of knowing, feeling and making sense of the world and not just a physical enactment of social forces. In gesturing toward the East, I am echoing the calls within Judith Beth Cohen's and Geraldine DeLuca's recent articles in this journal, to actively seek out the connections between writing pedagogy and yoga practice.⁵ Cohen argues that the most obvious connection between the two is the focus on process and movement, and DeLuca inhabits this fluid process in her article as she documents the difficulty of accepting her limitations as a yoga student and discovers a parallelism in this humbling exercise that she can draw upon as a writing teacher. Through her struggling practice of headstand, *sirsasana* in Sanskrit, DeLuca learns the pedagogical value of "radical self-acceptance," or of accepting where she is in the present moment instead of trying to push away the parts of her reality she'd rather not face (28). In doing so, she challenges the commonplace that forward motion is the only way growth in our writing and teaching of writing can be measured.

My opening points to the ways I intend to use this essay to explore an integrated yoga-writing pedagogy that teaches students to embody the writing process with the breath. Like those before me, I am drawn to yoga (which includes the exercises of both postures like headstand as well as focused, meditative breathing), because it is, like composition, a praxis or an applied philosophy. Because it is a practice of doing, much like writing, yoga harmonizes well with the tenor of writing rhetorics, especially embodied writing pedagogy with its shared interest in bodily hermeneutics. From this convergence, I will argue that developing writers' "emotional flexibility" by teaching them to engage their feeling bodies through the practice of *pranayama* can not only enrich their felt experience of the writing process and the physical ease and comfort with which they write, but can also attune them to the materiality of knowledge making. Students who use *pranayama* as a regular composing ritual begin to appreciate the body as a site of learning and to understand writing as a somatic experience that occurs with and through the flesh. And students who self-consciously engage in these embodied writing practices develop, in turn, a greater metacognitive awareness of the writing process, reflected in their writings *about* writing. In other words, as students breathe their way into writing, they place new value on observing the writing process as it unfolds, documenting and analyzing the felt

⁴ Tompkins calls for us to give up the pretense of the disembodied and impersonal voice in our writing and accept the real body, "the human frailty of the speaker...his emotions, his history" that supports the writing persona as well as the "moment of intercourse with the reader—acknowledgement of the other person's presence, feelings, needs" (175).

⁵ Jeffery Davis' *The Journey from the Center to the Page* is also an interesting, popular source on this topic, advocating an infusion of yoga practice into the creative writing process.

experience of composing, which helps them become more generative and reflective writers. Particularly, students' increased mindfulness and flexibility results in developed focus and advanced coping mechanisms to deal with the negative emotions of the writing process.

To give sufficient space to students' vocalizations of their feeling bodies, as represented in the reflective, metacognitive writings they produced during our class, I will not focus primarily on students' final products, which is a task for another essay altogether; instead, in the pages that follow I am interested in students' attitudes and approaches toward the process of writing and how these change when they self-consciously embody their writing practices. Yoga teaches us that being on the path is what is important; the focus is always on the practice of a pose, a meditation or a breathing sequence and not simply the outcome. Even so, there will be organic moments where students' reflections will lead me to their papers if only to underscore their changing ideas about writing. As will become clear, students' own reflective writings serve as a testimony that a focus on process doesn't preclude an interest in the texts our students produce.

Emotional Flexibility

Daniel Goleman has served as perhaps the best-known popular theorist of emotions in education and the workplace through his theories of emotional intelligence, defined as "master[ly of] the emotional realm" (xiii). Goleman claims lineage from Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences, but faults Gardner for focusing on cognitive elements in his categories to the exclusion of feelings. Goleman describes emotional intelligence, calling it a subset of Gardner's personal intelligences, as an individual's awareness of her own and others' emotions toward the ends of self-control and the management of emotional encounters with others (xiii). While Goleman may have successfully revived talk of emotion in discourse about education,⁶ I'd like to argue here that his term is too problematic for inclusion in embodied writing pedagogy. Positioned within patriarchal capitalism, Goleman's term lacks attention to difference and diversity and is fixated on singular self-control of emotions, which are consequently feminized; he thereby constructs emotional intelligence as a site of masculinized social control where the gains lie in "creating 'smooth' and efficient worker relations" (Boler 61).

Instead, I suggest we trade talk of emotional intelligence for "emotional flexibility" since the former tends to denigrate emotional awareness to the level of a commodity which can be deployed for capitalist gains. Because it refuses lineage from such troubled terms and springs instead from a tradition of yogic mindfulness that parallels feminist theories of connected and situated knowing, emotional flexibility is more hopeful and

⁶ In approaching emotion through new ideas of flexibility inspired by yoga, I am hoping to address the problem Worsham articulates in "Going Postal" that we will continue to struggle with emotion's inclusion in our pedagogies until we refuse to allow it to remain "beyond our semantic availability" (240). A novel means of talking about emotion may give us the impetus to once more work through its effects in our classrooms and may provide us a constructive language to share with our students.

is self-conscious of embodied difference.⁷ Unlike emotional intelligence which works within a genetic range bestowed upon us by fate or divine will (Goleman xii), I understand emotional flexibility as a skill that can be cultivated, taught and learned—just as flexibility is taught and developed in the yoga studio. Indeed, by utilizing contemplative acts like *pranayama* as writing tools, my students grow to become yogis of their thoughts and emotions. That is, our classroom practice of mindful breathing helps my students develop emotional flexibility they can use to become more generative and reflective writers who are strong and resilient in the face of negative emotions and thoughtful and compassionate in their attempts to understand and utilize the meaning potential of feeling in their composing processes.

Our feelings, whether inspired by the ideas and memories about which we are writing, generated by the writing process itself, or produced by our body's responses and organic intelligence, energize our writing. I like how the founder of the yoga tradition that bears his name, B.K.S. Iyengar, puts it: "The very word, inspiration, meaning both to breathe in and to grasp a feeling in the form of an idea, expresses the way the brain is charged during inhalation" and reminds us of the body's role in meaning creation (*Light* 75). Iyengar accounts for what we might call felt knowledge after Sandra Perl's exploration of felt sense, or the "body's knowledge before it's articulated in words" (*Felt* 1). If Iyengar accounts for the ways invention is embodied, he does so by linking breath and emotion. According to yoga, focusing on the breath, *prana* or life force and energy, makes us attentive to our feelings (and thus able to reshape them) and stabilizes our mind by bringing it back into dialogue with our body, connecting us to the rest of the material world, in turn. In the simplest terms, *prana* situates us. And because *prana* is never still but rather flows between all material objects, this situatedness is dynamic. If situated knowledge, at its best, is attuned to the ways our social and material placement locates us in the world in particular ways, then *pranayama*, or the practice of focused breathing and awareness, represents how we both surrender ourselves to our environments and also how we exert ourselves on these environments as we filter them through our bodies, changing them and ourselves in turn.

Flexibility is the ability to bend without breaking; similarly, when applied to our emotions it is the ability to balance the weight of our emotional responses and the need to accommodate others'. Yogis can only stretch as far as they can maintain balance; stretching without minding our own positioning will cause us to fall over. Mindful breathing helps us become aware of this need for balance and can teach us how to attain it through our bodies and exercise it in our mental and physical activities. To find this balance, or to become emotionally flexible, we must learn to pair the movements of extension and expansion. Iyengar explains that extension requires attending to our inner space and expansion requires reaching out to others and the unknown (*Light* 33-34). The literal core of both acts is the center. Respiration is a prime example of the coupling of extension and expansion, learned at the level of our bodies. During inhalation, our lungs expand and we

⁷ Here, I am thinking of Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledges, or the material-discursive meanings we create from our experience. From a yogic point of view, the commonality of our materiality gives situated knowledge a relational orientation that establishes it as a method of connected knowing. Connected knowing, defined in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, values the historical, social and experiential and is characterized by its stance of openness, a continuous deferral of closure, and by the recognition of our need to join with others (Belenky et al, 113-23).

bring the outside world into our body, allowing it to affect us, often in ways we may not initially predict. As we take in a breath, we literally and metaphorically take in and process the new, or that which we label as “other” because it exists outside of ourselves. If “[i]nhalation engulfs the whole body, expanding from center to periphery” (*Light* 75), then extension occurs in turn: “During exhalation, the tide recedes, drawing back toward the center” (*Light* 75-76). For as we exhale, we move inward to our center, refocusing on the self, even as that self has been changed and shaped by the new breath circulating within our inner body until it too is released, and the process begins again.

Mindful breathing, or *pranayama*, becomes a practice and a tool for teaching emotional flexibility in the writing classroom because it asks writers to pay attention to how the body feels and what the body does in order to develop writing habits that apply the strength and flexibility of the yogi to the writing process. Simply put, flexibility is achieved when writers can practice both self/inner- and other/outer- directedness and balance the two moves in their composition and their composing processes. Here, the body is used as a hinge for new ways of *thinking* about writing and new ways of *doing* writing, or actually engaging in the process of composing. Instead of brains in vats, student writers in this paradigm are best understood as body-heart-minds who use their physical beings as writing laboratories, or as lived sites for the practice and research of the writing and meaning-making process, enacting the expectation invoked in my epigraph. Mindful breathing thereby becomes an integral practice for instructors who want to forward embodied writing pedagogies that seek to rejoin the meaning-making potential of both thinking and feeling as they come together in the physical writing body. Imagining and enacting writing as a situated and embodied process by attending to the breath specifically invites students to think about how the body is integral to the composing process and how the relationship between thought and emotion shapes the words and meanings writers create.

Working Toward Emotional Flexibility

Encouraging students to approach their writing processes as embodied through the practice of *pranayama*, known to target the subtle body of emotions in yoga, helps them attend to their physical and emotional responses to writing. Mindfulness starts, after all, with the practice of paying close attention, a skill we deem necessary for successful writing. While we already insist writers apply such attentiveness to their subject matter, using the skills of close reading and analysis, we might also include increased awareness of the feeling body as the writing subject and the material origin of meaning. One way to respect the body as a source of knowledge is to become more aware of and responsive to our feelings as writers—“gut”/ ideational, psychological and physiological.⁸ *Pranayama*

⁸ Along with the tradition of yoga, I refuse the closure of neatly delineating between cultural affect, psychological emotions or physiological feelings. This is not an uncommon view. Education theorist Meghan Boler (1999) echoes this tradition with her comprehensive definition of feeling as “in part sensational, or physiological: consisting of the actual feeling—increased heartbeat, adrenaline, etc.” and “also ‘cognitive’ or ‘conceptual’: shaped by our beliefs and perceptions. There is, as well, a powerful linguistic dimension to our emotional awareness, attributions of meanings, and interpretations” (xix).

asks writers to develop this corporeal orientation and trains them to attend to feeling via the breath.

Mindfulness of and concentration on the breathing process can teach students valuable, practical lessons they can immediately apply to their writing. In particular, students learn through breathing exercises that effective writing sessions begin with responsiveness to their current feelings, which may position them as more self- or other-centered at any given moment. Only they can target which breathing patterns will balance their emotional states, which is why the choice of breath documented at the start of this essay is so important. On an immediate and instrumental level, the choice of breath gives students a reason to become aware of their current feelings and energy levels and how these relate to their receptiveness to the writing process and their openness to learning and to others.

For instance, when the class I follow in my opening narration first attempted *pranayama* together, many students assumed that they were anxious simply *because* they were in class, so they used longer exhalations to calm themselves. They chose their breath based on what they anticipated feeling as opposed to listening to their bodies. As a result of using calming breaths when they were more tired than anxious, some of my students complained of sleepiness after our inaugural *pranayama* practice. As my student Johnny stated, "I found the breathing calming and relaxing, but almost too much to the point where I was lulled to sleep. I came out of the exercise feeling relaxed, but also with a strong urge to go to sleep." After a few more attempts, Johnny learned to "check in" with his feelings before choosing a breathing pattern. He noted in his blog that he stopped using long exhalations by default and began, instead, to analyze his feelings and scan his body. Johnny started working with the three-part inhalation to create energy and, therefore, engagement with his environment. After listening to his body, he found that was what he most needed. In navigating the consequences of his choice, Johnny learned two lessons: first, that he needs to pay attention to his body if he hopes to be an effective learner and writer; and second, that understanding and navigating his feelings is part of the work he must complete to this end. His breath became a means for this.

Johnny's experiences should also remind us that remaining open to new ideas is a task a peacefully attentive mind can handle with greater acuity than a foggy, sleepy one. Johnny's classmate, Ryan, reiterated this conclusion in his blog, stating that the three-part energetic breathing gives him "ideas for writing, or simply refreshes me after hours of writing. After [breathing] breaks, I feel energized and usually have better ideas more readily than before breaks." Ryan links these "better ideas" to "the positive energy. . . the deep inhalations did give me . . . Now I'm not going to lie to you, it wasn't a miracle cure. I didn't suddenly burst out full of energy, ready to conquer the world. But it did help." While not a "miracle" this "positive energy" was indeed a motivator. Ryan called up energy through his breath, channeling *prana* to give him the excitement, endurance and ideas he needed for writing.

In his comments, Ryan is likely referring to the effects of physiological coherence, which has been shown to result from contemplative practices like meditative breathing. Citing several researchers (Schoner & Kelso, 1988; Tiller, McCraty & Atkinson, 1996), Tobin Hart observes that "Correlates of physiological coherence include a regular heart rhythm, decreased sympathetic nervous system activation and increased parasympathetic

activity and increased heart-brain synchronization (the brain's alpha rhythms become more synchronized to the heartbeat)" (31). In other words, the effects of the physiological coherence brought on by *pranayama* include the calming energy of focus as opposed to the jittery energy of caffeine since attentive breathing harmonizes the body and drops levels of anxiety. As Ryan's and Johnny's testimony highlights, students often begin to appreciate *pranayama* from a practical orientation rather than a philosophical one; the energy that mindful breathing gives them is a quality of our practice they value immediately—once hooked by practicality, deeper meanings have time to take root.

For instance, as Johnny's corporeal awareness grew from practicing *pranayama*, he realized along with Ryan how breathing could not only help him monitor his states of feeling, but how it could also help him reshape those feelings. Johnny began to question the role of his entire body during our breathing exercises, and after a few weeks, he relates increasing success in using *pranayama* as a writing ritual to how receptive he is to his full being and not only his breath while performing it:

As we continued . . . my goal has been to channel the exercises into becoming relaxed and energized at the same time. While I tried to adhere to all the instructions of the breathing, with the first practice during class I found myself still coming out the exercise more sleepy than I had entered . . . With the last two practices I have felt myself become more and more relaxed and at the same time energized . . . I think I can attribute it to paying particular attention to my posture during the breaths . . . Before I think I would allow myself to unintentionally slouch, or relax in the chair, contributing to my continued sleepiness from the morning. While focusing extra on my posture, I think I have been able to gain more from the exercise . . . Writing after, I not only felt relaxed, I felt balanced.

My student's comment about posture is important for the ways it links the breath, body and mind together as they form his states of receptivity and rootedness. In slumped postures that allow the body to turn inward, Johnny found himself feeling so rooted he wanted to distance himself entirely from his environment through sleep. But when he concentrated on opening his body while focusing on breaths that continued this action, he felt energized and more connected to the community of our classroom and receptive to the learning process. These actions can explain why he feels a sense of emotional balance that he can take into the writing process after our practice.

As his teacher, I could see the effects of Johnny's growing mindfulness taking place in his blogs. Johnny's blogs at the beginning of the semester, those that correlate with a breathing practice that drew him further inward, were much more focused on pleasing himself as a writer. For instance, he states in these his intention of "getting out [his] true thoughts" as a writer and learning to have "no reservations about what I am writing." Later, as he attunes himself to his body and learns better emotional balance, Johnny's blogs contain more interest in audience and state his attempts to make his papers "easier to read for the reader," while still remaining interesting to him. While some of these growing concerns may be attributable to the workshops and peer reviews that were a part of our class, Johnny is also certainly embodying new attitudes about writing that grew as a result of composing with *pranayama*.

By the conclusion of our course, these lessons of balance and harmony permeated

not only students' practical applications of the breathing exercises but also the ways they thought about the writing process. In a final class reflection, Mark noted that prior to our class he was reticent to open up to others. He accounts for the new openness he felt at the conclusion of our course as an effect of his embodied awareness of the writing process developed through breathing exercises that engaged him in the acts of expansion toward others alongside extension toward his center.⁹ Mark notes, "I can sense that in some ways I've grown more open Yoga and breathing meditation have helped my focus Hopefully both have made me a better, more intelligent person." The growth my student accounts for is holistic; in learning to balance his writing body and the outside world, he has grown flexible enough to respect his own ideas as well as to remain open to his audience and environment. The flexibility learned through yoga thus "becomes more than a physical attribute; it is transformed into a living metaphor" (Cohen 15). Mark senses that this growth is a gain for his "intelligence" which would give greater authority to his writing as well as his character or *ethos*, making him a "better" person and therefore, we can conclude, a more believable and persuasive writer.

Most interesting in Mark's reflection is his simultaneous attention to his developed "focus" on the self and the writing task at hand, as well as his openness to others and foreign ideas. By noting both together, my student is actualizing the complementarity of extension and expansion. He goes on to state in the same blogged reflection, "The learning that has occurred so far this semester because of our practice [of yoga and writing] has driven me to not take ideas and experiences at face value." This observation testifies that he applied the lessons from our breathing practice to his writing. The strongest writing Mark produces, according to his blog, dialogues his "own ways of being" with new ways of thinking.

Mark embodied this discovery with his final class paper, which he chose to write about deviance on campus. In his first draft, he argued that while underage drinking was an activity in which many college students participated, students who abstained would not be automatically socially ostracized for their decision. He spoke from his own experience of occasionally abstaining at parties when he had a big test the following day (he drank at other times). In talking with classmates about his ideas, however, Mark encountered another student who passionately disagreed with him since she had indeed felt excluded because of her decision to abstain entirely from underage drinking. While Mark entered my class disdaining the practice of peer review because he felt his peers could in no way help him write a better draft, by the end of our class he sought out an interview with the student who disagreed and, without my prompting, used her as a source in his paper. He also asked me if the two of them could peer review with each other (I usually assigned pairs). Mark's final draft was a powerful mediation between his original arguments and

⁹ It may be worthwhile to note that while I talk with my students about centering and rooting in themselves as well as shifting outward toward others, I rarely use the terms extension and expansion in the classroom. While these terms are extremely helpful to me in my research because they allow me to work through the importance of these acts while drawing on the discourse of yoga, they become less helpful in demystifying writing for my students. I try to use as little of such jargon as possible with my students. For me, it is more important that they can engage in these acts and express them in simple, everyday language than it is that they can express themselves in the same discourses I use in my professional writing.

his classmates' dissenting opinions. In it, he reflected his classmates' opinion that he didn't encounter ostracization when abstaining because he was already accepted as a "drinker" in his social circles: "I discovered that the barrier . . . was due to the bond alcohol creates between drinkers." Led by his breath, Mark didn't simply learn the power of using experience as evidence in his academic writing; he understood the necessity of analyzing his own experiences and putting them in dialogue with others' in order to build the most socially and personally responsible knowledge, knowledge that respects multiple "ways of being." As this example illuminates, these acts of emotional flexibility are metacognitive acts, acts of thinking about thinking, about writing, and about being in the world.

Mark's classmate, Megan learned a similar lesson though her integrated practice of *pranayama* and writing. Unlike Mark, Megan worried almost exclusively about her imagined audience. In early blogs, Megan wrote that it would be a sign of growth if she could begin to incorporate her own experiences and ideas in her writing and worry less about pleasing others and accommodating anticipated criticisms from her audience. After a semester of using *pranayama* to motivate and sustain her writing and increase her mindfulness, Megan did learn to become more responsive to her own concerns as a writer, according to her final, blogged reflection on her changed attitudes toward the writing process:

This semester, my views on what it means to grow as a writer have drastically changed. Prior to [our class], writing was about pleasing an audience. Now, I have been searching more for what I care about and WANT to write about. I've also been focusing a lot more on my writing for exactly what it is. There's less comparison to the writing of those authors we read in class, and more comparison between my old writing style and new style. I think this is perhaps my greatest realization, because to grow as a writer means not to grow in the world as a writer, but to improve upon oneself and climb your own ladder...I think that emotionally, I've got a lot more relaxed about writing through breathing, and that is growth.

Indeed, Megan's mid-semester writing marked a transition point for her as she found a link between the breaths she used to give her calm and confidence for her composing process and the voices she incorporated within her writing. For a mid-semester revision assignment, she wrote a triple-voiced narrative instead of a traditional, claim-driven argument because she felt it better represented her ideas, even if it might be shocking to her audience—including me, her teacher. The essay that resulted was an extremely powerful one that narrated the extreme pressure female athletes face to stay thin and yet remain strong, a paradox my student explored with an academic researcher's voice and intermittently spoke back to with two additional voices: her own personal voice, which examined the changing thought process and confusions of a growing teenager, and a voice of popular culture as depicted by singer Rhianna's song, "Question Existing." The song both asks and genders the question of what it means to be judged for performance and image and champions living for oneself. The paper Megan produced thus embodied for her a lesson of claiming an authoritative voice so that I'd argue that while my student might not be able to write a multi-voiced narrative in her biology class, what she will have learned about rhetorical flexibility and the link between form and content will transfer to other classes, making her writing stronger there as well.

Every new language gives us new ways of thinking, and yoga does this for my students who are able to revisit and “resee” the writing process as embodied by framing it within the terms of their bodies, emotions, movements and breaths. But what they gain isn’t simply a new language, and what we gain as teachers isn’t simply some Sanskrit to include in our professional writing. Instead, these acts help us to talk with students in new ways about what it means to develop a writing practice, how they might cultivate awareness of themselves as writers and meaning-makers, and what the physical process of composing entails. That is, the embodied practice of *pranayama* urges students to plan generative, body-conscious methods of approaching writing and learning tasks. It gives them a method of monitoring themselves as they move through their writing. It provides a supportive system of evaluation that interests them more in intrinsic growth than extrinsic success, particularly in the form of grades. This shouldn’t be surprising since *pranayama* is a means of metacognition itself. It engages writers in learning to develop a conscious relationship to cognitive and emotional states that allows them to reflect on and to redirect their patterns of thought and feeling.

Breathing In Focus, Breathing Out Negative Emotions

Breathing not only teaches us balance by unifying the energies between self and the world, but also helps us to concentrate on the present moment and to be attentive to our embodied needs in it. Meditation, whether on the breath, an intention or a mantra, has long been known to increase our powers of focus and concentration. As Iyengar states, “[w]atching the flow of the breath also teaches stability of consciousness, which leads to concentration...The power of concentration allows you to invest your new energy judiciously” (72). By paying attention to our breath, my students learn to focus the energy of the physical and mental body, which can result in more productive writing sessions wherein they feel more able to cope with the distractions that surround them. The greater their powers of attention, the more likely they will be motivated to continue writing, and the less likely they will be blocked by stress or anxiety.

Because students do not always arrive on time to class, and because we start with our breathing exercises, we’ve had to learn as a class how to deal productively with the interruptions not only caused by other loud classes heard through the thin walls of our room, but also by classmates entering the room after we’ve started. When we first started our breathing exercises, my students would open their eyes to see who had entered; later in the semester the majority remained focused on their breath, a demonstrable effect of their learned attentiveness. Not responding to the distraction is an act of agency and of choice that many students never considered prior to the class. Our age of multitasking and my students’ almost absolute reliance on technology hides the choice. The cellphone call may go unanswered and the blinking Facebook message ignored. Sam noted in her blog that before our class, she never thought about the importance of focus during writing, but that now she understands it and attributes her success to our practice of *pranayama*: “I would have never guessed that yoga...could help a person focus as much as it has for me. My new writing habits are definitely more productive than the ones in the past, like watching TV and Facebooking.” Part of what students are learning during these classroom moments is the difference between beholding what happens around us (noting a late classmate, letting

it go) and attaching to these events (opening our eyes to observe the classmate) (Hart 30; 32).

Students can apply these lessons to their own bodies as equally as to other bodies and their environments. Because breathing rejoins our body and mind and urges them to work together for a common purpose, it is a helpful practice for writers who find their own bodies sources of distraction when attempting to focus—a common problem. One of my students, Steven, said this:

Through the last few weeks, I have been able to concentrate in English a lot more because of the breathing exercises. At first, I had a lot of trouble concentrating. My nose always itched, or I had to cough . . . But after the first few times I learned to tune this out and concentrate . . . I am amazed at the changes . . . I now see writing as a lot more physical and I can really jump right into it with the right combination of breathing exercises and habits. I always look forward to using these methods while I write papers.

Deciding what distractions are enabling versus those that are disabling is a strategy students tell me they often use to stay focused on their writing when working in loud dorms or heavily-populated libraries on campus. Even the library, where many of my students go to escape from the noise, is distracting for many. Some of my students were worried about peer judgment if they used *pranayama* in these public spaces: “I didn’t like doing [breathing exercises] in the library at first, where I write most of my papers, because there are a lot of people there. I don’t like closing my eyes, thinking about my inhalations, when others are around.” The usefulness of the breathing exercises, however, tended to win out over the fear of peer judgment: “I don’t mind anymore, I just do it; I figure no one cares if I close my eyes for a minute. I mean there are people taking naps in the library, so really a breathing exercise isn’t that weird or out of the ordinary there.” The sheer number of students who reported performing *pranayama* in the library and other public spaces on campus testified to me just how much they valued the practice. *Pranayama* also encouraged students to re-evaluate the moments of the writing process when they weren’t breathing. Another of my students, Cindy, noted in a blog entry that she took to listening to classical music on her iPod as a way of maintaining her mindful and peaceful state after completing breathing exercises. Cindy states that she “learned how important it is to develop and maintain focus this semester and to be aware when focus is lost. I didn’t do this before.” As a result, Cindy had come to my class with much frustration over writing, which she was able to dispel through her breath.

Pranayama teaches writers that where the breath is, the heart will be as well. Cindy’s response illuminates how emotional stress pulls the body and mind in separate directions. These moments of appreciating the breath teach students that it is necessary to rejoin the body and mind. Iyengar tells us that “[t]he breath, working in the sheath of the physical body, serves as a bridge between body and mind” (*Light* 73). Developing skills to channel the breath in hopes that the mind will follow can help writers cultivate successful strategies for navigating the demands of the writing process, demands that are often emotional and anxiety-producing for our students (and ourselves). Breathing mindfully can create positive feelings and cultivate a quieted and calmed consciousness, ready to create and problem-solve. We know this instinctively as we unconsciously take deep breaths before

walking on stage, and we are even culturally reminded of the ways conscious breathing promotes focus when a friend encourages us to “just breathe” when we are in the midst of a trying situation, wondering what course of action to take.

Learning how to use the breath to refocus their emotional states is important for students who rush from one class to another, hardly giving thought to the ways their performance in one will impact their successful learning in other. For instance, leftover anxiety from a test taken in the class before mine can chip away at my students’ concentration, leaving them to fret more over the correctness of their answers on that test than to learn a new reading or writing strategy during our time together. One of my students noted that these stressors, “like [his] math test . . . fall away when we breathe at the start of class,” allowing him to apply a fresh mind and calmed emotional state to our classroom work. “After each exercise, it’s like all my concerns for other classes evaporated for a while, and I could focus solely on English class. I feel not totally, but somewhat relaxed. It’s a good start.”

My student might be alluding to the ways *pranayama* helps develop mindsets that encourage awareness and acknowledgment of feeling in ways that are enabling rather than disabling. This is an applied skill of emotional flexibility. These “motivational mindsets” contain “scripts for dealing with competence-related setbacks” and “beliefs about the malleability of abilities as well as strategies and scripts for how to cope with inevitable setbacks associated with learning new and challenging things” (Roeser and Peck 129). Feeling itself is not unwanted in the writing process, since with feeling comes motivation. What *is* disabling is when negative emotions like stress and anxiety overwhelm the writer. Because emotional flexibility centers on balancing inner and outer pulls, it can help writers “avoid reactive attachment [to feelings and thoughts]...allow[ing] us to observe the contents of our consciousness rather than simply being absorbed by them” (Hart “Interiority” 33). In the end, overriding reactions to feelings doesn’t so much invalidate their importance as it allows students to better understand them, leading to emotional maturity. “For example, instead of just seething with anger, the contemplative mind may allow a little more space between the anger [or other emotion] and us. We might both have our anger and also notice it—‘Look at me being angry, what’s that about?’—rather than simply being lost in the anger. To notice, accept, embrace and thereby transform our anger may have significant impact on behavior” (Hart 33).

Intimate awareness of our feelings is therefore a key step in developing an emotional flexibility that will allow writers to develop coping strategies and motivational mindsets that help them overcome negativity. Highlighting how this process works by attending to the breath, one of my students shared the following story on his blog:

Today I was feeling really down on myself and felt as though I needed some type of pep talk. After going through the breathing routine . . . I actually was able to re-energize myself. Afterwards, the work that I had done was so rewarding that I feel motivated to continue writing. Sometimes if I get myself in a slump I need to remember that just one exercise can help me feel better, help me to be able to focus on homework, and to make me want to continue. This is what’s so good about the yoga I do, it has a day to day use . . . [making me] emotional[ly] and mentally flexible.

This student finds a source of resilience and “emotional and mental” flexibility through

pranayama. Meditation and yoga has indeed been shown to “promote the construction of attributions to malleable source of difficulty and adaptive source of coping, particularly when confronting setbacks” (Roeser and Peck 129). It is this adaptive coping my student alludes to when he uses breathing as a soothing and calming exercise, much like a private pep talk. As in the discussion of anger above, this student is able to step back from his depressed mood which seemingly leaves him devaluing his abilities as a writer to ask, “What’s up with that?” The conscious channeling of positive energy using his breath is an alternative to seeking out assurance from another, an act that may be stilled by embarrassment. This work to transform his mood increases his motivation so that my student feels emotionally-rewarded by the writing that follows.

These examples from our breathing practice show how yoga helps writers displace negative emotions and embrace self-compassion, which is a quality upon which the contemplative arts are built. In their article on the usefulness of contemplative pedagogy, Roeser and Peck argue that teaching students to exercise self-compassion helps them “take a kind, non-judgmental, and understanding attitude toward [themselves] in instances of pain or difficulty rather than being self-critical” (Roeser and Peck 129). Given that so many of my students describe the writing process as painful and emotionally dissonant, such an attitude is essential in our composition classrooms. My students’ testimonies embody the additional benefits of self-compassion for writers including greater feelings of confidence and competence and an increased, intrinsic desire for growth and improvement. Indeed, college students who exhibit self-compassion are found by Roeser and Peck to focus more on their learning and improvement as opposed to their performance in comparison to others. Roeser and Peck discuss how students who have developed self-compassion are more likely to approach setbacks with a positive mindset and to correlate academic failures less with their sense of self-worth. Self-compassion is specifically correlated to students’ understanding of moment-to-moment fluctuations in perception, taught by breathing exercises, and their increasing ability to become aware of habitual responses in order to redirect them, creating “a calm and clear mental context from which to act” (Roeser and Peck 130).

It is this calm and clear context my students describe:

I definitely used breathing exercises to help calm myself down. I get so stressed and generally I use crying as a release for the stress but in this case, it was breathing exercises that helped me to calm down and get my focus back when I got too overwhelmed. I think it worked...only one instance of tears!

And,

I used the breathing exercises to stay calm when things were not coming together as quickly as I planned. I knew that I was on the home stretch of finishing my portfolio so when I went to the library to finish up little things and compile it in the folder I thought it was only going to take me two hours, but it ended up taking me six. I began to get frustrated knowing that I had other stuff I wanted to get done too, but instead of freaking out and getting frustrated like I did in the past I took deep breaths in and tried to stay calm.

Breathing gives my students the ability to override their habitual and negative responses to feelings of stress and anxiety and helps them redirect the energy of their feelings in more positive ways.

Attending to the energy of the breath attunes us to the flow of our emotional states because it requires us to be in the present moment and to judge ourselves less harshly as a result. In the end, increased compassion and mindfulness results in growth. According to another student:

Using the breathing techniques, I think that emotionally, I got a lot more relaxed about writing, and that is growth. To be able to accept something as imperfect because it doesn't have to be perfect yet is growth. To be able to know that you can improve in the future, and to be able to find your own flaws and then smooth them over is growth Yoga helps to allow me to sit and concentrate and not need to constantly move. It allows me to sit. And write. And put my body into the paper. I can use all my senses to their fullest, and I can use myself and my ideas and my inclinations to truly write a good paper, one that shows my growth.

Acts of emotional flexibility are directly applicable to the writing process and can be learned through the practice of *pranayama*. Appreciating the breath “as it is” while learning to direct its energies toward where we want it to be is pragmatic in the writing classroom, in particular, because it teaches students that they must start where they are. Students who accept the duality of extension and expansion, learned first at the level of their bodies by means of their breath, more easily accept change and are therefore more likely to see writing *as* a process and complete multiple, global revisions. Students who can better cope with ambiguity are more likely to respond productively to their classmates’ opposing viewpoints and may be more open to multiple perspectives in other writings, more accepting of the situatedness of knowledge, and less likely to ignore such complexities in their own writing. Students who are able to use coping strategies with the negative emotions called up by writing will not only spend more time and energy on their writing, but will also take more risks in their writing, leading to increased learning. On the page, the paired actions of extension and expansion represent a fusion of the critical and the creative, which characterizes the most socially viable and personally fulfilling kinds of writing our students—and we—can produce.



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Reflections on Accidental Testimonies and Spectacular Witnesses

Lavinia Hirsu

Imagine a writing class where most students have never encountered a refugee. During a discussion on human rights, one of the students starts talking about her traumatizing refugee-camp experience. Not having anticipated or called for this testimony, the teacher and the student's peers fixate their eyes on the speaker. Dead silence falls over the classroom, eyes stare at the student, the student is now looking down. How can we break this silence? How can we take our eyes away from the student? How will we remember this classroom event? Are we going to recall the story or the face of the person who spoke? Are we going to imagine the scene of her trauma or are we stuck in the visual space of the classroom?¹⁰

These are questions that we have to answer if we want to be prepared to address *accidental testimonies* in the classroom. Accidental testimonies, as the one in the scenario above, are testimonies that tear apart the dynamics of a class and stick to our memories as emblematic tableaux that beg to be remembered for their rhetorical force and visual impact on the audience. These events transform the classroom into a space of witnessing. The speaker, who has lived trauma firsthand, discloses her experiences in front of an audience, her peers, who unexpectedly become second-hand witnesses of that traumatic account.

I call these types of testimonies *accidental* not to downplay the value of the accounts themselves but to highlight their volatile nature and disruptive effect on the audience. In courses where traumatic testimonies constitute the core subject of analysis (e.g., courses where students analyze photographs of the Holocaust or recorded interviews with trauma survivors), participants are aware that a certain degree of response-ability is expected from them. Accidental testimonies, however, are unpredictable and oftentimes leave us speechless. They challenge us to respond in the moment although we may feel unprepared to do so.

Scholars in trauma studies, such as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Cathy Caruth, Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer have suggested that what brings us to silence is the spectacular (and spectral) dimension of trauma itself. Because trauma demands that we witness the unimaginable, we find ourselves in the impossibility of finding the right thing to say. In the case of accidental testimonies, we also feel unprepared to respond because of the spectacular presence of the testifier, because of her immediate presence in our field of vision. Turning to the visual dimension of witnessing and to notions of iconicity, I propose that *seeing* a student-peer suddenly turn into a testifier (i.e., an iconic figure of a traumatic account) adds an important dimension to the process of witnessing. The immediate visual impact of the one who testifies conditions how teachers and students can bear witness to traumatic accounts. If we turn to the opening vignette, the peer-refugee telling about her story may easily become the exemplary figure of the refugee experience. The sudden transformation of the student into a testifier turns her into a memorable figure, an unforgettable face that may take precedence over the account itself.

¹⁰ Editors' note: After reading this essay, please read "History 101" in "Connecting," this issue.

Susan Sontag confirms that the immediacy and impact of the other's image are more pressing on the memory than the shared narrative. In "Looking at War: Photography's View of Devastation and Death," Sontag argues that the ways in which we remember and memorialize narratives of trauma nowadays has become a primarily visual experience: "To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture" (94). We have a better visual memory than a narrative one; we pay more attention to images of trauma rather than their socio-historical contexts. Consequently, when we witness an accidental testimony, we may be more invested in the process of looking at the person who testifies rather than in listening to the depths of her narrative.

While Sontag finds this investment in the visual problematic because images can detract us from fully attending to trauma, scholars such as Wendy Hesford and David Bathrick agree that the visual can be a productive pedagogical site. Bathrick notes that we cannot stop our students from staring, nor can we impose on them a form of rhetorical criticism that would simply deny what their eyes have seen (294). A more beneficial approach would be to develop strategies that help students negotiate others' traumatic accounts by acknowledging and working with, not against, the images they see. In the case of accidental testimonies, if we want our students to be able to break their silence, we need to identify strategies that would allow them to pay attention to how they look at the peers who share their extraordinary stories. As teachers, we cannot avoid the spectacle of a testimony, we cannot dismantle the image of a testifier; however, we can help our students re-adjust their lenses and re-view the relationships with their peers in new and complex ways.

In this article, I start by presenting the main challenges that accidental testimonies pose for the classroom. To address these challenges, I argue, we need to develop pedagogical strategies that would help our students *see* the possibilities and constraints of the witnessing process. With this goal in mind, in the second part of the article, I present three strategies—*freeze-frames*, *refiguration*, and *the testimony of absence*—which give teachers and students new ways of engaging with accidental testimonies. I illustrate each strategy with an example from my own teaching experience. Finally, I hope that my reflections will serve as an invitation for other teachers and scholars to contribute their own strategies on how to deal with these complicated classroom events.

Accidental Testimonies—Challenges and Impasses

In this section, I argue that students who are suddenly exposed to peers' accounts of trauma have to confront a crisis of language, a paralyzing silence, the temptation of voyeurism, and the spectacular presence of the testifier.

A crisis of language

Scholars who examine the burden of witnessing generally point to the impossibility of adequately responding to trauma because this phenomenon affects an audience at multiple levels. Confronted with the spectral dimension of traumatic events, second-hand witnesses face a crisis of language, not knowing what to say or how to negotiate what they

hear or read (Bernard-Donals and Glejzer vii-x; Doxtader 278). The inability to respond to a traumatic moment can turn into different forms of ir-response-ability. Incapable of an appropriate answer, some witnesses may freeze in what Wendy Hesford has called “a crisis of reference” and “a crisis of witnessing” (“Documenting Violations” 95). Others may turn their lack of language into “a crisis in cynicism” (Alsup 78). Janet Alsup remarks that in her classroom students exposed to traumatic accounts went through “a type of secondary trauma, a sort of crisis resulting from student experience with the class and its subject” (78). Students’ apparently “cynical” attitudes toward the memory of pain and oppression were in fact the result of a struggle with meaning making.

Silence

A crisis of language is oftentimes accompanied by profound silence. A traumatic narrative awes, overwhelms, and paralyzes. Most of the time, it feels wrong to respond to a person who has just confessed pain. Many of us have probably experienced the profound silence following an accidental testimony. In fact, in the anticipation of such a response, some teachers assign moments of silence as a way to channel students’ first reactions and to give them time and space for introspection (Cooks).

To listen to the speaker is above all, as Marguerite Helmers argues, a moral call: “we must listen to the language and the silences of trauma, experience, and the crises of the wound” (169). Silence buys time for meditation, critical thinking, and exposure to unimaginable experiences. In Barbara Schapiro’s words, “The silence forces us to acknowledge all the separate, inner, private thought processes occurring within both students and teacher” (430). Silence is not a passive process because it has its own internal language and represents a critical form of engagement (Ratcliffe 84-93, Glenn 156). For this reason, silence must be granted its classroom space because it is a vital, productive moment when students are able to discover the distance between them and the testifier.

If we are to turn accidental testimonies into teachable moments, then we should wonder to what extent silence is a satisfying response. Can we rest assured that our students’ silence is an indicator of a reflexive process? Taking into account the complex and heavy burden of trauma, a lack of language could be in fact a sign of confusion on the part of some students who may not know how to negotiate moments of disclosure. A quiet classroom could obscure misunderstandings that students feel uncertain about voicing. We may never know whether our students are able to adopt witness-positions if we do not open up opportunities to make the process of witnessing explicit.

Even if we do not intervene in how students experience traumatic testimonies, silence can prove to be a temporary and insufficient response. In Shoshana Felman’s course on the stories of Holocaust survivors, her students left the classroom in silence but continued to be haunted by their inability to verbalize an adequate response. They called the teacher at home, contacted her outside the classroom, and pursued her under an imperative to talk about what they had experienced. Felman recognized that she had to go back to the classroom and break the silence. She realized that modeling a response through language would help her students enact the kind of witness-position that was called on by the testimonies presented.

The two responses to trauma that I have mentioned above, the crisis in language and silence, represent modes of engagement with the traumatic account itself. Because trauma, by its nature, resists immediate translation into language, students have difficulties making sense of what they hear through words. However, it is important to note that a testimony doesn't only call on the listeners to understand what they hear. Oftentimes, what makes witnessing even more difficult is the negotiation process between what we *see* and what we *hear*. Because we are confronted with the spectacular presence of a first-hand witness who has seen and lived unimaginable things, we are tempted to focus our attention on that face.

Voyeurism

In courses where trauma is presented through visual means (e.g., documentaries or photographs), scenes of pain and horror always risk to trigger some form of voyeuristic response. Transfixed, the second-hand witness dwells in what she sees. Wendy Hesford ("Documenting Violations"), Wendy Wolters, Diana George and Diane Shoos have already warned us against the deadening effects of voyeurism, arguing that such a response to trauma is a reductive way of giving meaning to what cannot be fully explained. Faced with a spectacle,

students are trapped in the immediate moment without the resources necessary to disentangle themselves from that moment and sift out the invisible forces at work. The visible constitutes the only thing with value because the memory of what is *not* present, the memory that would give weight and importance to what is absent, has disappeared. (Fleckenstein 56)

Voyeurism allows the viewer to feel empowered in her position of observer, to maintain control by taking pleasure in the process of seeing (George and Shoos 590). At the same time, voyeurism grants the viewer only a compensatory power because trauma is a profoundly disarming experience. A voyeur finds pleasure in the act of looking just as a way to substitute for her struggle with meaning making.

To say that voyeurism is simply a bad way of looking, though, misses the more complex nature of how we engage with what we cannot fully comprehend. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's work with images and post-memory, David Bathrick notes that the problem with voyeurism doesn't rest with the fact that we look passively at trauma. At the core of voyeurism, we encounter a problem of representation. Our students are too often tempted to believe that images of terror have a truth-value and that visual depictions capture the true essence of what others experienced. Because of this propensity, Bathrick encourages teachers to work with students *through* iconic images of trauma. He recognizes that we cannot completely demystify traumatic images of others because visual representations impact us against all our critical intentions. Instead of preventing students from staring, "as teachers in the classroom, we must contend with these images as part of the pedagogical process of disfiguring and imagining" (296). In other words, teachers may not be able to de-fetishize students' viewing practices, but they can try to help position these iconic images in a larger "collective pictorial archive" (294). We can

help students situate their visceral responses at the confluence between the historical context of these images and students' own visual habits (Fleckenstein 98).

Spectacular testifiers

Undoubtedly, in the case of accidental testimonies the danger of voyeurism remains. When a student interrupts a class discussion to confess a painful memory, we do not have any pictures of her trauma, we cannot access any photographs of the things she has seen, and we cannot imagine what it means to move from the scene of lived experience to the classroom. In lieu of a photograph or a film, we may be tempted to stare at the performance of the other; we may be taking her face as the iconic representation of the shared traumatic account. For lack of a better visual frame, listeners may be tempted to dwell in the image of the other as the primary indicator of trauma. This kind of visual engagement should be our starting point in discussing the possibilities of bearing witness.

In *Spectacular Rhetorics*, Wendy Hesford reminds us that the spectacle needs to be understood at two different levels: the spectacle as entertainment and the spectacle as a visual field that the eye cannot simply avoid, forget, or criticize without having been under its transfixing power (8). The first definition of the term, the spectacle-as-entertainment, invites the practice of voyeurism whereby one looks passively, in awe or amusement.

However, voyeurism closes down too easily our discussions about the impact of the visual dimension of witnessing. For this reason, I find Hesford's second definition of the spectacle-as-an-unavoidable-field-of-vision more productive. Besides voyeurism, I want to suggest that an accidental testimony can also engender processes of visual reverence and re-discovery that complicate the process of witnessing. Faced with a *spectacular* testimony, we tend to immerse and dwell in the presence of the speaker not in a passive mode, but actively *seeing* the person in front of us with different eyes. When students listen to trauma, they have to make a shift from seeing their peer as a student to looking at that very same face as a trauma-sufferer. The shift, as I will demonstrate in the following sections through examples from my own experience, doesn't happen immediately or without difficulty.

The attitude of reverence for the speaker implies a paradox: the more a testifier speaks, the more pious the listeners become; at the same time, the more a testifier speaks, the less recognizable she becomes. When we find out unforeseen aspects about our peers, we tend to re-adjust our attitudes, and as we listen to their stories, we look with pleasure or interest to better understand the person in front of us. In other words, when we are fascinated by the presence of a speaker, it is not because we are consuming the other, in bell hooks' terms, but because we make an effort to re-imagine that person in light of the narrative shared. We realize that the individual we thought we knew can no longer fit the portrait that we imagined, and this realization demands that we re-focus our lenses and revise our attitudes toward that person. For this reason, visual reverence is different from voyeurism because it is a productive process of discovery, rather than passive indulgence in the other's presence.

Ultimately, what I want to suggest is that the spectularity of a testifier can add to the spectularity of the testimony. Being in the presence of a witness can render the experience of trauma more real and authentic. As Sue Vice and Gwyneth Bodger show, the presence of a trauma-survivor in the classroom does not "universalize" students'

perceptions of trauma (20). To the contrary, looking the speaker in the eyes and seeing trauma on her face helps students better grasp the individual dimensions of suffering. Moreover, the authors suggest, we couldn't fully understand how students take in accounts of trauma without acknowledging the visual impact of the trauma-survivor. Witnessing may, indeed, leave us speechless, but it never leaves us sightless. While second-hand witnesses may never have access to the scene of trauma, they do have to confront, make sense, and remember the testifier's presence in their visual field. To meet this imperative, in the rest of this article I propose pedagogical strategies that could help teachers and students alike pursue the following goals: to keep under scrutiny our immediate visual and verbal responses, to understand the limitations of what we can *see* in the process of witnessing, and to explore ways of channeling our visual attention reflectively and critically.

The Need for Pedagogy

Before I discuss the possible strategies to which we can turn in the case of accidental testimonies, allow me to explain why I find such an endeavor necessary in the first place. According to lore, classroom disruptions can serve pedagogical aims. But an accidental testimony oftentimes puts us in situations where we are not prepared to turn confession into a teachable moment, either because teachers aren't prepared to respond or, more important, because we want to protect the integrity of the person who testifies. But if we are to hold true to the idea that the classroom is an interventionist space, and an accidental testimony is, by definition, an intervention in our learning process, then we should be able to turn testimony from a classroom accident into a teaching subject by helping students understand the possibilities for formulating ethical responses.

Some may argue that, from the beginning, my impetus to identify and practice potential ethical responses to traumatic experiences is misguided. My drive to articulate a fuller pedagogy of bearing witness may be regarded as part of a pedagogy of control, of supervising the multiple possibilities of response and non-response. Such pedagogy may imply that teachers need to tame the accidental nature of certain classroom events. As we know from practice, though, the beauty of teaching relies on a certain degree of unpredictability. The dynamic nature of learning depends on unruly moments, which make the classroom not only the teachers' domain, but the students' territory as well (Skorczewski 12). As Lee Shulman states, interruptions in the classroom are not negative indicators of teaching and learning; on the contrary, "active performance must be balanced with strategic and intentional cessation of performance" (57). From this perspective, accidental testimonies could be considered an integral component of the natural dynamics among individuals and should be left as such, untroubled by our pedagogical agendas.

However, bearing witness is a process that implicitly engages and calls for a response—be it a question, a comment, or a moment of silence. Once an accidental testimony happens in the classroom, we cannot afford to ignore it and move along. In their silence, our students have already formulated their own responses. I do not believe that we can or should control the classroom so strictly, but our mission as educators is to help students see the affordances and limits of their reactions. For this reason, we have the obligation to address questions such as: Will our students leave the classroom with a rich understanding

of what they have witnessed? Will they freeze in that moment of spectacular tension, provoked by the unexpected transformation of their peer into trauma-sufferer? Is students' silence a reflective process or a moment of paralysis? My goal in this article is to suggest that teachers need to bring accidental testimonies under discussion in order to raise students' awareness about the multiple dimensions and consequences of their responses. If we trouble students' silence, it is not because we want to impose *appropriate* answers, but because we want students to think about the implications of their attitudes and responses.

Freeze-frames

In 2005 I was teaching an introductory composition course at a large Midwestern university. Toward the end of the semester, I assigned my students a project that asked them to research and analyze a series of artifacts of their choice that built on similar persuasive strategies on the same topic. To write the final project, students had to present orally their preliminary findings in order to discover what could have been possible counterarguments to their analyses. Based on their peers' feedback, in the final essays the students had to incorporate and account for the counterarguments brought up during class discussions.

In the context of that final unit, I vividly recall Tim's presentation, neither for the strength of his argument, nor for the eloquence of his words, but for the scene that he created in the classroom when he delivered his work. His focus was on war rhetoric, more specifically on the ways in which the army recruits young people to join their forces. When Tim began researching the topic, I did not know that he actually had direct experience with the army, and that he had been deployed for a couple of months in the Iraq war. His presentation sounded very promising and challenging, yet one of his classmates was unconvinced that the material was given proper analysis. I cannot remember the specific issue that the peer brought up, but I can clearly picture Tim's angry face with eyes wide open, punctuating every word: "That's a stupid comment. You don't know what it means to be in the war. I've been in the war and I know what it's like." Dead silence fell over the classroom, Tim standing tall, next to the projector. I was uncertain about my next move at the back of the class in a corner.

For a few good seconds I was paralyzed, looking at the presenter—a tense body of memories untold, a witness dismayed at his audience. I was waiting for him to say more, to fill in the gaps between him and the rest of the class, to tell us how the war hurt. The other classmates were also absorbing his presence. At the same time, I was thinking of the student who had asked the question and whose comment had just been catalogued as "stupid." Judging by his surprised face, I could guess that Tim's peer had no intention to hurt or show ignorance of Tim's experience. All I could do in that moment was to break the silence by making the following remark: "This is not an appropriate way to have an academic argument. I would like to talk about this with you two after class. Now . . . does anyone else have any other thoughts or comments regarding this project?"

According to the definition that I have provided at the beginning of this article, accidental testimonies are disruptions—*freeze-frames*—that reorient students' attention toward the speaker and stop the classroom flow. The first-hand witness, whose narrative captures a lived experience, assumes the position of a subject of trauma and oftentimes

renounces her subjectivity as classroom peer. To use Kenneth Burke's pentad, the first-hand witness situates herself *in the act* (i.e., the testimony) rather than *the scene* of witnessing (i.e., the classroom). This shift was clearly visible in Tim's physical transformations (tensed body, angry face, wide-open eyes), and in his aggressive tone. In that moment, Tim refused to be a student presenting some academic findings and revealed his status as war veteran.

As a consequence of Tim's transformation, the rest of the class was challenged to accept this freeze-frame or deny it, to embrace silence or to move away from it. My students seemed caught between two positions of response—as peers and as second-hand witnesses. Since we could not dwell in silence forever, nor could I ask Tim to say what he did not want or could not say, I merely re-established the classroom frame by asking students to refocus their attention on the academic task, i.e., to ask questions related *only* to Tim's project and not to his testimony.

Then and now, I have felt that my response was insufficient because what I invited my students to do was to deny Tim's intervention, to forget what their eyes had seen, and to ignore the freeze-frame. Instead, a more adequate strategy would have been to actually spend critical time within the framework of Tim's testimony. As Dawn Skorczewski notes, "The freeze frame refers to a process through which we [should] examine student-teacher interactions in a classroom by stopping the action to talk about what is happening at any given moment" (40). In other words, Skorczewski asks us to take advantage of these interruptions and turn them into moments of learning through sharing and reflecting on the classroom events.

However, maintaining a freeze-frame does not mean reflecting only on what is happening in the classroom. This would take us back to the hope that language is able to rescue us from our inability to fully comprehend traumatic narratives (Bernard-Donals and Glejzer 259). Instead, we should use freeze-frames as an opportunity to discuss the extent to which we can actually *see* beyond the face of the other, into the testimony itself. The process of reflection should, in fact, speak about our blind spots, about what may prevent us from fully taking in the account shared. Reflection is less about the looking back at what has happened in the classroom, and more about the acknowledgement of our positionality and the limits of our own visual fields. In other words, to dwell in the freeze-frames means to recognize what we see, what we hear, and how we can respond in light of our visual constraints as second-hand witnesses.

In practical terms, when Tim brought the class to silence with his remarks, I should have explained to my students what my silence meant. I could have re-framed the conflict between Tim and his peer in terms of a problem of witnessing. Tim's dissatisfaction with his peer's question reflected an indirect allegation that his peer knew nothing of the war and was not worthy of his testimony. In his frustration Tim was right; we knew nothing of the war because that was our condition as second-hand witnesses. We hadn't seen what Tim had seen; the only thing we could do was to look at him and try to situate his body in the context of war. I should have confessed my own struggle with understanding Tim's position in the classroom not as a way to pressure him more into the spotlight, but as a way to make the scene of witnessing more apparent.

Dwelling in the freeze-frame could have helped my students realize what it means to be a second-hand witness. We should have discussed together, in that moment, the extent to which a second-hand witness can actually *see* into war trauma. This would have helped

both Tim and his peers recognize that his intervention was not out of place, uncontrolled, or impolite, but the manifestation of a negotiation process between two spaces: the war and the classroom. A critical dialogue would have helped Tim be less dismissive of his peers. Finally, Tim could have also understood that his comment was not simple peer feedback, but an important shifting moment in our entire class dynamics.

Refiguration

In Fall 2008, I was teaching an introductory course for multilingual writers. During one of the in-class discussions, I was trying to involve students who were less vocal in the conversation, so I decided to call on Mary to reply to a comment made by one of her male peers. Mary was a first-year student from Saudi Arabia, who would always put a serene smile on her face whenever I looked at her for cues of understanding or approval during lecture segments of our course. This time, however, Mary stood still and was trying to avoid my eyes saying humbly: “I am sorry,” she paused, “I cannot say because in my culture women don’t talk to men like that.” She paused again as her peers’ eyes turned to her. I looked at her as if asking for more. “Maybe I can answer later,” she added with a softer tone and another long pause.

Mary’s testimony was not an *account of trauma* in itself, but a *trauma in the making*. My request for a response was a cultural taboo for her, and Mary had to risk taking a position that had more disadvantages than benefits. One option was to acknowledge her cultural taboo—in this case, the cultural stigma against women speaking in certain ways to men in public. This decision, however, would have meant risking her role as a student in the American classroom because it would have made her stand out as a rule-breaker of appropriate classroom behavior. The commentary, “Maybe I can answer later,” shows that Mary was not ready to risk her student-position since she was willing to compensate “later” for her silence. Her second option was to respond to the assigned conversation partner and to disregard her cultural rule—which she chose not to do. Knowing Mary’s shyness and judging by her demeanor and hesitations, I noticed that she was caught in a difficult struggle between two choices that were risking her status in the classroom.

As she was speaking, I realized that I could no longer recognize Mary and that I needed to look differently at her in order to better understand how she fit with the rest of the class. While I was silently searching for an immediate response, I looked at Mary with admiration and fascination. She was the student who took the risk of exposing herself through a difficult testimony. At that moment, she became one of my iconic figures—a visual landmark of women’s socio-cultural position in Saudi Arabia, and the image of the courageous student who spoke from a very well-defined standpoint that I had previously disregarded. I do not mean to suggest that, in that moment of silence, I was tokenizing Mary, viewing her face as the exemplary specimen of all women in Saudi Arabia. To the contrary, I was actively trying to *refigure* her face in a larger social context that could better explain to me the tensions between her social status at home and her place in the American educational system.

Mary’s example brings me to the second strategy that I want to propose to teachers who face such classroom disruptions. I call this strategy *refiguration*, and I use it to designate the process by which an individual’s (visual) attention is continuously (re)-

focused, adjusted, and redefined. As I have suggested earlier in this article, witnessing a peer share a traumatic experience doesn't always constitute a moment of voyeurism. The spectularity of the witness may often catch the viewer in a process of refiguration whereby the viewer tries to better understand the person speaking, to better *see* on the other's face the signs of an unanticipated past. Therefore, refiguration is an intrinsic characteristic of accidental testimonies.

The problem is not that second-hand witnesses dwell in their fascination with the speaker or that they cling onto the image of the first-hand witness. In fact, this visual investment needs to remain active beyond the accidental testimony. If our students come too quickly to a sense of closure, having the certitude of "now, I know who this person is," then they are more likely to tokenize the testifier instead of attending more fully to her testimony. To go back to Mary's intervention, in my hope to break the moment of paralysis ensuing her account, I asked my students to return to their academic tasks. In that move, Mary probably remained for many of my students an unrecognizable peer with strange cultural habits and the iconic figure of a taboo.

Instead, to keep my students in that moment of arrested attention when many were probably still asking, "What does she mean she cannot speak? Who is Mary, after all?" I could have turned my students' eyes to the classroom space itself. I could have invited them to think about questions that Mary was implicitly pointing us to: What is a classroom for? What kind of relations does it negotiate or prescribe? How does the classroom induce us to certain expectations and behaviors that we take for granted? Had I asked my students to literally look around at what they do and how they behave, maybe they could have *refigured* Mary not as an exceptional person, but as an individual implicated in larger cultural systems that affect us all. Therefore, refiguration is the process whereby we resist a sense of closure and we continue to engage with the image of the other.

If we wonder further how we can make students aware of these visual and reflective processes—without further exposing the person who testifies—Kristie Fleckenstein calls on teachers to help students see their bodies as imagetexts, to locate themselves and others in multiple sites/sights. This pedagogy implies that we ask our students to focus their attention on the ecology of the body, on the complexity of being. The first-hand witness becomes a spectacular sight not because she is reductively the iconic image of a certain kind of trauma, but because she has been in other places, and she can speak about the tension between being somewhere else and with us (listeners) at the same time. In this sense, refiguration allows the testifier to tell her story through a body that has been affected by the multiple places she has inhabited. As ethical participants in the witnessing process, our duty is to remember and imagine the testifier and her account in similar terms.

Yet, visual engagement with the other does not happen only in one direction: from the first-hand witness to the speaker. Students need to know that a testifier also stares back and that piercing look demands the viewers to refigure their positions as well. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues, "This intense visual engagement creates a circuit of communication and meaning-making" (3). The exchange of looks is at the basis of refiguration. Students need to become aware of the fact that an accidental testimony is a moment when they learn to look differently both at the speaker and themselves. Had my students and I spent more time in that freeze-frame, Mary could have also realized that her intervention was not inappropriate, her hesitations were not a personal flaw, but a

challenge to us all.

The negotiation process between how peers remember and look at each other is fundamental. In courses where students interact with testimonies rendered through books, films, or photographs, and even when students meet with an acclaimed trauma-survivor, there is a critical distance between the second-hand witness and the speaker. In the case of accidental testimonies, though, this distance is substantially reduced. Teachers and students all share the same space and will return to this place after the events have happened. For this reason, teachers have to consider that their responses and strategies have multiple goals: to prepare students to respect their peers and their testimonies, to avoid the tokenization of the first-hand witness, and to create a bearable space for everyone in the classroom after an unbearable account.

Testimony of Absence

My final classroom example comes from an argumentative course on “Representations of the Body and the Beauty Myth” that I taught in Spring 2011. Toward the middle of the semester my students and I were discussing bell hooks’ article, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance.” During our conversation, the only black female student in my class, Shauna, acknowledged that she totally identified with hooks’ comments because she oftentimes was put in situations where she had to change her body in order to please others. Moreover, it was not her peers who were putting pressure on her, but her own parents who often commented on her hair. The decision to have a boy-style haircut was her own statement against her parents. This testimony may seem quite innocent, but Shauna’s intervention came after a long series of commentaries from white female students in the class who denied the relevance of racism in their own lives and who vehemently insisted that hooks’ analysis was out of date and the result of her own personal anger.

It was clear from my students’ reactions after Shauna spoke—moments of silence, amazed and embarrassed looks—that I couldn’t overlook this testimony or put more pressure on Shauna to further analyze her own experience. Nor could I adopt a “black voice” that was not my own, to use Jacqueline Jones Royster’s terms (31). I, a white female teacher, could not pretend to speak for Shauna as a way to avoid making her the iconic figure of all black students. Instead, I offered to complement her testimony with my own *testimony of absence*, an acknowledgment of my own visual space. In the silence of the classroom, I confessed that I did not identify myself as a racist person, but to some extent, I was complicit in white privilege by the friends I make, consciously or unconsciously, by the people I surround myself with, and by the places I am most comfortable visiting and living in. As I spoke, I was making conscious efforts to highlight the moral and ethical consequences of my choices as a way of recognizing the complex aspects of my engagements as white. My intervention opened the meaning of the word *racist*, which for the students was an unbearable label because they avoided associating with the term at all levels. At my invitation, some of the other classmates started adding to the discussion their own stories about their friendships and their one-color home neighborhoods. As I listened to these testimonies, I highlighted the diversity and complexity of their accounts in an attempt to reposition Shauna’s testimony, to enlarge the context rather than tokenize her presence in the classroom.

The testimony of absence should occupy an important place next to the testimony of trauma because admitting to an absence, to the inability to see or comprehend the other's position because of one's own location, can be as memorable as admitting to traumatic events. What if, for instance, we have a class, as I did, where issues of race are discussed and only one black student is part of such a class debate? If one cannot speak for the other, and in fact one shouldn't (Sullivan 106), then the testimony of absence and the discussion of its underlying structures can help students see the gap between the lived experiences of the self, versus the lived experiences of others.

In the example above, I asked students to avoid blaming hooks for the racism charge and to imagine how the world around them looked like in contrast with the physical world that hooks described in her article. My own testimony of absence encouraged the rest of the class to share their own personal accounts. This strategy made them literally take away their eyes from Shauna and look from one peer to another as they added more testimonies of absence. The peers' stories validated the legitimacy of Shauna's narrative and revealed that racism is a systemic phenomenon, not her individual problem.

Among all the accounts, Shauna's presence remained central to our discussion. In fact, even here, in the space of this article, I do not offer a thick description of what the other students said, but only of what Shauna confessed. Her lively face is fresh in my mind—but no matter how many details I may offer about her, I cannot make people who were not present in my classroom picture her. However, if I cannot render her full performance and presence, at least my response-ability toward her testimony is to share it further not as a *good story* to tell, but as a narrative that engages more questions than it provides answers.

Needless to say, I do not suggest that the testimony of absence should get the same treatment as the testimony of trauma because the speakers in both cases do not share an equal position of power. A black student recounting a narrative of oppression does not speak from the same position as I or my other students did. Instead, I want to emphasize that those who speak of absence can create memorable scenes as well. In those moments, the students can better understand the underlying structures that make their peer's testimony spectacular. They can begin to see how the exceptional status of an individual is the result of a larger problem, and not the attributes of one person. To that end, "we should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice for speaking with and to rather than speaking for others" (Alcoff 111). If left in the middle of silence, the classroom is but a room of icons that we may respect and look up to, but we may never learn from them if we do not engage in a critical dialogue.

Conclusion

Accidental testimonies do not require a pre-determined pedagogy because they structurally escape notions of pedagogy in the traditional sense. What I have suggested in the previous sections are only a few of many possible strategies that we can use to help our students practice constructive responses in the classroom. Unplanned and unexpected, accidental testimonies remind us to be sensitive to the rhetorical contexts where traumatic accounts are made public. These events can happen in writing, in face-to-face interactions, as well as in a variety of other public or private places or across a wide range of media (e.g.,

photographs, videos, digital documents, etc.). Whatever the situation may be, it is more important that we understand the full impact and the multiple dimensions, discursive and non-discursive, that an accidental testimony activates when it engages our critical abilities.

In a larger sense, the reflections I offered in this article will hopefully lead to a renewed effort to research and investigate classroom events that we may think of as tangential to our focused work, extra-curricular happenings that we oftentimes like to label as lore. According to Stephen North, lore is hard to fit into well-defined theoretical frameworks because lore relies on pragmatic logics and experiential structures (24). At the same time, teachers are practitioners *par excellence*, and lore is consequently part of our pedagogies. Disruptive events and anecdotal stories inform how we teach and what we need to do differently from one classroom to the next. In fact, in many cases we start drafting pedagogical theories based on scattered interactions and challenges that take us by surprise.

Due to their accidental nature, unexpected testimonies also pose a methodological problem. To track and prove the spectacularity of a student who confesses is a difficult endeavor. How can we identify or re-trace the visual dimension of a student account without filtering that experience through language? How can we speak about our internal process of remembering a face, without a verbal reconstruction of what we have retained by looking at others? Finally, how can we avoid the temptation to believe, once more, that language is able to recover what we hear, feel, and see? Still, these aspects should not discourage us from looking more closely at what appears to be an ephemeral event. My classroom observations, as well as my own reflections about the ways in which I remember my students, will hopefully serve not as “proof” in the strictest sense, but as evidence for the kinds of problems that arise in our face-to-face encounters.

The three examples from my own experience have left a profound mark on my teaching history; they have turned me into a better prepared teacher, and they have changed me at a personal level. The three student portraits (Tim, Mary and Shauna) are now images in my mind that I could recognize immediately, among the many students I worked with. I recognize their faces with facility, but I still struggle to understand their experiences. This is the kind of reflective work that we need to encourage inside and outside the classroom walls. While our students are looking in the eyes of their peers, they should learn how to dwell and speak from their own position as second-hand witnesses (*freeze frames*), how to re-see their peers’ presence in the classroom (*refiguration*), and how to focus on their own blindspots (*testimony of absence*). In turn, students who take the risk and share their narratives can discover that they need not feel excluded or misunderstood. A writing class will not fully heal their wounds, but at least that process can start or continue from here (Anderson and MacCurdy 15).

To give one more reason to consider the urgency of thinking about the implications of accidental testimonies, let’s take into account the changing population of our writing classrooms. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the number of veterans returning to complete their education increased by 40% between 2009 and 2011 (“New Programs”). For the most part, these students have faced exceptional circumstances and many have gone through traumatic experiences. We may know about their backgrounds at the beginning of the course or we may discover, by accident, as it happened in my experience with Tim, that their past is still part of the present—pressing, haunting, and

painful. Some may be willing to share their experiences; others may open up against their will. For these students, we have to prepare ourselves, not as psychologists or moralists, but as compassionate human beings who are willing to watch and listen, learn and respond in ways that are less likely to risk anyone's presence in the classroom. For those who choose to testify, we need to live at the borders of our visual fields and be willing to look them in the eyes in order to begin to *see* rather than *know* what it means to be different. Accidental testimonies, as I hope to have shown, create the context of such extraordinary encounters.

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Queers, Cupid's Arrow, and Contradictions in the Classroom: An Activity Theory Analysis

Activity systems are not static, Parsonian social forces. Rather, they are dynamic systems constantly re-created through micro-level interaction.
—David Russell, “Rethinking Genre”

Heather Trahan

Introduction: Activity Theory as a Still-vital Force

A brief database search will reveal that activity theory continues to be a vital force in various academic disciplines. While specific research for this essay emerges from the related fields of rhetoric and composition, business and technical communications, sociology, cultural studies, and education, it must be noted that activity theory has an impact on more than these (for a comprehensive review of the ways activity theory has proliferated, please see Russell, “Writing and Genre”). In my field of rhetoric and composition, for instance, activity theory is indeed going strong, evidenced in part by the recent provocative “Discourse of the Firetenders: Considering Contingent Faculty through the Lens of Activity Theory,” a piece which uses activity theory as a way to address the inequitable “fully entrenched system of multi-tier faculty roles” (Doe, et al. 429). This analysis “suggests that an understanding of . . . overlapping activity systems within which contingent faculty members work can allow us to take a more optimistic view of the future” (444). In a similar move, this essay will analyze a situation where overlapping activity systems caused a series of distressing contradictions that, in the end, promoted a series of hopeful innovations. While I am writing from the perspective of a first-year composition instructor in a university setting, it is easy to imagine this work as equally useful for those teaching within the broader terrain of the humanities, where, more and more, intertwining concerns about pedagogy and social justice issues are dominating scholarly discussions.

Specifically, this essay takes a long look—through the framework of an extended case study—at contradictions in the physical classroom space. These disruptions may be quite literal (such as students talking over the voice of the teacher), or they may be subtler, sometimes involving the use of material tools that clash with the learning goals of the teacher. The overarching aim is to apply critical pedagogy to activity theory, which seeks to analyze how people come together for activity because of societal motives in order to achieve goals using actions and tools. Using activity theory as a framework for pedagogical reflection can aid in solving the (often quite uncomfortable!) contradictions that can arise within a classroom space.

Activity Theory: The Basics

Activity theory has its roots in 1920s Soviet Union. Beginning as a radical Marxist-Leninist approach to understanding the psychology of the human mind, activity theorists wanted to answer questions like: Why do humans act? Where does motivation come

from? What is the relationship between an individual and society? What is the difference between larger spheres of activity and smaller moments of action? What is the role of affect in working toward goals? How do humans use material tools and conceptual tools (such as language, societal traditions, etc.) to mediate their work? What is collectivity?

Many scholars agree that the most important early, first-generation leader of this psychological activity theory was Lev Vygotsky. Early activity theorists such as he built upon the work of Frederick Engels (a collaborator of Marx). Vygotsky saw activity as, simply, goal-oriented, mediated work that has social, material, and historical implications (Wertsch 37-71).

Then, in the 1970s, a second-generation of activity theory began as Western scholars began applying these ideas in fields such as education, sociology, and human-computer interaction (Engeström, see "Activity" and *Learning*). An important thinker during this time was A. N. Leontiev, who extended the theory's original framework to further elaborate major concepts such as *object* (the goal or goals of an activity system)¹¹, *subject* (an individual who is a member along with other members of that activity system community; often, this is the particular human who is being analyzed in the study), *rules* (these organize and govern the activity system), *division of labor* (which allow certain members to contribute differing types of work within the system), and *tools* (physical items such as hammers as well as conceptual items such as writing and speaking) which mediate an object by making the job more easily done. In this way, mediation effectively changes both the nature of the activity as well as the nature of the subjects who use the tools. Overall, the most prominent achievement of second-generation activity theory was in taking the first-generation concept of mediation and extending its use by applying it to larger social groups (Spinuzzi 69).

A further key distinction from Leontiev during this time is between *activity* and *action*. These two terms are not to be confused as synonymous. Activity, which is begun and done in response to some societal motive (some examples might be to learn, to join community, to receive esteem from a mentor, to make money, etc.), is carried out through specific, daily, concrete, goal-oriented actions. And, sometimes, subjects' actions are performed because of carried-over motives from concurrent activity systems—thus, in these situations, actions do not conform to the societally-driven motive of the activity (Bakhurst).

Currently in its third-generation, at least two interacting systems are the focal point for study. A major force has been Yrjö Engeström, who built upon the work of Leontiev, theorizing an additional concept for activity theory—that of *contradictions*. This tension-filled element is an unavoidable product both within a single system and between systems that overlap. Contradictions arise any time diverse individuals interact for the purposes of activity. Their backgrounds, morals, experiences, hopes, talents, and levels of learning will have an effect on the overall composition of the various activities involved. To put it another way, when humans come together in a single activity system to "do" an activity, some of these folks will necessarily interpret and/or carry out the activity in a multitude of assorted, often contradictory ways. According to Kari Kuutti, over time these structural

¹¹ Note that this is not the typical use of the word "object." In activity theory, object is not like "the subject/object divide." Rather, think of object as "the object of a game."

tensions—either inside the system or between systems—accumulate, which then manifest as “problems, ruptures, breakdowns, clashes” (qtd. in Murphy and Rodríguez Manzanares 1063). However, these contradictions are actually beneficial because they push for much-needed updates in the activity itself. Contradictions, then, ultimately help analysts perceive how innovation occurs. In our personal lives, workplaces, and school settings, to stay current, flexible, and relevant, one must “learn new forms of activity which are not yet there”; one must learn, create, and update rules, policies, and ways of being within and between activity systems simultaneously as a response to contradiction (Engeström, “Expansive Learning” 138).

Lately, the notion of contradictions has taken on an even more heightened role in analyzing how activity systems compose activity *networks*—activity systems that are intersecting, woven, spliced, and/or overlapping.¹² A number of recent articles in education (at both the secondary and post-secondary levels) have utilized activity theory’s notion of contradictions as a primary lens. Gunther Dippe, in his analysis of a Swedish online education system, reveals radical contradictions between how the program was intended and how the program was truly carried out (1). Charles Nelson and Mi-Kyung Kim argue for the use of activity theory as a helpful framework for thinking about how international students approach a first-year composition course. And a recent article by Elizabeth Murphy and Maria A. Rodríguez Manzanares analyzes contradictions between the virtual and physical high school classroom. The authors claim that in this third generation of activity theory, the notion of analyzing contradictions is the best way to learn, negotiate, and improve teaching theory and practice, especially as digital technology forces a reimagining of our learning objects.¹³ Perhaps the most prominent advocate is currently technical communications scholar, Clay Spinuzzi. He argues for the maintenance of activity theory’s potency as well as outlining ways that activity theory must recognize its own contradictions and thus evolve. Spinuzzi hones in on the concept of contradiction as a dominant element in understanding activity; he writes that these are the “engines of change: they provide the impetus for the sorts of reorganizing, reconceiving, and reworking that characterizes a living activity system or network” (73).

Indeed, activity theory, at its core, accounts for development—and its accompanying concept of contradiction can aid in reflection about how students learn, grow, expand, change, shift, and gain agency. In sum, activity theory proposes thinking about *how humans can most effectively come together*. It is not an isolationist lens; rather, it sets up collective activity as its basic unit of analysis. Moreover, critics such as Leesa Whellahan do not hold much weight when they say activity theory is not focused enough on individual creativity or agency—that it “tends to oversocialize the individual” (185). Critiquing activity theory

¹² A currently contested issue: whether or not activity theory advocates interacting activity systems in network(s) are “spliced” rather than “woven.” The problem is that the notion of “spliced” emerges from the rival theory of actor-network-theory (ANT), with which many activity theorists do not want to mingle. Clay Spinuzzi, however, strongly argues for the meshing of activity theory and ANT. He states that in order to remain relevant in our rapidly-expanding technological age, we *must* begin to adopt spliced understandings of interacting activity systems.

¹³ The authors give the example that in a physical classroom, the object is to “teach students”; whereas in the virtual classroom, the reformatted object is now to “help students learn.”

for its obsession with communities is like critiquing zoos for being too obsessed with animals. Activity theorists study individuals who come together with other individuals, who then come together with more individuals. No lack of agency here—only the clash of contradictions that arise from each individual's thrust of agency, which is unavoidable.

The following case study will shed light on how activity theory can continue to be a vital, powerful theoretical force in the academy, especially as we begin to understand classroom contradiction not as failure, but rather as a much-needed request for pedagogical reflection, and, ultimately, change.

The Case of a Budding Romance

On the first day of a first-year composition course, Zack and Edward (both names are pseudonyms) began the semester sitting on opposite sides of the room. By the third or fourth class, however, I noticed they arrived together and chose desks next to each other. My “gay-dar” (a colloquialism in the LGBTQ community, referring to a psychic radar that can detect whether someone is queer) was beeping loudly. Yes, Zack and Edward seemed gay—I was almost sure of it—and, it seemed, openly so. What was significant is that these appeared to be the first gay students that had ever been placed in a course of mine since I began work at this particular school (a university located in a fairly small, conservative Midwestern town).¹⁴ I was thrilled.

As a double sexual minority (I am both bisexual and polyamorous) who is mostly “out,” I’ve had a long history of LGBTQ affiliation.¹⁵ I have been involved in door-to-door campaigns and in-the-streets protests, and I’ve stood in the rain asking for signatures. My partner and I have volunteered for and supported local youth queer clubs and safe spaces. After earning a B.A. in English, I began working as a freelance journalist, covering queer issues/events for community newspapers and websites. In the past few years, during my M.A. and Ph.D. programs, I’ve begun to devote a majority of my research to merging insights from sexuality studies, feminist studies, and queer studies into my home field of rhetoric and composition. If there happens to be on-campus events regarding anything LGBTQ, I make sure to spread the word to colleagues and students. In my teaching, I’ve made it a point to regularly select readings from queer writers, and when I’m explaining concepts, examples relating to queer issues (and other social justice issues such as racism, ableism, classism, ageism, sexism) are usually some of the first to pop into my mind.¹⁶

As this brief history demonstrates, I was *ready* for Zack and Edward to be in my class. As an educator and activist holding these ethical/political values regarding human equality, I was already heavily invested in these two young men.

¹⁴ Only three years ago did this town finally pass—and it passed by a very slim margin—legislation which protects against employment and housing discrimination based upon sexual orientation.

¹⁵ For more about polyamory, please refer to the work of one of the pioneers in the poly movement, Dr. Deborah Anapol.

¹⁶ For instance, I use a PowerPoint slide each term to teach how to write thesis statements. Many slides touch upon LGBTQ issues. One particular slide states: “An example of an excellent, contestable thesis is: ‘Gay marriage is not so radical; in fact, it is passé because it fits into a conservative, status-quo capitalist paradigm.’”

After books were purchased, after introductions were spoken, after course policies were reviewed, and after first assignments were explained—after the class really began to get underway—I began appreciating how often both Zack and Edward contributed to class-wide discussions. Both were incredibly enthusiastic, gregarious, humorous, and didn't mind attempting to answer questions that they weren't entirely sure they knew the "right" answers to. Edward especially impressed me. He often, bravely, took stabs at the most difficult queries while holding a modest, cheerful attitude. He worked hard, thought hard, but didn't have a huge ego about his efforts. One day after class, early-on in the term, as my students were packing up their books and departing from the room, I thanked Edward for being so vocal. He grinned, blushed, waved his hand to the side in a gesture of *no big deal*.

I pressed him, saying, "No, *really*. Thank you! Class wouldn't have worked at all today without you."

In response, he said that it was fun. "I like the deep questions you're asking," he said. As Edward walked away to his next class, I remember thinking that the rest of the term would surely be smooth sailing—would remain as delightful as this. Edward and Zack would continue to be leaders, helping me motivate my more reserved students.

By the third week of the term, my suspicions were confirmed: Zack and Edward were indeed in the throes of a romance.¹⁷ I found this out because both men had each been scheduled for an early-term "getting to know you" conference in my office, in back-to-back time slots. When I saw them both standing in the hallway outside my office, waiting, I quickly decided to change the schedule and confer with them simultaneously. During our conversation, they revealed that their relationship was a result of their meeting for the first time in my class. As the three of us talked, I asked my standard question: "What is something you've done in your life that you are especially proud of?" Without much hesitation, Edward divulged a long narrative about how he had come out of the closet to his parents and his friends when he was fifteen ("a traumatic event" he called it). After this, I revealed to them that I was "in the family" (lingo meaning "a member of the gay community") and told them briefly about the various activism I've been involved with.

When it was Zack's turn to answer my question, he didn't brag as Edward had, but instead shared with me his struggles as a student over the years. He admitted to having trouble caring about school—that other matters seemed more pressing to him. He told me, "I'm not smart." When I pressed Zack to brag to me about something, he continued to resist, telling me that he really wasn't proud of much, not academically. When I asked him to brag about something he'd done outside of school, he had no response to that either. Overall, however, while Zack did not take the opportunity to brag about himself as I'd hoped he would, I *was* pleased that Zack felt free enough to confide in me about his problems with school—and, although perhaps not intentionally—revealing general problems with self-esteem. When the young men exited my office, I felt content, even

¹⁷ In the discourse of polyamory, this early phase of a relationship is fueled by what's called *new relationship energy* (NRE). It's a time when the world seems to shrink down the size of one's new lover. All attention is focused on exploring and enjoying the new relationship. Other responsibilities and cares and affiliations seem less important by contrast. For more on concept of NRE, please see my dissertation blog: <http://rhetcompolydiss.wordpress.com/tag/nre/>

pleased. I felt I'd connected with them as both a mentor and as a human being. This term was going to be a special one.

Contradictions Between Overlapping Systems

During the fourth or fifth week of the term, I began to notice moments during classroom meetings that began as disheartening slight distractions, and then as they continued to build momentum, began to feel as if a thick cloud had descended over all of us in that room. *Contradictions* in the making.

Edward and Zack were beginning to act in (unintentionally, I felt) disrespectful, disruptive ways, both toward their peers and myself. They began to ignore my injunctions to please calm down at the start of class. Again and again, those two seemed to be the last ones to stop talking. I noticed that I'd started sounding like a broken record, saying, "Let's begin" or "Can I have your attention?" over and over and over—until they finally heard me. As our class met for only fifty minutes three times a week, I felt we did not have the luxury of those few lost seconds (sometimes minutes) at the start of each class period as Zack and Edward talked and joked with each other and those seated nearby. On the other hand, I did appreciate the fact that the typical beginning-of-term uncomfortable silences were quickly disappearing—our class was moving toward friendliness, toward community, and this seemed to be helped along by Edward's and Zack's presence as the two who'd been hit by cupid's arrow. At the same time, I wondered about the cost. What was being lost as I tried in vain to get my students' attention at the start of class? And how was this negatively affecting my ethos as a leader in that space? Clearly, my students were becoming friendly colleagues. I knew that the success of peer reviews and class-wide conversation depended almost solely upon students feeling comfortable around each other. Yet their desire for *too much* conversation at the start of class sessions was indeed a contradiction within the activity system of our classroom: Zack and Edward (and nearby students) had made their *object* and *action*, upon entering the classroom, the enjoyment of non-academic conversation, of socializing; this was in contradiction to my *object* and *action* upon entering the classroom, which was to harness students' attention in order to facilitate a learning environment.

The chit-chat continued during those middle weeks of the term, and then it began to bleed over into the rest of the fifty minutes. Most frustrating perhaps, their conversations began to erupt right over other student voices. One particular moment stands out in memory: Melanie (a pseudonym) was sharing a story about how her father was probably going to lose his job due to the immanent Ohio legislation which would ban all unions. As we listened to her worried words, Edward and Zack began whispering. Whatever they were talking about must have been fascinating, because soon, a group of four or five students sitting close to them had joined in—at this point, not even bothering to whisper. I gently interrupted Melanie by saying, "Please hold that thought, Mel"—and then turned to Zack, Edward, and the rest. I stood there silently, mustering a facial expression of pure displeasure. But by the time they realized I was attempting to stare them down, whole minutes had passed. After the class grew silent again, I asked Melanie to please finish her story. But the moment had passed. She'd apparently forgotten her train of thought (or, perhaps, was feeling embarrassed that her story had been ignored by some of her peers),

and simply shrugged, saying, “Whatever. I was finished.”

The disruptive action continued. On another particularly frustrating class meeting, we moved our desks (for the first time that term) into a friendly circle (as opposed to the less-friendly formation of all desks facing the front of the classroom) to discuss an article. Once I made the announcement to shift desks, Zack announced that he had forgotten his textbook, and I suggested that he share with someone. A mistake! The two young men now had an excuse to snuggle up, fully ignoring the discussion, and instead making gooey love-eyes at each other. And then, for the first time, they began to pass notes to each other—an action which was now easy, for their notes did not have to be passed through the air (which would have been awkward), but instead, in this new circle formation, notes could simply slide from one desk to the next. What really bothered me about that day’s note-passing was that they were not at all subtle about it. I’m sure many other students noticed; and even when I stared squarely at them a few times, mid-pass, they continued to do it.

I can sense your questions.

Why was this the extent of my reprimand? Why did I not speak up and ask them to stop passing notes? The only explanation I can supply is this: At first, when I began to notice their behavior, I was still in a state of rapture over the fact that these two brave, good-humored, intelligent gay men had been placed into my class. So, the part of me that was rapturous was also the part of me that was reluctant to totally accept what was going on in the classroom. In activity theory’s terms, I did not want to make my *object* that of discipline, that of control. I was reluctant—for I so wanted to be a friend, a supporter of these men. So, I second-guessed the developing situation. I asked myself: Was it *really* Zack and Edward who were promoting the lack of respect during class discussion? Was it *really* they who were hampering efforts to start class each morning? Was it *really* their actions that were disrupting the learning-and-teaching activity?

At midterm, finally beginning to come to terms with the implications of the situation, I found it helpful to apply activity theory to these problems, to better understand the dynamics of what was going on. Figure 1 is a representative graph that illustrates the complex pedagogical situation.

This representation is characteristic of a third-generation activity analysis, because there are at least two systems interacting with each other, ultimately forming an activity *network* (Murphy and Rodríguez Manzanares 1062). As a result of this particular network of various objects, tools, affiliations, motivations, and communities coming together, *the space in the very center of the representation, the space where the three overlap*, contradictions developed: “a fundamental disagreement about how they should relate” (Spinuzzi 12).

So, how to deal with the fact that Zack and Edward were not focusing during class? How to motivate them to care about writing more than romance for fifty minutes three times a week? And, in the language of activity theory, what new *innovations* were necessary to solve the contradictions and move forward? In this network of three overlapping activities—the activity of romance, the activity of the LGBTQ community, and the activity of the academic course—how could we come together as a community to get our work done? And how should I, the teacher, adapt? How could I push Zack and Edward to shift their behavior—but in a gentle manner, without embarrassing them? (Making them sit on opposite sides of the room came to mind, but I did not want to do that. I

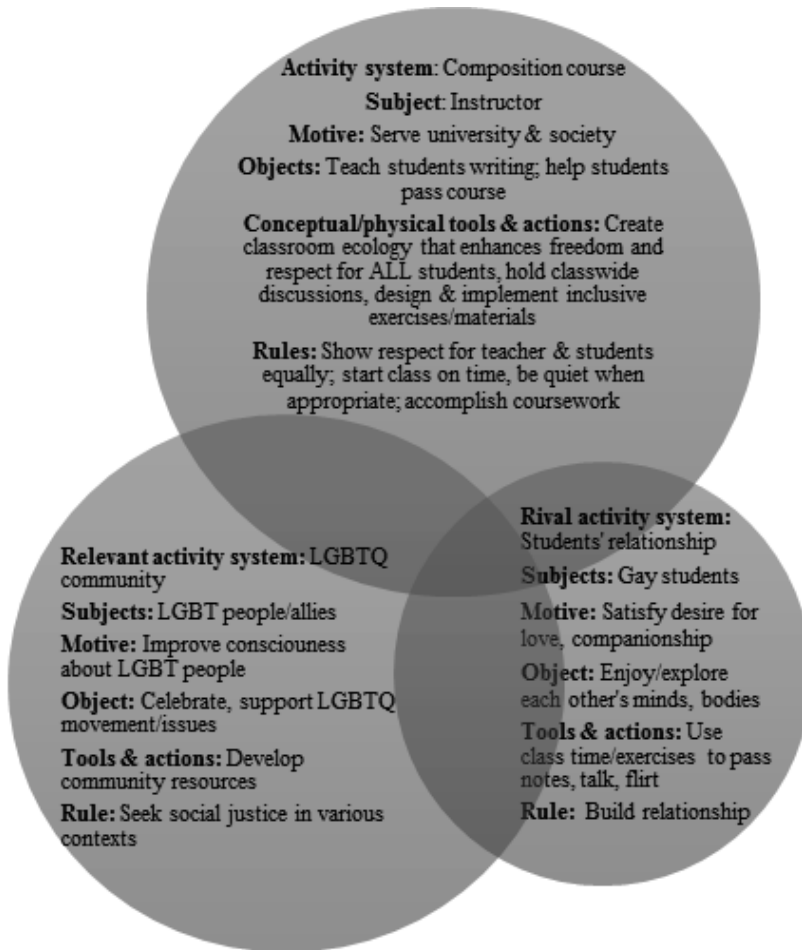


Figure 1: Interacting Activity Systems

wanted to treat them like adults.) Also, I wanted to keep in mind Spinuzzi's warning that contradictions must not only motivate us to reflect, but that we must implement "broader changes" if the links are to "survive" (12). The blank space in my figure, at the center of the three overlapping activities—the place where all three systems touch—had to shift, but not break.

However glad I was about my telling Edward and Zack during our conference that I was "in the family," I wondered: Had that transparency led them to think of me as "the cool teacher"—the one who was on their side *no matter what*? If they had assumed this, they were right. Weeks had passed, and I *still* hadn't done more than occasionally say "Zack and Ed, please be quiet, okay?" My few reprimands had a rather tentative quality,

ending with a high-pitched (maybe even whiny) “please?” or “okay?” My activity as a queer-advocate had clashed, for the first time in my teaching career, with my activity as a writing teacher. I was allowing these two students to dominate the classroom in negative ways because, frankly, I *liked them* so much.

Subtle Innovations

Paul Prior’s impressive work with activity theory in *Writing/Disciplinarity: A Sociohistoric Account of Literate Activity in the Academy* argues that activity is never totally stable, but open, fluid, dynamic, and composed of vastly heterogeneous elements. Prior invokes the term “laminated” to discuss how each social interaction between human beings is incredibly complex:

How to handle such heterogeneity is an issue. Consider a classroom as an example. The complex intersections of social, pedagogical, and institutional forces, the striking asymmetries in motives and actions between teachers and students and among students, and the varied configurations of interpersonal and intergroup relations that exist in classrooms I am suggesting that activity is laminated, that multiple activities co-exist, are immanent, in any situation. (24)

Each composition class meeting that term was *indeed* laminated. The object of coming to class for Zack and Edward seemed to be a chance to flirt, to bask in each other’s presence. They seemed to be forgetting about other crucial objects, such as learning, becoming better writers, or passing the course.¹⁸ Coming to class for me, on the other hand, meant an object of facilitating scenarios where students would gain crucial concepts, skills, and approaches to academic writing. Class lasted a sacred fifty minutes. Coming to the classroom space for me, also, was infused with my other impassioned activity system—my ever-present desire to infuse the learning space with conceptual tools for coming to a greater awareness of the ongoing discrimination of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other non-normatively sexed/sexual human beings. I wanted to plant a seed. So the simple act of coming to class then, of *being* in the classroom space, became problematic. Russell, invoking notions from Engeström, writes, “Collectives pursuing different objects and motives interact with one another in a host of ways over time, producing not only micro-level conflicts but also deep, ongoing *dialectical contradictions* within and among social practices at the macro level, in which collectives are at ‘cross purposes’” (“Rethinking” 508).

In writing (thus, re-living) this scenario with Zack and Edward, more than a year after they have departed from my class, I wonder about my pedagogy. How could I have let things get so out of hand? How could I have virtually ignored their disruptive behavior

¹⁸ I must admit that perhaps Zack and Edward were there to look for love. Maybe their motivation for signing up for class—or even for going to college—was primarily to find a partner or a hot brush with romance. Maybe their daily object upon entering the classroom was to enjoy and explore with each other. Maybe they did not care about the activity system of the classroom, of learning and teaching. Maybe their actions were *not* conflicted, and their passing notes and flirting and talking made perfect sense. Maybe their actions were fully (or mostly) in line with their purpose. I can’t pretend to know these things.

for so long? Yet despite this retrospective criticism of myself, I *can* remember what I was thinking and feeling and wondering.

I remember being terrified. I remember worrying about unconsciously reproducing in my classroom the larger situation in our culture; I remember thinking that it is possible for even a queer like me to hurt another queer; I remember thinking it was entirely possible for me to inadvertently enforce heteronormativity. I remember returning, a few times that term—to the theories of Laurel Berlant and Michael Warner, to passages like this one:

This sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just in sex—is what we call heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is more than just ideology or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; education; plus the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture. It is hard to see these fields as heteronormative because the sexual culture straight people inhabit is so diffuse, a mix of languages they are just developing with notions of sexuality so ancient that their material conditions feel hardwired into personhood. (194)

And thus, even though writing (re-living) this experience about my overly-careful urge not to create a heteronormative classroom space has been at times quite humbling, it brings me pleasure to remember how, midterm, I sat down in my office, one quiet afternoon, to draw a map (Fig. 1.) which helped me think.

Around week ten, in taking activity theory into further account, I realized that, even though the notes passed between Zack and Edward weren't necessarily making noise—weren't making a physical contradiction to my voice and to other students' voices—they were, in fact, using the tool of the note as a way to mediate their budding romance at the expense of their own educational experience, as well as (probably) sending this subtle message to the other students: *This class doesn't matter*. Thus, innovation had to occur. I wanted to be careful in my approach, creating a solution that did not conflict with my ongoing queer-supportive ethics.

So this is what I did: I simply shifted the physical makeup of the class. I realized that note-passing only occurred during the context of sitting together as a whole group in a circle. Because I did not want to forego this arrangement entirely (I liked the spirit of camaraderie that the circle formation brought to conversation), I simply shifted how the desks were arranged in that circle. Before each class meeting that involved circle-discussion, I arrived at class early, and pushed all of the excess desks into the corners of the room. There were only thirteen students and a total of twenty-five desks taking up space, so this action up a more spacious area for students to form the kind of circle where their desks were not physically touching. When students arrived in the room, the circle was already in place. Because the desks were now each separated by a few feet of space, Zack and Edward—as I predicted—stopped passing notes to each other. In addition, I announced a new course policy midway through the term that if students failed to bring in the required texts to class, they would not receive attendance credit—an innovation which would obviate Zack and Edward's excuse to cuddle-up. My innovation here not only benefited Zack and Edward—by forcing them into separate space, thus helping them focus—but it also helped a few other students too, ones who were sometimes failing to

bring their books and thus not being able to be active discussion participants.

Because I wanted each to think about their situation *as intellectuals* in a class, as opposed to persons *in a romantic relationship* in a class, I decided to discuss candidly, yet finally quite sternly my concerns, frustrations, and desires for the young men to respect the space of the classroom as a place for study. I decided to take advantage of sheer serendipity when Edward (around week eleven or twelve in the term) showed up quite early to class one day, without Zack by his side. With just Edward and me in the empty classroom, I let myself be both a vulnerable human being, expressing my admiration for his intelligence and gregariousness and admitting that I, as a teacher, had been feeling frustrated that he and his boyfriend had been talking over myself and over others and generally failing to stay on task during class time. I told him that future disruption would not be tolerated. Edward listened attentively, and then apologized. When he said, "If you don't mind, I'd like to be the one to talk to Zack about this"—I agreed. Thus, respect and trust had been maintained, despite the contradiction. And the act of shaming that I had worried about had, thankfully, not occurred. Deep in my own queer heart, I understood that these men had been shamed enough.

A few days after that crucial talk with Edward, I emailed Zack, simply stating that if he had any questions about the information that Zack relayed to him that I would be happy to sit down with him to talk. I then quickly listed my expectations for the rest of the term in terms of respect, and then I wished him well.

Other subtle classroom innovations included my formulating small "stable" discussion and peer-review groups that students maintained throughout the rest of the term. I purposely did not put Edward and Zack into the same group. In addition, I asked each stable group to meet at a particular, reoccurring location within the room for each activity, informing the class that my rationale for this was to promote comfort and a sense of routine for their small group meetings, which I suggested would create more free, more creative discussion. The other students had no idea (I don't think) that my placement of Zack's group at the far back right corner and Edward's group in the far front left corner of the classroom was purely for the sake of keeping Zack and Edward apart. Again, no outright shame was placed upon Zack or Edward. This innovation, meant to dissolve the contradiction between the new lovers' desire to bond and my desire to create an environment conducive to learning to write, could have been carried out in a less-subtle manner. I *could have*, in front of the whole class, explicitly said, "Zack and Edward, do not sit by each other anymore—you are being disruptive." But instead, I subtly mediated the structure of classroom activity.

Admittedly, not all contradictions were completely solved. I still noticed frustrating moments—moments, for example, when Zack and Edward would whisper to each other during circle discussion, despite the added space between them. However, I am reminded of Spinuzzi's account of the power of human development through activity. He writes that contradictions can be resolved to a lasting betterment of all involved, that activity theories highlight "irreversible evolution, all performed through the cyclical resolution of dialectical contradictions" (80). Through the inevitable moments of contradiction, a particular activity can become more attuned to the unique, shifting needs of individuals involved to make it work. Taking into account the contradictions between the competing activities of the course, my queer activism, and the budding romance, my pedagogical

toolkit remained rust-free. It remained relevant, and ready to take on new classroom contradictions as they would certainly arise.

Conclusion: Undertaking Activity Theory as Reflective Method

The particular ways I utilized activity theory are, granted, unique. No other teacher will have the same contradictions as I did. However, the generalizability of this article lies not in attempts to adopt the specific innovations that I just explained. Rather, the point is to create a sense of excitement about the overall usefulness of activity theory as a boon to pedagogical reflection. By analyzing the objects, actions, rules, tools, motives, and contradictions inherent in a classroom, innovation may come more quickly. In sum, the preceding case is meant to provoke others' own exploration of activity theory—as a potential method for seeing anew, for re-seeing the dynamics inherent within the classroom space, especially when a course is mired in cross-purposes, in contradictions.

In a grand sense, it is important to remember that, as Spinuzzi reminds us, no matter what field we are in, no matter what jobs we are doing, contradictions are ever-present in living activities, living networks. If we are alive, we will enter contradiction as we rub up against other individuals who belong to other activities. Indeed, “[C]ontradictions form, develop, and eventually lead to large scale transformations of the entire network, and these transformations become the stage for the next contradictions and the next set of transformations” (122). Thus, contradictions do not indicate failure—they indicate *life*. Let us not be discouraged by these, but rather take them as motivating facts.

More particularly, considering crises in the classroom space as contradictions within activity and between activities helps reframe contradictions in ways that lead to possible solutions. The dialectal dance that is activity theory is related to the fact that we, as energetic, diligent teachers, *can never really make mistakes*. For instance, we can turn a “problem course” into the tool of a written essay, which then can be published in a journal such as *JAEP*L (or read by colleagues in a more informal fashion), and then that tool can mediate the ongoing work of teaching within that activity field or between activity fields—not to mention move the teacher-writer farther along toward the object of heightening professional status. In the network of academia, there is no such thing as a mistake *if* we believe there is no such thing as a mistake.

As activity theory can assist teachers in seeing more clearly the competing motivations within members of a particular class community, it can also be useful for instilling an added layer of empathy in our pedagogy. Activity theory can also help us better view how students are negotiating many conflicting pulls when they set foot in the classroom. Conversely, however, too much empathy can sometimes be a negative force, as evidenced by my reluctance to reprimand Zack and Edward for their disruptive behavior. Thus, each teacher must reflect for herself, finding the line of appropriate empathy, and trying to strike a balance between her own ethics and the academic goals of the course, while simultaneously taking into account the realization that students do not always have as much energy invested in the course as we do. In doing so, activity theory can give us a much-needed pause, helping us see and re-see classrooms as holding enormous complexity, as “sociohistorically organized functional systems that weave together heterogeneous trajectories of persons, practices, artifacts, institutions, and communities” (Prior 278).

Coming to grips with that complexity must not overwhelm us, though. Contradictions may temporarily destabilize us, yes. But taking up the lens of activity theory will help us regain, and reinvigorate, our center.

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Gatekept: Inviting Creative Community Literacy

Shelly Sanders and B. Cole Bennett

As instructor of the Community Writer's Workshop at Abilene Christian University, it's my duty to unlock the outer door to the library so that our workshop participants can enter the building on Saturday mornings. Our group gathers in the ACU Writing Center. The Center is usually closed at this time and normally reserved for student tutors to help peers develop better written arguments, fashion thesis sentences, find evidence from research, and learn how to cite sources properly. This group, however, is more interested in writing for themselves or for family, and throughout the free, six-week workshop, they never quite seem to believe that they're in the right place.

They don't all arrive at once, but when I reach the Library doors at 8:50, a couple of workshop participants are already waiting outside: the 16-year-old high school student, Miranda, and her mother, stamping their feet to keep warm on this blustery November morning, and Bob, the middle-aged campus police officer, who has a key himself but graciously waits for me to unlock the door. I love that I am a part of the hospitality of the Writing Center's mission with this endeavor, and this is one of my favorite parts of Saturdays in the fall. As I set up hot coffee and scones, and the early birds warm up, the other workshop members straggle in: the young mother and writer, Sara; Ed, who works at the State School but dreams of writing his memoirs; and Betty, the elderly retired teacher who writes stories for her grandchildren. A few others will arrive even later, but we don't care. If you can get here by 10 a.m., you're welcome. We're a diverse crowd, but we all find solace during these Saturday mornings, talking about and sharing our writing.

"I'm so glad y'all could make it today. Let's start off with a brief writing exercise," I say. "We're going to write a story using six words that we all agree on. First, give me three nouns...."

"Okay, Shelly. Hopscotch," says Betty, shrugging. I write it down.

"Watch, like on your wrist," says Miranda.

Someone else calls out "child," and then I ask for a verb and an adjective. In a few moments, we've got a list of random words, and before I can even say the word "go," the room is silent with scribbling. They've all contributed to this list and keep it in front of them. The stories they write from it, however, will be as different as their backgrounds. Even more than that, when we share them out loud, the writers almost interrupt each other to get the chance to read (though they all apologize for their stories at the beginning). The stories are funny and charming and interesting—one a fable about a pirate, one a long piece on the nature of grief, and another a short poem. A random list of words and a random collection of people gathered in a university writing center sharing stories . . . somehow, it all makes sense.

I watch Shelly welcome her writers to the small round tables in the Writing Center. I thought it important to be on hand this morning—just to make sure the workshop gets underway smoothly, that Shelly and her participants feel well-hosted, and that all have what they need to write. I arrange cups, creamer, and giant boxes of brewed coffee on the

front table, and I will go to Starbucks when things need to be replenished. As things get started, I direct latecomers and rearrange more furniture to accommodate them.

But this is not my gig; Shelly has conceived, designed, recruited for, and now implements a writing group for people who don't consider themselves writers. They perceive themselves as almost-writers, pseudo-authors, or creators-in-waiting. Now, *that* I recognize; I see those attitudes every day. The ACU Writing Center is exactly the place where these people should come. Normally, our clientele is made of students walking in with essays, literature reviews, reflections, syntheses, or reports. But not today.

This is an essay about combining passions toward a mutual end of creative critical literacy. Shelly and I are joining our interests and our efforts to serve a group of citizens—a community—in what we hope are complex, fruitful, and, ultimately, constructive ways. Our thesis is that creativity and critical thinking should not be separated, as they often are, and that deft use of campus resources can effectively rebuild the natural connections between these modes of thinking. Additionally, through such efforts, universities can serve populations often “kept out” of creative spheres and improve critical literacy in their communities.

Creation, Criticism, Collision

Douglas Hesse recently surveyed the current state of the pedagogical writing universe, building a case for the disciplines of composition and creative writing to tear down fences and share back yards. He doesn't merely want to improve relations in our departments, but he believes that creative expression and attention to style should count for something in a rhetorical situation, and, conversely, that we should care how writing affects an audience as people compose creatively. Hesse posits for consideration an aptly named “Elbovian Parlor”—a place where writers “gain the floor by creating interest through the arts of discourse” (41). Other scholars of writing have weighed in on the disciplinary relationships between creative writing and composition, or on the places of creative writing in English departments generally.

Notably, the January 2009 issue of *College English* is entirely devoted to analyzing the connections that exist (or don't) between creative writing and other fields. Gerald Graff writes that areas of convergence, such as creative writing and conventional literary study, are “avoided” because of assumptions that either we already agree, or because current discussions tend to be more divisive than fruitful (271). He writes, “Instead of discussing such questions, we pass the buck to the student, by instituting coverage requirements that essentially leave it up to them to connect what the department and the college cannot” (271-72). If students are successful in doing this on their own, great, but “connect(ing) the specialized functions” would require “that we not only talk to each other about the connections but actually work together in our teaching, as apparently we can't imagine” (272).

According to Graff, the “tense and uneasy relationship” that exists between creative writing and literature certainly can also be extended to the relationship that creative

writing often has with writing centers, and little evidence of curricular collaborations between these factions perhaps suggest “an opposition between creativity and criticism that lies deep in the roots of modern culture” (272, 274). Graff argues that the deep rift between the “unified, creative” Ancients and the “self-divided, hypercritical” Moderns spawned many other significant oppositions between the book-reading middle class and the more rarified academic critics and theorists (274). Because boundaries around creative writing and other fields then solidified, the tension between creative writing and other fields has limited students’ encounters in the academic arena. That tension has privatized creative writing programs such as the Iowa Writers’ Workshop that was originally founded to bridge scholarship and creativity. It has fractured literary and “ordinary” language (275).

Coming to terms with the conflict between creation and criticism is at the heart of the debate about why creative writing has always been a “gatekept” field. What can we in the academy do about it? While Shelly and I are not necessarily as interested in the problems that exist between creative writing and criticism, in this essay, we *are* interested the ways literary study and critical discourse in the academic community might not be limited to university students. How can creative writing be a part of non-academic programs or taught in unconventional spaces for learning?

These questions drove us to take action in the summer of 2008. Shelly wanted to offer a creative writing workshop for the community, but didn’t have a space to do it. I had a Writing Center whose mission included the community, but whose foot traffic often did not. We both wanted to talk about the larger contexts of the “gatekept” world of creative writing and the more “open” world of the university writing center to see how we might work together, sharing our strengths. Must there be a “bifurcation,” as Kimberly Andrews describes, an entrenched resistance between between creative writing programs and other types of writing programs—or must those who don’t have access to the university, to creative writing courses, simply flounder along, hoping the skills will be garnered in isolation? Andrews points to the creative writing workshop itself as the germ of this isolation:

The isolationist stance that pervades creative writing may have its origins in the history of literary history and criticism . . . but its perpetuation rests in the workshop. The workshop, the beating heart and running blood of any creative writing program, is a pedagogical structure that stands ‘over a hundred years old but basically unrevised’ (Bizarro 296). We must ask why this should be so. (247)

Of course, one of the major questions regarding this topic is whether or not creative writing itself can be taught at all, which is the focus of many articles on its future in our departments. However, this question may be secondary (and may even helpfully illuminate) an examination of “what constitutes the study and the practice of creative writing” (Andrews 250). Graduate writing programs may have their place, but how can students who do not have access to these classes still have access to a place in the academy or in the literary world? How might they have access to publishing, empowerment and confidence in order to hone their skills? What might be alternatives or spaces that provide new models for writing communities?

Andrews argues that we must pursue “hybridity” by having conversations among

various disciplines and programs (250). Through these conversations, we might find alternatives to bridging the creative writing divides. And hers is not the only voice echoing this sentiment, nor the only voice revisiting the sentiment of Joseph Moxley, who feels that the way to build the discipline of creative writing is to tear down walls in English Departments. Moreover, Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweet address the idea of a writing community to bring attention to the complementary resources and new possibilities that are formed when writing programs and spaces are collapsed. Dawes and Friend are correct in viewing composition studies as an allied field . . . “that offers a fertile ground” (322).

While every writing community may not look the same, the writing community we describe below closely aligns with many of the rationales and procedures offered by Dawes and Friend in their model for the writing community. While their community was comprised of tuition-paying university students and differs from ours in scope, our writing community’s approach (which we call a Community Writers Workshop, open only to non-student residents in our community) mimics theirs in practice, in that it

attempts to maximize the strengths of each and minimize the weaknesses. It creates groups of writers with similar interests and uses group energy and skills to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. Each community also includes a mentor to facilitate, advise, and where necessary, teach the group. (319)

The Community Writers Workshop

In the fall semesters of 2008 and 2010, the Community Writers’ Workshop transpired at ACU for six-week sessions. We used fliers and newspaper announcements to solicit applications from the community, each of which required a brief writing sample from the applicant. We received many responses from a wide array of citizens—from teenagers who were mostly interested in writing vampire novels to senior citizens writing memoirs and short stories. In fact, there were so many applicants during the first iteration that we held two workshops each Saturday, a decision we did not repeat the second time as we had a more reasonable number of applications. Writing Center employees answered questions and explained the workshop to parties who called or stopped by; they also collected applications and writing samples, routing them to Shelly for inspection and follow-up.

This is how the workshop operated: The Writing Center, not open for normal business on Saturday mornings, provided the suitable furnishings and environment for a writing workshop, including coffee and pastries. Although the facility is located in a Learning Commons space on campus, which is easy to find for visitors, it also has a more private back room, quietly sequestered from the goings-on of college student life. Shelly designed the event in a normal writing workshop fashion, with various participants assigned to bring multiple copies of their fiction or nonfiction each week, and others assigned to listen and provide feedback. The students also honed their craft and communication skills through fun, helpful exercises of all kinds, from starting with a given first sentence to writing a story in 10 sentences, each with a decreasing number of words. On the final Saturday, writers had the opportunity to read selections from their workshopped pieces for friends and family members.

Having a private room with an easily adaptable furniture arrangement provided a

space that mimicked a writer's workshop in a normal university setting. Yet it was clear that not being in an actual classroom provided some relief to participants. The Writing Center acted as a transitional space for them, and they began slowly to see themselves as writers. Additionally, they started to understand that the CWW, though a university-sponsored workshop, would listen, help and provide the space and tools to learn, no matter what age, background, socioeconomic status, career, or whether or not they had ever before stepped onto the university campus grounds.

Shelly approached this workshop as any other student workshop, calling the participants "students of life" or "students of writing." The first day, she explained what it means to be in a workshop, distributing a syllabus and describing the workshop's three parts: mini-lecture, short writing exercise, and workshop critique. Each workshop session is two hours long, and students are encouraged to attend each of the six Saturdays in order to gain the maximum benefit from the experience.

A productive tension comes out of offering a program that meets the writers "where they are," yet at the same time asks them, even from the first moment, to envision themselves as serious writers, on a college campus, taking a class from a university professor. We believe this productive tension, of being "in the world," and yet not entirely "of it," has been crucial for the program's success.

Yet Shelly found teaching in the workshop very different from teaching in her regular university classes, a pedagogical wrestling that has been both illuminating and disconcerting. In the Community Writer's Workshop, she focused more upon progress and confidence in writing than upon results, which, interestingly, aligns with writing center goals. Shelly channeled her pedagogy toward collaborating, fostering the creative process, and careful listening. The students often showed low self-esteem, and many expressed hesitancy at even being there. Shelly tried to allay their fears and create an atmosphere of hospitality, which is created by both the physical setting of the Writing Center and the structure of the workshop. Almost all of the students responded in an end-of-class survey to the sense of "ease" created in the workshop, noting that if they were nervous at the beginning, the *setting itself* made it a more successful experience. This seemed to be almost as important, if not more so, than the actual skills that they learned. A small group in a small place seemed to go a long way in overcoming the "gatekept" attitude.

In the workshop, Shelly's pedagogical method focused on writing exercises and short lectures to teach specific skills connected to voice, the writing process, and revision. Students experimented with varying voices for each piece of writing, and what was learned in the workshop helped them decide what voice they would use from multiple options. One of the most successful writing exercises required the students to take one story and tell it from the point of view of each person in the story. For example, in a story centering on a fight between a husband and wife over who would feed the dog, the husband, wife and even the dog would be called upon to tell his/her version of events. These suggestions proved helpful in changing entrenched writing habits and encouraged students to make thoughtful decisions about which perspective the writer spoke/wrote from. One student said this made him "work harder to flesh out the ideas."

Another lesson that made a lasting impression on students involved the power, importance and complexity of revision. As another student noted:

The most enduring thought is ‘revise, revise, revise.’ That’s been a difficult discipline for me to learn, especially if I’ve had other projects pending. On the other hand, I did find in our workshop notes the following admonition: *Watch out for self-critique leading to procrastination*. For some odd reason, I had an arrow pointing at the words and my own note: ‘make into a sign.’

Generally, hearing other people’s writing, getting to share and have some of their writing critiqued were listed as the most valuable experiences from the CWW.

Writing Center Mission

The mission of the ACU Writing Center reads, in part, “to provide an open teaching and learning environment for the collaborative discussion of writing so that people may become more critical and independent writers.” After outlining particular ways it supports the university writing curriculum, the mission goes on to say that we “offer assistance in all facets of the writing process to the entire community of Abilene, including area college and university students, working professionals, and the citizenry at large.” Cole had originally intended this language mostly to provide a welcome to the other universities in Abilene, and we do see some clients from that population, but we have rarely had people walk in with fiction, poetry, or screen-writing projects. When conceiving the Community Writers’ Workshop, Cole was as enthused by the prospect of expanding the Writing Center’s outreach as Shelly was with opening the fiction workshop to normally excluded writers. We both appreciated the motivation of the other to open a gate, but we each had our own places of professional fulfillment as the workshop unfolded.

Here, we would like to call attention to specific participant feedback to the workshops. What was really important for us to find out through these surveys was (1) what the strengths and limitations of the workshop were, through the eyes of the participants, and (2) how to better articulate the need for future workshops to those in the university and surrounding community. Our goal here is to summarize a few of the most interesting and insightful remarks that relate to the workshop’s function in the smaller community of writers and with the community at large.

On the final participants’ surveys, the students often remarked that part of the strength of the program is that it gave them the opportunity to connect with a community of writers in the Abilene area. These comments often illustrated that we were successful in overcoming the “gatekept” world of creative writing. In terms of how participants reacted to each other, two students said:

- I enjoyed learning that there are other aspiring writers in Abilene that have a passion for writing as well. This helps me to believe that great authors come from anywhere.
- I met a newspaper reporter, a high school student, a middle-aged college student, some writers and a geriatric historian—neat!

Other comments centered on how the participants interacted with each other:

- I enjoyed hearing comments of others about their own writing or mine.
- Everybody had something specific in mind, and it was all connected through writing.

These comments convince us that hierarchies did indeed collapse as Dawes and Friend put it, and that a new, hybrid space of learning opened up. Even after the workshop was over, productivity has continued. Shelly keeps in contact with students and encourages them to pursue their writing efforts. Since the last workshop in fall 2010, one student has landed several writing and photography opportunities on a newspaper, and another has even completed 82,000 words of his memoir.

One future goal will be to find ways to make these connections even more sustainable, to support writers beyond the six-week scope who might prefer isolation or have disabilities that shape their lifestyles. Several students hoped after attending the workshop that we might provide advice on getting their pieces published. We're hoping that we can develop new opportunities for growth and for partnerships between the English Department, the Writing Center, and other organizations.

Mitigating Boundaries

Our main goal in this essay was to argue that while university resources can ensure that some student writers enjoy an enriching experience in creative writing workshops, those resources are often limited and exclusive. Many potential creators of good writing cannot afford to get the "permission" a university course gives them to create such writing. They have never heard of creative writing workshops such as ours because so few exist. Moreover, their perception of such programs may be that they are not qualified participants—that such programs are designed for someone with a more valid "license" to write.

We want to overcome these perceptions. We have plans to continue and improve the CWW in semesters to come. For one thing, we are linking the CWW to university classes. Shelly will be revising undergraduate and graduate creating writing syllabi to incorporate a service learning component that includes the Community Writers Workshop. We plan for ACU students to mentor, facilitate, and learn from these workshops. With their participation, we can offer it at least once a semester. This summer, Shelly will research grants that provide funding and/or support for future workshops. We want to solidify the schedule of workshops, arrange for more reliable advertising, and bring in well-known guest speakers or workshop leaders.

We will also provide opportunities to publish participants' work. Like most liberal arts universities, ACU produces a literary magazine called *The Shinnery Review*. It publishes poetry, fiction, essays, and photography from contributors across campus. Under the guidance of faculty sponsors, a group of English majors solicits, vets, and edits this magazine, which is published annually, and whose audience includes current ACU students, alumni, visiting prospective students, and various others. We want to begin including selections from the CWW. Doing so would close the "publishing loop" for these participants, allowing them to see their hard work pay off in tangible ways that reinforce a sense of inclusion within the writing community. The placement of their pieces alongside

those of tuition-paying creative writers will salute the importance of all writing, within and outside the academic gates.

As Mary Ann Cain posits, the field of creative writing has the potential to make the academy a more public space that fosters “collective expression, deliberation and action” (232). Creative writing, as Cain, D. G. Myers, and Stanley Fish have all asserted, has always been more than just “big business.” While critics might point to the uselessness of the humanities in this regard, we’ve witnessed the challenge and potential power that creative writing generates in spaces for the community that might initially be seen as outside the parameters of the academy’s interests. As Cain states, “We can make room for other voices, other forms of expression and other viewpoints that the academic classroom might otherwise seem to disallow” (240). The community writer’s workshop at ACU seems to be a space that joins creative writers and writers in the academy in a way that is surprisingly useful, deliberate, and lived.



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OUT OF THE BOX

Outside the Box and Onto a Dusty Trail

Richard Leo Enos

I never realized that doing fieldwork in Greece at remote archaeological sites would include dealing with overly protective sheep dogs guarding their flocks, swatting away aggressive bees, and explaining to village leaders why examining their ancient inscriptions—housed in open sheds and covered with pigeon droppings—is important to the study of classical rhetoric! All such extra-curricular activities may be “out of the box” as normal research procedures, but they have become standard practice for discovering new evidence about ancient rhetoric at remote sites.¹⁹

For reasons that I do not fully understand, let alone hope to explain to others, I have always loved to study languages and antiquity, and to be a teacher. Further, I thrilled at the idea of traveling to, and discovering new evidence at, remote archaeological sites. As I tell my students, follow your passion, even if that passion falls outside of the box. Following one’s passion as a career may not be novel advice, nor does it seem to be out of the box, but I feel that following one’s own path is the best road to take . . . even if that path is a dusty trail on a remote island that leads to a little-studied archaeological site.

Doing research in classical rhetoric was far different when I began in the early 1970’s. Research and teaching in classical rhetoric traditionally meant following well established nineteenth-century procedures equating (and perpetuating) Victorian methods of textual analysis as the “proper” method for classical studies. From that perspective, research meant little more than close readings of already published and edited classical texts; in short, one could do the research in the comfort of an office and never have to travel farther than a trip to the library or (now) a keyboard cruise through the internet. I have always felt that one of our responsibilities was to discover new primary source material, evidence that was not limited to textual artifacts, and to complement traditional methods of philological analysis with other methodologies,



Enos displays Greek artifact.

¹⁹ Permission to use photograph granted by Carolyn Cruz, photographer.

ones sensitive to the object of study, such as those that are used in archaeology and epigraphy. I also believed that it was critical to leave the office and library and go to Greece, Italy, and Turkey for on-site work and study.

The value of thinking outside the box became dramatically clear to me in the summer of 1974 when I was a student at The American School of Classical Studies at Athens. On one of our field trips, we stopped briefly at a remote archaeological site, the Amphiareion of Oropos, a small sanctuary about 30 miles northwest of Athens in Boeotia. My professor, Fordyce Mitchell, pointed out an inscription that he thought I would be interested in seeing because it listed victors of literary and rhetorical contests. Previously, our study of Greek rhetoric had been limited essentially to Athens to such an extent that we were tempted to equate Greek rhetoric with Athenian rhetoric. While Athenians were clearly present among the list of victors, this stele also listed victors who came from several other Greek cities.

At that moment, I realized that a treasure of new evidence, such as this one inscription, could well be available for study and that Greek rhetoric had manifestations other than Athenian rhetoric. Such non-traditional evidence and methods of analysis can enrich and complement what we have come to know about classical rhetoric through traditional methods, if only we are willing to leave armchair-research, think out of the box, and travel the dusty trails to archaeological sites.

SPECIAL SECTION: Administration, Ethics, and Spirituality

Even Administrators Have Souls

Paul Puccio

Thursday afternoon. 2:00. You arrive at the monthly faculty meeting. You have just finished a class in which none of the students bothered to look up the meaning of a key word in the title of the text—and so none of them had a clue about what the text was actually about. Over the past few days and into the nights you have read and commented on dozens of student essays, many of which suffered from careless reading practices and rushed writing practices. A few students did not even hand in essays; one bluntly told you that he had too much other work to do. You still have one more class to teach this week, and you're not feeling particularly buoyant. From the looks on the faces of your colleagues arriving at the faculty meeting, their weeks haven't been much better.

You decide to be a good faculty member: you turn off your mobile phone; you resist the temptation to read student work or review a class plan; you give your full attention to the committee and administrative reports and even to the discussions that, in a whimsical moment, you visualize as mobius strips. When the academic dean approaches the podium, you sit up straight—a reflex from grammar school training and a means of sharpening your attentiveness. It's a good thing you do, because the dean announces that the faculty need to begin a discussion regarding a major change in academic policy. The discussion will begin at this faculty meeting, continue in department meetings, and come to a vote at the next faculty meeting. Some of your colleagues launch into the discussion immediately, but you are troubled by the sudden urgency of the policy change. The conversation taking place at the meeting is lively, but you are unconvinced of its depth.

Given that you are already at mid-term and that advising for registration begins soon, you wonder how careful the deliberations of the next month can be. With what thoroughness and with what range of information will faculty consider the context and implications of the policy? How many faculty will be able to devote the time they want to the conversation, in the midst of their other commitments? You feel as if you are being asked to rush an important decision, to work less carefully than you know is right. You fear that you will do no better than your students: skimming the relevant literature on the subject, rushing through the formulation of your own ideas, not having the time to research or consider important elements in the policy under discussion.

This is, sadly enough, not an unfamiliar experience for most faculty—and for many faculty it is a very disquieting one. Faculty who understand our work in higher education to have deeply spiritual and moral dimensions are particularly impatient with the exigencies with which administrators will frame decision-making processes. True, administrators sometimes impose such short-term deliberations on faculty because they themselves must answer to another administrator, an institutional board, or a state agency responsible for the exigency in the first place. In any case, faculty who regard contemplation as integral to decision-making often feel thwarted by abbreviated discussions, just-in-time management,

abrupt deadlines, and the product-orientation of many governance tasks.

If we are in the business (and I use that word ironically and unhappily) of helping our students change their lives, we may well insist on recognizing a spiritual dimension not only in teaching and advising, but in all aspects of how our institutions work. And spiritual work cannot be rushed. As theorists of spirituality in the workplace remind us, traditional change models may debate whether change should be bottom-up or top-down, but “a spiritual perspective would suggest that change should be inside-out” (Mohamed 102). Such change takes time; however you understand the soul, yours is not on Twitter, and 140 characters will not suffice when you need to listen to it. Our spiritual occupation is, as Sherry Hoppe sees it, “the search for depth and meaning in our entire being” (84). This is not an assignment to begin the night before it’s due.

As Mary Rose O’Reilley reminds us, “all great spiritual traditions advise us, one way and another, to *screw up*”; they involve inner journeys that are not strictly linear and that are rarely tidy (11). While many administrators acknowledge and even appreciate such journeys, the “decisiveness imperative” often trumps the habit of deliberation so fundamental to higher education and the humanities, especially. Patience and forgiveness are crucial elements of spiritual practice, but in the market-driven university or college they can be radical concepts. The dean who needs a policy change ratified in a month’s time will have limited patience, and while that dean may invite debate on such an issue, reflection is another matter entirely. Indeed, even other faculty members will welcome a lively discussion, but, for the most part, they want to see that discussion brought to a satisfying and unequivocal conclusion—to stamp “mission accomplished” on the subject and to move on. Those who wish to pursue all of the implications and contexts of an issue are frequently criticized as “belaboring the point.” Perhaps such conversations *are* wearying, and they are inevitably time-consuming, but the alternative is deeply troubling.

So, what’s a contemplative faculty member to do? My experience suggests that faculty who have leadership positions in a shared governance structure often work closely with administrators and can help them better understand the faculty desire for more deliberate decision-making. Moreover, faculty leaders who gain the trust of administrators can help those administrators better represent their own *ethos* to the faculty at large, resulting in a clarity of purpose under pressing circumstances that is not only sincere but also strategically effective. Faculty trained in rhetoric and writing have precisely those skills that enable effective communication, and communication challenges are responsible for many of the disconnections between faculty and administrators. If your faculty is anything like the faculty at my college, the call for transparency is practically a mantra. While, of course, there are times when administration and faculty have priorities that are unaligned and perhaps resistant to alignment, very often the source of contention is the absence of context—a context that might have been articulated by one or more administrators.

Needless to say, some administrators are lost causes. Several years ago, at a CCCC session entitled “When Bad Things Happen to Good Programs,” a presenter quoted a pronouncement made at her large Midwestern university: “The Dean’s Office does not think; it decides.” That is the kind of statement that makes many faculty lose any hope in a cooperative, let alone collaborative, form of governance. I would like to think that most administrators, however, are eager or at least willing, to reassert the collective mission, if not identity, that they share with faculty. The problem is that not all have the

skills to make those assertions very convincing. Faculty with rhetorical training can help administrators frame a discourse that establishes a communitarian vision, and one that might also articulate an *ethos* of caring and a culture of deliberation.

As you might have already gathered, I am not writing as an administrator myself. The closest I've come to administration at my college is coordinating the English literature program, a task that surely qualifies as "participatory leadership"—a position of influence without any claim to power (Milburn 94). Instead, I am speaking as a full-time faculty member who has had opportunities to work with college administrators. My experience has shown me that these conversations and collaborations between faculty and administrators have the potential to close the gap between them and to transform relationships, both individual and collective.

When I was the chair of my college's Faculty Council, I met regularly with our Vice-President of Academic Affairs (who is also our Dean of Faculty and an *ex officio* member of Faculty Council). Either one of us might have initiated these meetings, and they were for the most part cordial if not downright friendly. We discussed subjects such as how to move our new General Education proposal forward, how to motivate faculty to become engaged in college governance, and how to strengthen overall faculty morale. I was careful to describe our efforts as collaborative—the two of us sharing a goal but approaching it from different perspectives. Much of my advice focused on how she might present her own position.

Often I learned that some statement or request of hers (which had troubled or angered some of the faculty) arose from a situation out of her control. As Lee Bolman and Joan Gallos explain, "administrators . . . often find themselves in a turbulent and contested in-between zone, chronically buffeted by the conflicting concerns, viewpoints, and agendas of faculty, students, other administrators, governing boards, and a variety of important external constituents" (7). In those instances, the best suggestion I could offer was, "Why don't you just explain your predicament to the faculty? Why don't you let the faculty know that we're in this together and that you're as troubled as we are?"

Bolman and Gallos claim that academic leaders fumble for two reasons: (1) They see a limited or inaccurate picture—they miss important cues and clues in their environment—and as a result take the wrong course; and (2) they fail to take people along with them; they move too fast, too unilaterally, or without full appreciation of the power of cultural norms and traditions that enable others to buy into their plans (9-10).

Both of these are failings in connection; they result from an incapacity or an unwillingness to recognize the limits and risks of militant individualism. Administrators build their reputations by branding their initiatives, articulating a distinctive and personal vision for forward movement. While they do facilitate and enable the work of those units for which they are responsible, many parties (boards of trustees, presidents, other administrators at their own institutions, administrators at other institutions) understand their roles within the institutional structure as creative leaders. The individualism that feeds (and feeds off) such leadership can obstruct spiritual development, however. Hoppe reminds us that "the inner journey leads one first to a sense of self and meaning and then to an acknowledgement that connectedness is essential for wholeness in our lives" (87). Administrators disregard connectedness at their own peril—and arguably, at the peril of their institutions. Acting and talking as if one had a direct link with the Omnipotent does not make for true leadership.

On the other hand, recognizing one's links with other members of the community can result in the most authentic and effective kinds of administration.

The "wholeness" that follows from such deep connectedness is not uncomplicated or neat, and we as faculty need to admit to that as much as administrators need to. Recognizing the spiritual dimensions of our work does not simplify that work or our lives. If anything, the spiritual (or the "depth dimension," as Paul Tillich calls it) often brings an immeasurable mess into our lives. The poet Mark Doty identifies three habits of mind necessary for a spiritual outlook, and all three are not apt to make our lives easy: "pay acute attention . . . inhabit paradox . . . resist certainty" (O'Reilly 47).²⁰ These are not habits of mind to which most administrators will quickly warm, and so it is up to us to bring them around. We might ask our administrators, as Rilke asks, "Why do you want to shut out of your life any agitation, any pain, any melancholy, since you really do not know what these states are working upon you?" (70). Great wisdom comes that question, but perhaps you shouldn't ask it of an administrator until after you have tenure.

On the other hand, by modeling a spiritual outlook in all that we do, by encouraging this outlook in others, we introduce it into the cultures of our colleges and universities. Those of us who do work closely with administrators and who have established comparatively trusting relationships with them should use all of our own rhetorical skills to urge our leaders to "*Live* the questions," in Rilke's words. Am I being a cock-eyed optimist? Very likely, but a belief in the forward momentum of ideas and a confidence in the human potential for growth are themselves aspects of a spiritual outlook. We may as well turn to Rilke one last time and remind ourselves, as we remind our administrators that among the tasks that we take on, there "are difficult things with which we have been charged; almost everything serious is difficult, and everything is serious" (35). Despite rumors to the contrary, even administrators have souls—when we forget that, we sacrifice some of our own spirit.



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²⁰ The citation comes from a public address that Doty gave at O'Reilly's institution.

The Communally Focused Writing Center

Tom Truesdell

Writing center work is hard work. The seemingly infinite number of writing center metaphors attest to this. Writing center workers are tutors, teachers, coaches, consultants, peers, mentors, counselors, and advocates. They are expected to provide feedback for *any* type of writing at *any* stage of the writing process, and they do so by using minimalist, generalist, specialist, directive, and non-directive methods, often within a single session. We tell tutors to produce better writers, but we also train them to be concerned with the text. We tell them to ask the writer what to work on, but at the same time, we want them to assess writing so they can “lead” the writer to the points that really need to be addressed. I am convinced that all of these issues relate to the location of our tutors—or maybe I should say the non-location. Ultimately, writing center work is hard because tutors occupy what John Trimbur calls an academic “no-man’s land” in which they are neither peers nor tutors although that is what they are often called (23). We expect them to be experts in academic discourses while claiming their value lies in their “peeriness.” This paradox is not lost on them.

But they somehow manage to rise above all of this. To borrow from David Bartholomae, I am continually impressed by the patience and good will of our *tutors*. Every time they sit down with a student, they must negotiate their non-location, as well as the paradoxes, inconsistencies, and competing forces of academia. I am surprised more don’t throw their hands up. But they don’t. They listen. They advise. They console. They persevere. While I would like to think that they do so because of some theory I mentioned in training or a writing center article I had them read, many do so simply because they want to help other students do better in their classes. They do not care about methods or theory or professors or administrators.

Here’s a story about helping. Last fall, Luc²¹ came into my office dejected. Apparently, he was frustrated about two sociology courses he was taking with a particular professor. Unfortunately, I was not surprised by Luc’s struggles—while Luc was both intelligent and hard-working, his upbringing did not afford meaningful opportunities to acquire what James Gee calls the dominant secondary discourses that are closely connected to school and other institutions of power (37). Indeed, before coming to Northwestern, Luc had very little access to these discourses. He was born and raised in Haiti until age 12, when his father’s sudden, tragic murder forced him to move to Southern Florida to live with his mother and grandmother. Unfortunately, the education Luc received in the Miami public school system did not compensate for the poor education he received in Haiti. Complicating matters was his lack of exposure to English, particularly Standard English, at home. Gee states that children “from non-mainstream homes often do not get the opportunities to acquire dominant secondary discourses . . . due to their parent’s lack of access to these discourses” (37). This was clearly the case for Luc.

Still, Luc overcame these disadvantages, graduated from high school, and attended community college before transferring to our small, private Midwestern college to pursue

²¹ All student names have been changed to protect their identities.

a bachelor's degree in sociology. Luc faced many challenges as a student here. While his interpersonal skills and easygoing demeanor helped him socially adjust to our small, rural (and mostly white) campus, he struggled to acclimate to the college's academic culture—particularly regarding language. Luc not only had a hard time communicating with professors, he also struggled to both understand and engage the readings and assignments for many of his classes.

So, when a dejected Luc appeared in my office that afternoon, I had an idea about what was wrong. Luc desperately wanted to graduate so he could return to Florida to support his family. And I wanted him to do so. But for this to happen, he would need to pass at least three classes with this particular professor. Faced with this challenge, I asked Sarah, a talented and committed tutor, to meet with Luc several times a week. My charge to Sarah was two-fold: 1) help Luc understand his professors and the texts he was reading, and 2) help Luc communicate his ideas in standard, academic prose. Ultimately, Sarah was to follow Bartholomae's call to define and identify academic discourse conventions so they can be "written out, 'demystified' and taught" (635). Over the course of the next year, she did exactly that—she helped Luc communicate in academic discourse so he could pass his classes.

I cannot overstate what Sarah did for Luc. Because of her persistence and patience, Luc not only passed the classes in which he struggled, he also graduated with a degree in sociology, returning to Florida to help his family and contribute to his local community. Indeed, Luc's graduation was a celebration for everyone who knew (and helped) him—tutors, faculty, staff, and most important, his family. As an administrator facing potential budget cuts, I was ecstatic about his success. Each year, I submit data that quantitatively justify our funding, but now I had a convincing story that demonstrated the value of our Writing Center. Not only did Luc's experience show how the Writing Center contributed to student retention, his status as a minority student also showed how we contributed to the college's diversity initiative.

But I never shared Luc's story with administration. The more I thought about it, the more uncomfortable I became. Yes, we helped Luc pass his classes and graduate, but in doing so, we also reinforced the system that had labeled Luc as problematic and lacking. Perhaps Luc's story would help me secure funding for our center, but presenting it as a success story felt disingenuous, even unfair. Furthermore, I couldn't ignore the fact that sharing Luc's story would contribute to what Nancy Grimm refers to as a reductive characterization of writing center work:

Sometimes we unintentionally participate in that reduction when we use what Nancy Welch has called a 'Moses' story to illustrate the value of the writing center. In these stories, a writing center tutor 'leads his "somewhat lost tutees" into the promised land of discovery and understanding' (213). When we explain what writing centers offer by characterizing students as 'needing help,' we reinforce a restricted understanding of literacy that privileges a mainstream, standardized, monolingual norm and that overlooks the work interlocutors must do to construe context and negotiate meaning. (Grimm, "Writing Center Narratives" 7)

In the end, I was uncomfortable with telling a story in which a writing center tutor led a "lost tutee" into the promised land of discovery and understanding. I was uncomfortable

telling a story that presented Luc as a student who “needed helped.” Ultimately, I don’t know if Luc really understood that he was categorized and treated in this manner (if he did, his situation—and the lack of an influential advocate—clearly forced him to passively comply in the interest of graduating). But I do know that instead of challenging an academic culture that is not as meritocratic or fair as it claims to be, our center’s actions merely reinforced existing practice.

So, no, I did not share Luc’s story with administration, but I am sharing it now. I am not sharing it as a success story; I am sharing it because it complicates my understanding of writing center work. Grimm calls on us to use the stories that “keep us awake second-guessing our decisions” as conceptual change narratives that “offer richer accounts of literacy learning, particularly ones that put more emphasis on ways to mediate the structures that determine meaning and less emphasis on holding individuals accountable for figuring out the workings of literacy on their own” (Grimm, “Writing Center Narratives” 3-4). Luc’s story has kept me awake second guessing my decisions. While I cannot change what happened—nor am I sure how much I would change if I could—I believe that his story can function as a conceptual change narrative that complicates writing center approaches to literacy learning. More specifically, I hope his story can help us move beyond individually focused writing centers and toward more communally focused ones. This article, then, seeks to articulate how moving beyond an individual focus and towards a more communal one will help writing centers benefit the communities they are a part of.

(The Problem With) Individually Focused Writing Centers

At this point, I want to make it clear that I do not believe that Luc was harmed by our writing center. Luc benefitted in many ways from working with Sarah—he became a stronger writer and communicator, which served him well in his courses and his hometown community in Florida. But at the same time, I also believe that our center missed an opportunity to challenge and inform an academic system that categorized him at best as underprepared, and at worst, intellectually-lacking or lazy. I am convinced this missed opportunity was the result of our focus on helping Luc. Simply stated, we were so concerned with helping Luc pass his classes that we lost sight of ways in which we could challenge an academy that privileged a mainstream, standardized, and monolingual norm. Our student-centeredness prevented us from seeing how our perception of Luc—as someone who needed help assimilating to the system—kept us from acting in ways that could benefit the entire campus community.

Still, our center’s individual focus is consistent with writing center orthodoxy. As Grimm observes, “If writing centers across the country have any one theoretical underpinning in common, it is the emphasis on individualized instruction” (18). Indeed, the writing center community has consistently maintained that our value lies within our ability to provide individualized, one-to-one feedback that is not feasible in the classroom. Muriel Harris points out that in writing centers, “the uniqueness of each writer is acknowledged as well as the writer’s individual needs and the benefits the writer can gain from personal attention” (para. 7). Thus, if the object in any writing center is to make sure that writers—and not necessarily the text—are changed by instruction, then “any plan of action the tutor follows is going to be student-centered in the strictest sense

of that term” (North 77). This mindset has resulted in the promotion of non-directive, minimalist tutoring strategies that strive “to make the student the primary agent in the writing center session” (Brooks 220). To ensure that the writer is the primary agent in the session, writing centers have developed codes of behavior for tutors: “A tutor is *not* supposed to tell a student what to do, a tutor is *not* supposed to hold the pen, a tutor is *not* supposed to undermine a teacher by giving conflicting advice, a tutor is *not* supposed to proofread for a student” (Grimm, *Good Intentions*, 18-19). Writing centers have also developed theory that supports their individualized focus. Perhaps no theorist has been embraced more by the writing center community than Kenneth Bruffee, whose “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” is repeatedly cited as validation of writing center practice. Bruffee claims that writing teachers and tutors should engage “students in conversation at as many points in the writing process as possible” (210). Because the traditional classroom is hierarchical and not collaborative in nature, Bruffee argues that peer tutoring is valuable “because it provides the kind of social context in which normal discourse occurs: a community of knowledgeable peers” (212). In other words, peer tutoring provides an effective context for individual students to practice—and thus become proficient in—academic discourse.

At first glance, this emphasis on the individual seems both reasonable and beneficial. After all, writing centers do provide opportunities for individual conversation and feedback that are not readily feasible in the classroom. Indeed, as someone who teaches writing, I appreciate the space that writing centers provide—I simply do not have enough time to conference with my students as much as I would like. Moreover, the student-centered mindset has resulted in theories and strategies that encourage students to be active participants in writing center sessions. As Marilyn Cooper, I endorse the “emphasis on tutor’s responsiveness to students and on students as active writers” (98). But I am also beginning to realize that our focus on the individual can also be problematic. I say this because I believe it encourages us to do what we claim not do: focus on improving papers. For instance, as Cooper points out, while Brooks repeatedly asserts that tutors are not to focus on papers but instead on students and their writing, minimalist tutoring encourages tutees to focus on their papers, and thus “their individual papers remain the focus of writing center sessions” (99). Likewise, while Bruffee claims that peer tutoring fosters a collaborative learning environment, the focus still remains on helping individual students assimilate into the academy. Consequently, instead of the directive pedagogy used by many college professors, writing centers advocate a non-directive pedagogy to help students master and adhere to academic discourse conventions.

Unfortunately, this individual focus can impact tutors negatively. Yes, many tutors are initially attracted to the simplicity of a student-centered approach, but they quickly realize that problems arise when they rely upon a strategy (or a combination of strategies) that are designed to help individual writers. Anne DiPardo chronicles how Morgan, an African American tutor, becomes frustrated and discouraged when the collaborative strategies she learned in tutor training fail her in her semester-long interactions with Fannie, a Native American student. As Trimbur notes, many undergraduate tutors like Morgan initially have both hopes of helping students become better writers and doubts about their ability to do so. As such:

When their hopes are not realized, when tutoring sessions don't go well or when tutees' grades don't go up, tutors may start to blame the students they work with. More often, the tutors blame themselves, and their feelings of inadequacy can turn into a debilitating sense of guilt about not getting the job done. (Trimbur 22)

By focusing on the individual, then, we risk setting our tutors up for frustration and disappointment.

But what is even more concerning is how individually focused writing centers fail “to acknowledge the challenges of communicating in unfamiliar cultural and linguistic contexts” (Grimm, “Writing Center Narratives” 6). Indeed, in her discussion of DiPardo’s essay, Grimm claims that Morgan’s faithful adherence to her tutor training causes her to miss out on the “many chances to learn about Fanny’s out-of-school literacies, identities, and passions” (11). For Grimm, individually focused tutoring philosophies and strategies are problematic because they hold individuals responsible for meaning making and ignore competing discourses and shifting contexts. They suggest that “the primary problem of a tutorial is within an individual student when in fact the primary problem is moving between contexts where values and assumptions conflict yet operate tacitly, thus being unavailable for scrutiny” (11).

The Communally Focused Writing Center

Malea Powell has issues with an individually focused writing pedagogy because student writers are highly complex, socially positioned individuals, yet the “goal of writing instruction was still—is still—individual mastery, the measure of the teacher still determined by individual students who we have ‘helped’ achieve that mastery” (572). For Powell, a more attractive alternative is a communally focused pedagogy that theorizes “students in composition classrooms in the ways that my own scholarly work encourages members of the discipline to theorize themselves and their practices—as a collective of connected humans, a community allied for a common purpose” (572). Whereas an individually focused pedagogy is designed to benefit the institutions in which we work, a communally focused pedagogy is “arranged for the benefit of all who reside within whatever imagined community is operational within the particular collective space where the ‘teaching’ is being enacted” (573).

While Powell’s discussion addresses the writing classroom, I believe her observations can benefit writing centers and the communities we serve. Writing center professionals also recognize the complex, social positions of the students that come through our doors, but most of what we do is still geared towards helping individual students master the language of the academy. Moreover, because our individually focused pedagogy is designed to benefit the institutions we are a part of, our work is often characterized in reductive ways, and we find ourselves continuously fighting our role as a service entity in the same way that composition courses struggle with their status as service courses. For us to move beyond the individual, then, I believe we must strive to realize a more communally focused *writing center*. Powell outlines three main distinctions between a communally and individually focused writing pedagogy. What follows is a discussion of those distinctions in a writing center context.

1. *A communally focused [writing center] sacrifices the needs of the individual for the needs of the whole, whereas an individually focused [writing center] attends to the needs of the individual at the expense of the whole (Powell 573).*

After sharing this statement with my staff, one of my tutors bluntly said, “So, what, we’re just supposed to say to the writer, ‘I’m sorry, but you’re gonna have to sacrifice your grade for the benefit of the team.’ I mean, what does this exactly mean for me when I tutor?” My tutors love to ask what “all of this” means for them when they tutor, but in this case, I could appreciate her frustration. After all, who are we, as tutors and directors, to determine what individual needs must be sacrificed for the greater good? Where do we begin? I must admit that as an educated white male who benefitted from a mainstream, middle-class upbringing, I would be very uncomfortable asking Luc to do something that would jeopardize his chances of graduating. What gives me the authority to make that judgment?

Michael Pemberton believes this dilemma is “at the heart of the ethics of what we do in writing centers” (261). In the end, as tutors or writing center directors, we must decide whether we should focus on supporting or critiquing the academic system. Pemberton states that even if we choose to navigate some middle course, making this decision requires us to “interrogate our personal politics, our theoretical beliefs, our systems of value, and our philosophies of teaching” (261). Ultimately, he writes, these issues are “deeply rooted in our sense of who we are and what we think teaching (and tutoring) is all about” (261). Pemberton’s use of first person plural pronouns is telling, for a communally focused writing center cannot answer these questions individually. After all, determining *our* value systems and philosophies is a lot different than determining *my* value systems and teaching philosophies.

As I read Pemberton’s words, I can’t stop thinking of something I wrote several years ago: “If writing centers want to be truly oppositional to the academy, they must encourage transgression by promoting abnormal discourse. However, if writing centers continue to encourage conformity to normal discourse—regardless of the method—they risk stifling many marginalized, oppositional voices” (Truesdell). Sounds good, but then I follow with this: “Granted, after much consideration and debate . . . the writing center community as a whole may decide not to support such dissent or resistance, which is fine—like other discourse communities, the academy must adhere to some standards and thus inherently practice some degree of exclusion” (Truesdell). At the time, I was uncomfortable adding the second passage, but I did so because I wanted to give myself an out. Why did I need an out? Well, to be honest, because I needed a job, and I did not want to publish something that would cause potential employers to hesitate from hiring me. I was clearly individually focused, putting my employment needs before the needs of the whole. Likewise, I was giving writing centers who wished not to dissent or resist a reason to continue doing so instead of considering their responsibility to the entire writing center community and the students we serve.

Of course, writing an article is different from actually working with a student in the writing center. What would a communally focused writing center look like in this context? Well, what if we, for instance, actually *encouraged* tutors and students to critique writing assignments? Clear contradictions to current writing center orthodoxy arise—common

practice advises tutors not to “criticize or in any way try to subvert teachers’ assignments” (Cooper 102). In fact, our center’s tutor handbook states that tutors should “never make a negative remark about an instructor.” If a student complains about an assignment or professor, we tell tutors to be diplomatic and never take sides. Why do we do this? I believe it is because we are individually focused. After all, discouraging criticism attends to the individual needs of the professor *and* writing center—we support the professors, and they, in turn, support us. A communally focused writing center, however, would benefit everyone by encouraging critical readings that help identify why “teachers’ ideas of what [students] need to learn sometimes conflict with what [students] think they need to learn and how recognizing these conflicts can lead to change as well as to accommodation” (Cooper 109). In other words—and this point is essential—the critiques would not be baseless complaining; instead, students and tutors would work together to identify why a particular assignment may be problematic. And then, just as important, they would have conversations with faculty about how the assignment could improve.

An excellent example of how critical readings could benefit the community concerns academic discursive practices. As Patricia Bizzell notes, new, alternative discourses are gaining acceptance in the academy because they “allow their practitioners to do intellectual work in ways they could not if confined to traditional academic discourse . . . These new discourses enable scholarship to take account of new variables, to explore new methods, and to communicate findings in new venues” (74). Unfortunately, many professors still insist that their students adhere to traditional academic conventions and write in an assertive, impersonal, and supposedly objective voice. In a communal writing center, however, both student and tutor would work together to identify what happens when a professor requires students to write in this way. They could identify what is being assimilated or lost; they could also identify what would be gained by using other discursive resources. Then, after having this discussion, both the student and tutor could meet with the professor and dialogue about discourse expectations. Regardless of the outcome of this conversation, the entire academic community would benefit from these discussions. Bizzell notes that “we should be welcoming, not resisting, the advent of diverse forms of academic discourse, and encouraging our students to bring all their discursive resources to bear on the intellectual challenges of the academic discipline” (83). Discussions of academic discourse would benefit the entire academy by promoting a more inclusive academic discourse, and it would benefit writing centers by helping us move beyond individually focused service roles.

So how would this hypothetically play out in Luc’s situation? Here’s an example: Luc wanted to write about his personal experiences as a Haitian immigrant for several assignments, but he thought he could not do so because the research paper genre prohibited “personal” writing. More specifically, Luc believed that he was supposed to write research papers about topics that were meaningful to the professor, but not necessarily to him as a student. Luc did not believe he could write in first person either, or include testimonies of family members. Ultimately, for Luc, writing for college meant removing himself from the topic as much as possible and only including research that could be found through ERIC, Academic Search Premier, or any other library database. Sarah apparently operated under the same assumptions.

But what if this was not the case? What if Luc’s sociology professor, for instance,

had never considered that Luc might want to write about his experiences and include testimony from his relatives and friends? What if Sarah, in looking for ways to make writing a more meaningful experience for Luc, decided to ask the professor if this was possible, or accompanied Luc to a meeting with the professor to ask if it was possible? In a communally focused writing center, Sarah would have felt empowered to suggest that she, Luc, and the professor discuss and negotiate the conventions of the assignment in a way in which all would benefit from learning Luc's perspective, thus enabling important personal experiences to be shared and considered.

2. *A communally focused [writing center] requires that [tutors] act as guides and elders, subsuming their own needs for the needs of the whole; an individually focused [writing center] pretends to community by claiming that the [tutor] has "given up" his or her authority in the [session] but, in making that claim, instantiates his or her authority even more firmly, operating within the same tired definition of power relations that race politics in the United States have relied on for decades—the belief that it is possible for folks in power to simply relinquish that power through the expression of individual will (Powell 573).*

A communally focused writing center is transparent. There are no hidden agendas. There is no posing or posturing. In a communally focused writing center, tutors acknowledge the experiences and insights they have, and they share those experiences and insights with students. Conversely, they are also transparent about what they do not know, and they listen to the experiences and insights of the students. Powell writes that teaching is a "responsibility, not an opportunity for me to show you how cool I am by pretending to waive the authority that the institution grants me . . . not an opportunity for me to pretend not to have the experiences that led the editors of this volume to ask me to compose this piece . . . and not an opportunity for me to pretend to a wisdom that I don't believe that I have" (578). Tutoring is also a responsibility, not an opportunity for tutors to withhold important information for students in the name of making better writers and not necessarily better papers. It is also not an opportunity for tutors to pretend that they necessarily know what is wrong with a paper or a student's writing style. Instead, communal writing centers are places of transparency where everyone shares what they do and do not know. They are places of convergence where power and authority—between tutor and student, student and professor, and tutor and professor—are acknowledged and ultimately negotiated. For instance, although they know that institutions coerce them in writing classes, both students and tutors in an individually focused writing center will "respond—quite rationally—by trying to make the papers match as perfectly as possible the specifications of assignments while at the same time—quite irrationally—trying to believe that in doing this students are asserting ownership over their texts and learning to write" (Cooper 102). A communally based writing center, however, would recognize this coercion and explore what could be done about it.

Perhaps this distinction can be better understood in terms of agency. I spend a lot of time talking with students and tutors about agency: what it is, exactly, and how it can be realized. For the most part, I am told that a prerequisite to agency is an understanding of how the system works. Once you have an understanding, students say, you can begin to

challenge, and hopefully influence, the system. Many students compare it to a game—once they know the rules, they can bend or break the rules in ways they see fit. And in many ways, this analogy makes sense. As Victor Villanueva asks, if learning Standard English was the key to parity, why does parity continue to elude so many? (115). Clearly, more needs to be done to help students challenge the system. But these challenges will not happen unless the system, rules, and power distribution are acknowledged and made transparent to everyone. As Gerald Graff writes, demystifying the academy means “changing the club itself as much as it means changing students” (25). Whereas an individually focused writing center ignores issues of power and authority to help a student become a better writer, a communally focused writing center will acknowledge and address power structures that influence and inhibit both students and texts.

One immediate way to do this is by allowing for more directive methodologies in writing center work. In the beginning of this essay, I discussed how writing center orthodoxy encourages tutors to have positive, confidence-building, collaborative exchanges with writers. In other words, a tutor is not supposed to be an editor who simply tells the writer what is wrong with a paper and how to fix it; instead, the tutor should seek to foster a collaborative learning experience in which both parties equally contribute to what Kenneth Bruffee terms the “conversation of mankind.” Citing Michael Oakeshott and Lev Vygotsky’s claims that thought is actually internalized conversation, Bruffee argues that people learn to think by learning to talk. Therefore, improved conversation is imperative to improved thought (209). For Bruffee, writing is a displaced form of conversation—thought is internalized conversation, while writing is thought re-externalized. Because of this, writers should engage in conversation as much as possible. If they are involved in conversation, Bruffee argues that writers will be able to become masters of normal discourse, and thus participate—understand and be understood—in the conversation of particular knowledge communities in both the academic and professional world.

Still, Bruffee does not believe the traditional classroom effectively helps students become members of knowledge communities because it is hierarchical, and not collaborative, in nature. Knowledge is not created by a community of peers in the classroom, but it is instead handed down to students from the teacher. Bruffee states that the main reason for this hierarchical framework is teacher distrust of class discussion—he claims that teachers do not create an environment where knowledge is created through peer conversation: “What we call discussion is more often than not an adversarial activity pitting individual against individual in an effort to assert what one literary critic has called ‘will to power over the text,’ if not over each other” (213). This is why Bruffee is such a strong proponent of peer tutoring. Ideally, peer tutoring models the conversation of knowledge communities by providing a place where all members participate and contribute equally.

Many writing center theorists have embraced Bruffee’s argument and claimed that a minimalist tutoring approach is the best way to create this peer conversation. In minimalist tutoring, tutors are not teachers who simply pass down information by telling writers how to fix their papers; they instead are equals who make the writer do as much of the thinking and work as possible. Jeff Brooks states that a writer who passively receives knowledge from a tutor “may leave with an improved paper, but he will not have learned much” (220). Similarly, Evelyn Ashton-Jones claims that the best way for tutors to encourage conversation is to “talk in open-ended, exploratory ways and not

in directive, imperative, restrictive modes” (32). For proponents of minimalist tutoring, open-ended, non-directive questions result in a conversational session that helps writers become masters of normal discourse.

While current writing center orthodoxy tends to favor a minimalist approach, some theorists do express reservations with this methodology. Linda Shamoon and Deborah Burns, for example, believe that a directive approach can be just as effective, if not more so, than a non-directive approach because it shows or models the normal discourse for the writer. In other words, once writers are shown how to do something, they will be able to express themselves more effectively because they better understand the discourse expectations of a knowledge community:

Directive tutoring displays rhetorical processes in action. When a tutor redrafts problematic portions of a text for a student, the changes usually strengthen the disciplinary argument and improve the connection to current conversation in the discipline Thus, directive tutoring provides interpretive options for students when none seem available, and it unmasks the system of argumentation at work within a discipline. (237)

Indeed, other writing center theorists have argued for a more inclusive methodology that moves beyond the directive/non-directive dichotomy. Building on Cooper’s claims that non-directive tutoring results in skills-focused, text-based sessions, several writing center scholars have argued that adherence to non-directive methodologies“ can be interpreted to sanction withholding necessary cultural and linguistic information from students whose experiences and background do not match the assumptions teachers make about students” (Grimm, “Attending” 10). As Pemberton points out, “all writing tasks operate under constraints, and the best tutors will help students to understand what those constraints are and how they can be bent and molded” (268). A communally focused writing center, then, will use both directive and non-directive methods to help writers understand those constraints and, just as important, identify ways in which they can be bent and molded.

3. *A communally focused [writing center] is rooted in place in such a way that discussions of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, orientations, ableness [sic], etc. will always already be part of the community’s understandings of itself and of what it means to attend to the good of the whole; an individually focused [writing center] denies place by positioning difference as its own special category of need—forcing us into a fragmented and tokenized understanding of difference which pits “us” against “them” and defines “the good of the whole” as “to the advantages of the majority” (Powell 573-574).*

I believe tutor training is one of the most difficult tasks writing center administrators are expected to perform. But not for reasons most people assume. Yes, it is difficult to find a time where every tutor is able to meet. And yes it is often difficult to address “everything” in one or two training sessions. In fact, after being hired as a director, I proposed offering a for-credit tutor training course for these very reasons. Part of my rationale was that such a course would result in a more effective tutoring staff that was better capable of helping

the myriad of students that come to the writing center, particularly those with their own “special category of need.” Fittingly, the initial course syllabus was structured according to distinct categories: minimalist tutoring, directive tutoring, higher order concerns, lower order concerns, students with disabilities, ESL students, strong writers, poor writers, technology, etc.

A communally focused writing center, however, would not view tutor training as a means to promote specific tutoring strategies or to show tutors how to be more effective in dealing with students or issues that belong to a predetermined category. Instead, a communally focused writing center would resist categorization and use training to encourage students to consider contexts. For instance, instead of learning about how to help non-native English speakers, tutors would be encouraged to “think about why they come and what qualifies us to work with them” (Grimm, *Good Intentions* p. xii). Grimm points out that more than any specific strategy, tutors need to learn how to identify moments where ideologies collide: “They need to learn how to slow down and consider the stakeholders. What is the context? What’s going on in this context? Whose is to gain, and who is to lose in this situation? And they need to recognize when someone is being forced to compromise” (Telephone Interview).

Of course, it is difficult to consider contexts and stakeholders in a homogenous writing center. A communally focused writing center, then, would consist of individuals whose experiences and perspectives help ensure that issues of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, orientations, and ability indeed become part of the community’s understanding of itself. Indeed, staff diversity has been a key focus of the recent Anti-Racist movement in the writing center community. Frankie Condon, for instance, challenges writing center administrators “to insure that the diversity of our staff is, at a minimum, proportionately representative of the diversity of our campuses” (27). She also challenges administrators to restructure their training and curriculum to include “writing center scholarship that addresses race and racism, as well as other forms of oppression that intersect and often overlap with racism” (27). Condon specifically recommends that tutors be familiar with the multicultural work of individuals such as Grimm, Nancy Barron, Anis Bawarshi, Stephanie Peklowski, Harry Denny, Beth Godbee, and Moira Ozias. Condon furthers this argument in when she joins Anne Geller, Michele Eodice, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth Boquet in speculating about “what new directions a discussion of literacy might take in your staff education course when you have tutors who speak Spanish at home, or when one of your tutors reveals his anger when his two home languages—Creole and Black English—are obliterated by ‘standard’ English” (54). For Condon and the other authors, a diverse writing center staff contributes to anti-racist work by offering the opportunity to complicate assumptions of literacy and language in the academy. Indeed, as helpful as Sarah was, I wonder how her sessions of Luc would have differed if she had not been a white, middle-class student. Would a tutor from an underrepresented population have been more likely to identify with Luc’s frustrations? Would Luc have been more likely to communicate his frustrations with such a tutor? Would the professor have been more likely to negotiate assignments if such a tutor and Luc had chosen to talk with him?

I cannot answer these questions with any certainty because most of the tutors in our center are like Sarah; that is, they are well-intentioned, white, and middle-class—as in most of the centers where I have worked. For a variety of reasons, achieving staff diversity

is not an easy task. Not only are many institutions predominately white, potential tutors from underrepresented populations at times resist recruitment efforts because they do not want to be diversity tokens. As Grimm notes, “Undergraduates today are less cynical and more willing to consider other alternatives, but you have to convince them that they are not tokens. You have to convince them that you really want to transform or change” (Telephone Interview). As such, a communally focused writing center would work to ensure that tutors from underrepresented populations are not tokens. These centers examine what increased staff diversity means for the writing center, and even more importantly, the tutors that work in them.

Take, for instance, the case of writing tutors who are who are non-native English speakers (NNES). Unfortunately, faculty and students at times resist working with NNES writing tutors because of ill-informed stereotypes. A communally focused writing center would respond to this resistance by pointing out that there are approximately three times as many NNES (1 billion) as there are native English speakers (350 million) worldwide (Jenkins, “Exploring Attitudes,” 15-16). These centers would also reference “global-Englishes” scholarship that suggests as the numbers of NNES continue to grow, NNES will have an advantage over NES because they are more flexible and resourceful in their English speaking abilities (see Jenkins, *World Englishes*; Kachru and Nelson). Still, a dearth of research hampers us from knowing the experiences of NNES writing tutors. Most research that does exist consists of first-person, self-reflective articles written by NNES tutors. For instance, in a column written for the *NNES Newsletter*, Pisarn Chamcharatsri discusses how an ESL writer’s assumption that he was an “American-Born Chinese” (ABC) made him question whether or not he should be proud of being misperceived as a NES. He also wonders:

. . . how different it might have been if that international student had known prior to the consultation that I was a nonnative English speaker. How would the tutoring session have gone differently? What made the student believe that I could be an ABC? Was it my “accent”? Was it my role as a writing tutor? Was it the way I responded to his writing? I am still left with lingering confusions and questions, which, I now realize, have not been answered after all this time.

Questions like the ones Chamcharatsri asks are important for both NNES writing tutors and the writing community, and therefore, they need to be explored further. Potential for research also extends beyond the perspectives of NNES writing tutors. For instance, research could examine what actually happens in sessions where a NNES tutors work with ESL and non-ESL writers, or how the presence of NNES tutors affects staff dynamics. Research could explore the administrative implications of a more linguistically diverse staff, whether that includes training or relationships with other institutional constituencies. Potential research questions might include:

- Does the language status of the tutor and/or student affect what occurs in a session?
- How does tutoring affect NNES tutors’ self-perception regarding their own linguistic abilities and/or identity?
- Does working with a NNES tutor change the language attitudes of NES students?
- How does the employment of NNES writing tutors affect staff dynamics? How do

NNES and NES writing tutors interact?

- Does the presence of NNEST writing tutors affect the language attitudes of other NES tutors?
- How does the employment of NNEST writing tutors affect the way the writing center is perceived on campus?
- Are students less or more likely to come to a center that employs NNEST tutors?
- Do directors need to train and support NNEST tutors differently from NES tutors?

In the end, I believe that Grimm's call for writing centers to seek more linguistically diverse staffs is commendable. But even if writing centers do not actively recruit NNEST tutors, data suggests that they will continue to join center staffs in increasing numbers. As such, the writing center community has a responsibility to begin examining what this demographic shift will mean for our staffs, the students who visit our centers, the institutions that support us, and most importantly, the NNEST tutors themselves. Such research may be difficult and may lead to difficult findings, but doing so would be a priority for a communally focused writing center because doing so would further the good of *all* its constituents.

Moving Beyond the Individual

Although she did not use a specific label, Nancy Grimm's keynote address of the joint 2008 conference of the International Writing Centers Association and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing included a description of a communally focused writing center:

The work of this center is visible to all who pass through the hallways . . . The staff is large and diverse, a mix of many different disciplines and racial and cultural identities. Distinctions between higher and lower order concerns are not an issue in this writing center; writing coaches respond to queries that students bring, and these queries are as likely to focus on context, on multimodal texts, on oral presentations, or on knowledge-management challenges in a lecture-based course as they are to focus on a draft being revised for an English class. The students who work in the writing center are often students who used the writing center, particularly during their first two years in college when they were negotiating transitions between home literacies and academic literacies and coming to understand the power relations of the university. In this writing center, communication problems are understood as emerging from competing contexts with implicit expectations about appropriate genres, styles, and discourses rather than from a lack within students or from a failure of their previous schooling. Students are understood as shuttling back and forth between contexts and developing the competencies to engage productively in the power relations of these contexts. Writing coaches are the experienced travelers who can make explicit the often unspoken conventions, values, styles, and assumptions of competing discourses. ("Conceptual Frameworks" 13-14)

As I consider this description, I can't help but wonder if Luc would have been better served if he had visited this type of center. Or perhaps I should instead wonder if we all would have been better served if Luc had visited this type of center. My inclination is to say yes. I can't stop thinking about what may have happened—or what changes may have

occurred—if he had had the opportunity to do so.

I began this essay by stating that writing center work is hard work. It is. And it will likely be even harder work if we pursue a communally focused writing center. After all, doing so requires us to *continually* examine what we do and *continually* ask ourselves if our actions benefit the institutions in which we work. Are we attending to the needs of individuals at the expense of the whole, or are we sacrificing the needs of the individual for the needs of the whole? These are difficult, complex questions. And to start answering them, we need to pay attention to more stories like Luc's. I echo Grimm's claim that the entire writing center community will benefit from such stories that complicate and make us uncomfortable.

This essay, then, is not a call for an easier approach to writing center work. It is also not an endorsement of a particular method, strategy, or policy, or theory. It is, however, a call for us to do more than help the person next to us. We need to start thinking about the stakeholders in our communities and recognize our responsibility to move beyond the individual.



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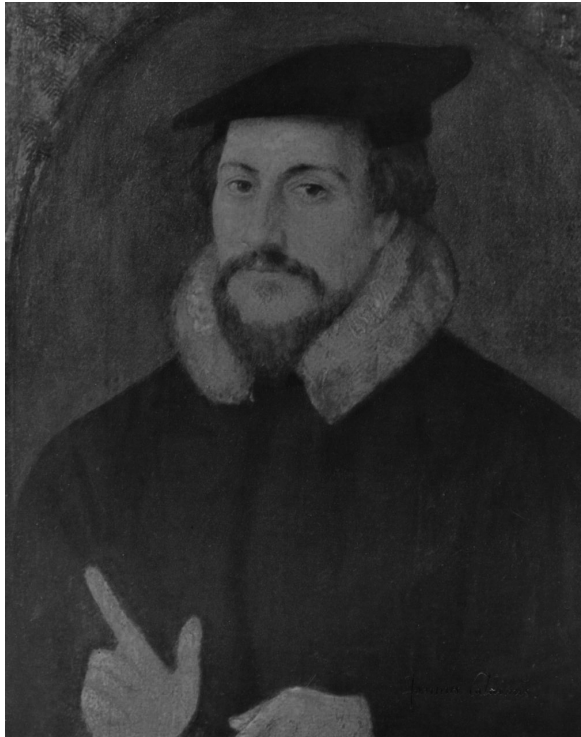
Renovating My Academic Administration

Elizabeth Vander Lei

Calvin College's Fine Arts Center has been my academic home for a very long time. In this building, as an undergraduate, I first imagined a career in academia—as a professor, of course, not as an academic administrator. In the Fine Arts Center I now teach writing courses, direct the first-year writing program, and co-chair the English Department, the latter job landing me on the committee that planned and supervised a major renovation of the building. In a hard hat and steel-toed shoes, I entered the construction site to attend meetings of the committee. Each meeting began with a site tour. Plastic sheeting partitioned the building into work areas; wires dangled from dark recesses high overhead; sawhorses and caution tape barricaded hallways where the floor dropped away and the roof opened to the sky.

On the first tour, I was surprised to encounter a portrait of John Calvin still hanging where it had when I was an undergraduate, a permanent feature of the building, it seems, as no one can remember a time before the portrait hung in that spot. Why had the portrait been left behind? A cheap reproduction of a mediocre painting, the portrait had little monetary value, but it must have been at least as valuable as the office trash cans that were put into storage. At Calvin College, of all places, a portrait of John Calvin is unlikely to have been forgotten.

Perhaps it remained as a bit of Protestant goading—what worker could slack off under Calvin's watchful gaze? Or maybe the opportunity for irony was just too great: where would a religious reformer feel more at home than in the middle of a renovation? After all, tangled in the etymology of the word "renovate" are mentions of spiritual rebirth and the distinctively Christian emphasis on the new reinvigorating the old, an emphasis evident in the relationship of the Old and New Testaments and certainly in Protestantism itself, with its radical definition of "church" flouting centuries of Roman Catholic theology and ecclesiastical practice.



Encountering a renovated Calvin?

The portrait itself seems to be an attempted renovation of Calvin's image. Because John Calvin did not sit for painters until late in his life, and then infrequently, painters have relied on written descriptions of Calvin, descriptions that record his difficult personality, controversial leadership style, and frequent bouts of illness. Consequently, most portraits of Calvin border on caricature; many depict Calvin in profile, perhaps better to emphasize the length of his sharp nose, the sickly slackness in his cheeks, the thinness of his hair and beard, and certainly the depth of his frown. In the portrait hanging in the construction site, however, Calvin faces the viewer, a young man with soft features, a slight smile, and warm, questioning eyes. Calvin's right hand points heavenward, as if he were teaching or preaching, and the kindness of his visage makes me want to listen. I've taken the memory of this portrait hanging amid construction chaos as a metaphor for the influence of my religious faith on my administrative work, a welcome remedy for a problem that vexed me as I began working on this essay: how could I fairly represent spiritual influences that are both subtle and pervasive, influences that are new and those that have always been a part of my life?

I continue to practice the Reformed Christianity of my family, a faith tradition of theologies and cultural practices brought to North America by nineteenth-century Dutch immigrants, a faith tradition that emphasizes Christian schooling to affirm the common grace evident in natural world and human culture even as it seeks to "redeem" them both. I grew up in a community founded by those immigrants; I graduated from one of those schools. And I am an academic administrator at a college that is shaped by the Dutch immigrant experience and Reformed Christian theology. In ways that surprise and delight me, the theologies and cultural practices of this staid immigrant community rejuvenate my approach to academic administration.

Laboring to describe this rejuvenation, I have found value in James Paul Gee's concept of figured worlds. Gee describes a figured world as "a picture of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical or normal" (71). Similar in function to major premises or warrants (though more material and more dramatic), these pictures of what is normal shape human action, according to Gee, by helping "people go on about the business of life when one is not allowed the time to think through and research everything before acting" (70). Of course, while figured worlds help people act efficiently, they can also create significant problems. They emphasize patterns and consistencies at the expense of exceptions, outliers, and contradictions; consequently, they can nourish generalizations and stereotypes. They dehistoricize and decontextualize practices and beliefs, turning particulars from one historical period or a dominant cultural group into norms that should seem to apply to all people for all time (88). As a result, according to Gee, "the taken-for-granted nature of the figured world . . . often stands in the way of change. Reforms just do not seem 'normal' or 'right' or 'the way things should be'" (Gee 72).

Academic administrators are painfully aware of how difficult it can be to change the habits and assumptions of students, faculty, legislators, and the public. For example, Linda Adler-Kassner opens *The Activist WPA* by describing the long history of "alarmist stories about student writers or college-level writing," stories that draw on an intransigent figured world of higher education being populated by students of declining abilities and faculty of increasing ineptitude (1). Although writing program administrators have organized into a national group (the Council of Writing Program Administrators) and

sponsored research that demonstrates the fallacy of such presumptions, we have been unable to reform these attitudes.

Academic administrators are probably less aware of what they themselves assume to be normal, a situation that Donald Hall attempts to remedy with his a fourteen-step "guide on how to destroy a department" (539). For example, in his second step, Hall recommends that English department chairs base their relationship with the dean on the problematic but pervasive figured world of academic administrators as "mindless, soulless bureaucrats; they are failed scholars and teachers, who find administration an easy way to puff themselves up with self-importance. Deans and provosts are especially pathetic" (540). Of course, none of us want to imagine ourselves as one of *those* department chairs, but if we are honest, we might be able to admit to how often we characterize other administrators this way.

Despite the intransigence of figured worlds, Gee suggest that they can be altered, that renovation *is* possible: "as society changes, what people take as typical can and does change. Figured worlds are not static" (71). In my own field of rhetoric and composition, scholarly interest in the relationship of religious faith and student writing has begun to challenge the idea of a strict separation of "church" and "state," a figured world in which religious faith is categorized as "church" and "private," something to be eradicated from "public" student writing at the university, which is categorized as "state." Elsewhere, I have argued that strict sequestration is impossible, that a person's religious faith shapes everything she does (see, for example, "Coming"). As I drafted those arguments, a famous dictum of Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian who influenced Reformed Christianity in America, caromed around in the back of my mind: "Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'" (488). Kuyper's figured world of Jesus Christ as ruler of all aspects of human existence challenges the dominant image of a thick wall separating "church" and "state." While the separation of church and state may still dominate the thinking of teachers of writing and writing program administrators, some scholars have seen the alteration of this figured world as an opportunity to examine the relationship of religious faith and writing program administration (see Hansen; Vander Lei and Fitzgerald).

Furthermore, Gee demonstrates that people hold allegiances to multiple figured worlds simultaneously, allowing people to experience a sense of well-being when figured worlds coalesce: for example, when a writing program administrator, in an interview for a dean's position, describes the hard work she invested into a successful writing program, she enacts a coordinated set of typically American figured worlds: 1) hard work produces success, 2) a program's success is the personal achievement of its administrator, and 3) the success of the administrator should be rewarded by promotion (see Gee 88). For me, "hard work produces success" often converges with Jesus' parable of a widow who appeals to an uncaring judge so persistently that he eventually relents and rules justly (Matthew 18: 1-8). The convergence of these figured worlds conspires to make me something like relentless in my petitions to the dean for causes I believe to be just. Figured worlds collide, too, producing cognitive dissonance. When a dean at a neighboring college removed the administrator of a long-standing, successful academic program, I became frustrated, no doubt in part because the dean violated my pet figured world of "hard work produces

success.” Were the dean to argue that he did so to save the university money, for example, I would feel some cognitive dissonance because another of my pet figured worlds is “frugality is good.” And, of course, nothing more than a quick consultation of Wikipedia tells the story of the cognitive dissonance I experience when I rely on Abraham Kuyper’s theology, a theology that produces both a generative “square inch” depiction of common grace for me even as it was twisted by Afrikaners into support for loathsome Apartheid policies.

Gee argues that people take up figured worlds from “books and other media, and in knowledge we can gain from what other people say and do, and in what we can infer from various social practices around us” (81), to the extent that people can be “colonized’ by a good many figured worlds that have come to us without much reflection on our part about how well they fit our interests or serve us in the world” (89-90). Imagining academic administration as building renovation, I follow (and was undoubtedly shaped by) metaphors that others have used to describe administering writing programs—kitchen cooks, plate twirlers, troubadours, for example—images of chaos, and performance. To what extent do these images frame how we imagine our work? While the metaphor of building renovation shares some features with other metaphors for academic administration, I prefer it to the others because it also emphasizes planning, collaboration, and resilience. And as anyone who has been displaced by a building renovation can attest, building renovation is an exacting process, well-described by Laura Micche as “slow agency.” Micche emphasizes the cooperation of disparate people and activities: “agency is relational. It entails a conglomeration of resources and activities that exceed a single agent but engulf her in a field of energy and activity. A rush to action can reinforce illusions of linear cause-effect actions while also neglecting the larger scene of activity that constructs institutional decision-making. Deferral and/or slowing down can be useful in this regard” (78-9).

Both building renovation and academic administration require a careful architecture that addresses the needs of a variety of users and that accommodates the complex, interconnected systems of modern buildings and academic programs. Collaboration is the slow work of “relational agency” that produces not only a renovation plan but also a method for implementing it. Working collaboratively takes time, just as working carefully does. Consulting architectural drawings, construction teams and academic administrators make meticulous calculations, measuring twice and cutting once. The activities of renovating buildings and administering academic programs are inevitably dappled with surprises, since the blueprints on file never perfectly represent the building as built, just as an organizational chart is can never truly represent an academic department. In building renovation, surprises occur in a context of planned contingencies and collaborative discussions among members of the construction crew, architects, and building inhabitants like me. Perhaps the metaphor of renovation attracts me because I have been colonized by a religious tradition that proclaims to be “always reforming.” Perhaps I find Micche’s metaphor of “slow agency” appealing because I have seen how difficult it can be for a religious tradition to enact that credo.

When people hold allegiances to multiple figured worlds, they experience moments of intertextuality in which, according to Gee, “a text spoken or written in one variety of language (one social language) will accomplish a sort of switching by incorporating (‘borrowing’) words from another text spoken or written in the same or a different

variety of language" (58). These intertextual moments connect language and webs of meaning from one figured world to another, sometimes like a key in a lock, other times like a hammer on a straightening shim, or even, perhaps, as rebar in a concrete footing. Examples of such intertextuality are literally right in front of me: along the edge of the shelf above my computer screen is a line of sticky notes that hold adages I hope will help me reinvigorate both my administrative work and my spiritual growth. Some notes challenge the figured world "hard work produces success" by reminding me of another normal I profess: "everything flows from the grace of God." I discovered one of these notes, in a colleague's handwriting, on a stack of student essays when I returned to my office one evening after leading an afternoon colloquium on best (and worst) practices in grading: "If you graded with a rubric, you wouldn't still be here." Other sticky notes encourage me to make good on the figured world John Calvin envisions when he writes "the minds of the godly are rarely at peace."

These notes challenge me to search out novel approaches to seemingly intractable problems; they goad me to enliven the lifelong spiritual commitments that shape my academic administration and my spiritual life. For example, one note holds a line penned on a final exam by my former student Caitlan Spronk, a note in which she alludes to Jesus' parable of the good shepherd: "This is why we wander, to find the lost sheep." These words invariably remind me of the illustration that accompanied this parable in my childhood Bible story book: against dark, threatening skies, a young man grips a sapling as an anchor while he reaches into a crevasse to rescue a lamb. As a child, I responded to that romanticized picture in a way that was likely different from what the author had intended: rather than feeling comfort or reassurance, I was excited by the danger of the scene and the courage displayed by the shepherd. As an adult, I still respond to the story behind Caitlan's words with a thrill at the challenge to explore words and ideas in wild or even dangerous places. The most recently added note attests to how much I have been musing about influences on my spiritual life and my academic work. It contains a line from Kenneth Burke regarding chickens that run to their executioner because he rings the customary dinner bell: "Chickens not so well educated would have acted more wisely" (6). It reminds me to wonder what customary dinner bells I heed at my peril.

The oldest note lost its stickiness years ago: it rests at the foot of my computer screen. On this note are the "fruits of the spirit" from the New Testament book of Colossians: Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love. I first wrote this list to myself as a challenge: rather than attempt a major renovation, I thought, perhaps I should try something small, and, to be honest, I thought that enacting them might be easy. I thought I was following Anne Lamott's advice for living in "difficult, violent times": "I try to . . . take on short assignments and do shitty first drafts of my work, and most of all, take things day by day" (141). Honestly, I have found it terribly difficult to put these fruits of the spirit into practice because, as any homeowner knows, there's no such thing as a minor renovation. In critical moments, I look at the list skeptically: how could an administrator accomplish anything if she acted like that? Inevitably, that challenge turns toward reflection: how couldn't she? What might academic administration look like if I acted that way? And then it turns toward conviction as I think of friends, successful academic administrators who demonstrate these qualities of character and—as a consequence—built strong programs, sure, but also built up the people in those programs.

They prove to me that it is good to administer academic programs through acts of peace and love.

These notes are attempts at answering a single, persistent question: “How then shall I live?” It was long ago that I first read Virginia Chappell’s essay “Teaching—and Living—In the Meantime,” but I regularly return to it because her description of living in the “meantime—unnervingly provisional and tentative in its very naming” fits my allegiance to ongoing renovation and slow agency (40). Her confession that “commitment becomes more difficult when simplicity and truisms no longer suffice” depicts the complexity of the conundrums that believers and administrators encounter (44). Her conclusion that “without certainty, but with conviction, my faith gives me the energy and the courage to do my work in the academy” is the idea at the heart of this essay: too often I default to a speedier process of demolition and new construction rather than commit to living in the mess that is renovation (52).

Donald Hall attacks the default process of demolition and new construction by cataloging the “monologic attitudes and behaviors” that characterize “disastrous” department chairs: “Express disdain for the job” because it is a “wretched, powerless, and embarrassing post” (539); “Act as if your department is the center of the universe” (540); seek revenge, reward loyalty, and “weed out the weak by pitting colleague against colleague in a grand Darwinian struggle” (541); rely on someone else to do complicated or tedious tasks (542), delegate and then micromanage subordinates (543), and, finally, yell at the support staff to relieve stress (544-5). Halls’ delicious sarcasm destabilizes this dominant figured world, freeing us to construct alternative images, like renovation, for the work academic administrators. Searching for theological grounding for the slow agency of renovation, I have been reading authors who consider two themes, peaceableness and love, that help me hear new dinner bells. The first theme, peaceableness, is, in my mind, a sum of the first six fruits of the spirit; the second theme, love, centers on excess and extravagance that a Christian might associate with God’s grace.

Reading authors who address these themes, I explore what I, as a Christian and an academic administrator, have grown to believe and the figured worlds that define what I aspire to. I have found that these authors helpfully renovate the theology that is my air and water; the intertextuality of what I read keeps me always reforming my religious faith and my academic administration.

Peaceableness

Throughout his scholarship, Stanley Hauerwas, Gilbert T. Rowe professor of Theological Ethics at Duke Divinity School, considers how Christian virtues can foster a more peaceable human community. In an intellectual move that is likely to surprise and challenge many of my readers, Hauerwas argues that we have misunderstood how to live peaceably with others because we have ignored the “inherent relation between truthfulness and peacefulness” (15). Turning his attention to Christians, Hauerwas defines “truth” as the central claim of Christianity:

As Christians, we must maintain day in and day out that peace is not something

achieved *by our power*. Rather peace is a gift of God that comes only by our being in a community formed around a crucified savior—a savior who teaches us how to be peaceful in a world in rebellion against its true Lord. God’s peaceable kingdom, we learn, comes not by positing a common human morality, but by our faithfulness as a peaceful community that fears not our differences. (emphasis in the original, 12.)

Hauerwas argues that when Christians fail to acknowledge the substance of their religious faith, they contribute to a problematic figured world that approves forceful imposition of ideological commitments. Sharon Crowley notes the presence of this figured world in *Toward Civil Discourse* when she characterizes “this moment in American history [as] a discursive climate dominated by two powerful discourses: liberalism and Christian fundamentalism” (2). In her concluding pages, Crowley relies on this figured world for the strategies she suggests liberals use to change the minds of Christian fundamentalists. (Crowley offers no strategies for Christian fundamentalists to change the minds of liberals.) With deep reservations about the likelihood of their success, Crowley recommends three strategies: “demonstrate the superiority of alternative values,” “demonstrate the contingency of given values,” and “disarticulate[e] a particular belief system from the others with which it is articulated” (200-201). Were Hauerwas to ignore the dominating moves in Crowley’s first two strategies, he would likely applaud Crowley’s third strategy and build on it, arguing that the problematic “moment” Crowley describes results from Christians failing to examine their allegiance the problematic figured world of “America is a Christian nation.” Hauerwas challenges American Christians to renovate Christian community by disarticulating Christian belief from much of the current political posturing associated with it:

While appearing to be a resurgence of “traditional” religious conviction, some of these movements [the “upsurge of religious conservatism”] in fact give evidence of the loss of religious substance in our culture and in ourselves. Christianity is defended not so much because it is true, but because it reinforces the “American way of life.” Such movements are thus unable to contemplate that there might be irresolvable tensions between being a Christian and being “a good American.” (12)

To become peaceable, Hauerwas argues, Christians need to stop imagining themselves as the center of America’s story. Instead, we need “to learn to place ourselves in God’s history, to be part of God’s people” (33). The humility required to place oneself in God’s history is undoubtedly obvious to those who have read the Bible. The Bible’s Old Testament is filled with stories of domination and power, more than a few of them utterly unsuitable for that Bible story book from my childhood. And the history of Christianity can plausibly be framed as an ongoing human quest for domination and power, peppered with horrible, ironic stories of people using violence as a means to impose God’s peace. The cognitive dissonance is heavy: I find these stories repugnant; I want to pretend that they are not part of my story; I want to pretend that these people are not a part of my family. I want to deny them a place in my heart. And then the words that seem so small, so easy creep in—compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, and, ugh, forgiveness. I cannot change these stories, but perhaps, with humility, I can live in God’s story even though it includes them. And perhaps I can add stories that figure a different world.

Secularizing Hauerwas' point, I think that when I served on that construction committee, I learned a little better how to be a part of Calvin's people and, consequently, a better administrator. I learned the names and specializations of co-workers from the Physical Plant division; I came to notice and appreciate a good HVAC system and effective storm drainage. I began to understand the Fine Arts Center as a building for the first time rather than as merely the location of the English Department. I became part of a heterogeneous community made up of people who were and were not like me.

Of course, when the committee discussed construction plans and considered budget cuts, this heterogeneity complicated our work, as it did in the Sunday School Anne Lamott once ran: "We did not exclude anyone, because Jesus didn't. On bad days, I could not imagine what he had been thinking" (68). In our work together, I suspect that I gave my colleagues from the physical plant a few of Anne Lamott's bad days. Early on, I was a troublesome member of the committee—emailing pie-in-the-sky design requests from the English faculty members; critiquing the number, size, and location of faculty offices; complaining that the men's and women's bathrooms, while of equal size, could not accommodate equal numbers of users. (Yes, I was the only female member of the committee.) More than once my colleagues from the physical plant must have questioned not only the value of my membership on the committee but also my competence as an administrator and—based on their off-hand comments about faculty—my competence to operate a machine or even dig a hole.

Once I began to understand the complexity of building construction, the raw physical effort it requires even of supervisors and architects, and the real-life consequences of making a mistake while removing asbestos or cutting cement block, I began to wonder along with them. When I commented in meetings, I sometimes wondered if they heard the voice that Anne Lamott did when she considered her inability to administer the Sunday School: "The mean voice said that when you don't have a clue what's going on, maybe it's better that you not be in charge of a lot of things, which is something I keep meaning to point out to George Bush" (66). Just as running a Sunday School was not what Anne Lamott imagined when she became a Christian, academic administration is not the work that most of us imagined when we became professors. It is work that most of us do day by day or, as Lamott would have it, bird by bird.

Perhaps we become more peaceable when we listen to the mean voice and consider how little preparation many of us have for this work, what little aptitude, how few mentors. And then we might wonder who we are trying to persuade otherwise, and why? Perhaps we become more peaceable when we ignore the mean voice, do the best we can, try to be content with "good enough," and accept that, contrary to a figured world in which power and domination produce tidiness, a peaceable world often includes some amount of Sunday School chaos. Perhaps we become peaceable when we consider that maybe other academic administrators, like the dean and the provost with whom we must collaborate, are also trying to listen to and to ignore the mean voice, trying to be "good enough," and trying to imagine chaos as a form of peaceableness.

Love

If peaceableness is rooted in knowing and acknowledging the figured worlds that

are a part of our story, then love might be rooted in our willingness to respect and accept people who are not like us and figured worlds that are not our own. In his theorizing, Kenneth Burke demonstrates this kind of respect and acceptance by using religious writers like Augustine and religious concepts like consubstantiation without feeling compelled to decide for or against them. For example, Burke concludes the first section of *Grammar of Motives* by echoing the Pauline triad: "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love" (I Corinthians 13:13). Kenneth Burke writes, "Love, Knowledge, and Authority: Three basic ideals, variously embodied in structures of power, and all liable to such transformations as make of them a mockery. As translated into the terms of social organization, they are necessarily at odds. But in moments of exaltation, ideally, we may think of them as a trinity, standing to one another in relation of mutual reinforcement" (124). Substituting knowledge and authority for faith and hope, Kenneth Burke levels the relationship among members of the triad and puts them in dialogic tension that, ultimately, allows them to fortify one another. Choosing to echo St. Paul, Burke demonstrates his respect for a figured world that privileges faith, hope, and love. Writing his own text, Burke expands beyond that figured world. As anyone who has read him knows, Kenneth Burke can make things seem easier than they are for the rest of us, but if we draw on experiences in which we have loved people enough to join our story to theirs, even though these people differ from us in ways that we may find maddening, we might be able to imagine a way to collaborate with them and to accept the renovating force of ideas that are not our own.

Two authors, Anne Lamott and Stephen Webb, turn to improbable-sounding Christian ideas to help their readers imagine the possibility of loving others and their ideas.

Being willing to respect and accept what we find different or even odious seems impossible, as Anne Lamott demonstrates in her struggles to respect and accept George W. Bush, a fellow Christian, at the start of the Iraq War:

I can't exactly forgive him right now, in the sense of canceling my resentment and judgment. But maybe I can simply acknowledge what is true, spiritually—that he gets to come to the table and eat, too; that I would not let him starve. In heaven, I may have to sit next to him, and in heaven, I know that I will love him. On earth, however, when I consider that he is my brother, and I am to love him, I'm reminded of the old Woody Allen line that someday the lion shall lie down with the lamb, but the lamb isn't going to get any sleep. So I will pray to stop hating him, and that he will not kill so many people today. (144)

Lamott approaches the impossible by invoking what likely seems an improbable figured world to many: she envisions life on earth and then in heaven; only in heaven can she imagine sharing a meal with George W. Bush. Until then, the best love she can muster is a commitment to stop hating him. Such a small step may strike some readers as a pretty shitty first draft of love, but most of us know how difficult those shitty first drafts can be. It may be that a commitment to stop hating is enough for now.

Theologian Stephen Webb argues that Christians must engage "a hyperbolic imagination [that] would open our myopic visions to God's unbounded love, the impossible priority of the other, and the unreal hope in ultimate redemption" (140). Hyperbole is

the trope of choice for Christians, according to Webb, because it enables them to hold the real and the seemingly unreal in productive, dialogic tension: "Christianity, through its doctrine of original sin, sees the world as it actually is, that is, governed by calculative self-interest, yet Christianity also imagines that the world is really what it apparently is not: full of love and grace" (282). Hyperbole provides language that is extraordinary enough, magnificent enough for implausible tales in which a loving father receives his prodigal son with joy and kills a fatted calf to celebrate. Living in a figured world of hyperbolic imagination, according to Webb, is characterized ". . . not [by] a fruitless self-denial aimed at some otherworldly reward, or an impotent and frustrated act of rebellion against the restraints of economic rationality, but [by] a sacrificial affirmation of the restless movement that already constitutes who we are" (295). For those of us who struggle to enact Kenneth Burke's seemingly easy accommodation of people and their ideas, perhaps extravagance and hyperbole offer a way to get over ourselves and beyond the constraints of our normal pictures of the world so that our academic administration looks less like Donald Hall's Darwinian struggle and more like cooperative, restless, renovating agency.

Will my administrative work ever be fully renovated so that peace and love are at its core? In Burkean moments of exaltation I can picture the building that could rise from the blueprints I've described here; on bad days, the ones Anne Lamott calls "Good Friday days," I see only snaking lines of conduit, positioned a foot too low to accommodate a standard-height classroom ceiling and a heat pump that passed its stress test only to fail once it was no longer easily accessible. But like the Fine Arts Center, academic administration is a kind of home for me, and I will continue to renovate it by following the best practices of planning carefully, cooperating with others, and trying to be content with "good enough." And it may be that making a commitment to continuing the renovation is good enough for now.



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Telling the Truth as WPA

Beth Daniell

At Al-Anon meetings I learned that alcoholics lie and their families lie, too.²² None of us call it lying, of course: we call it being nice, or avoiding trouble, or keeping the peace. Usually, it's not overt out-and-out lying, but rather minimizing ("It's not that bad"), blaming some other entity ("It's his father's fault"), denial ("She's really very smart, but school doesn't challenge her"), or delusion ("Some day I'll figure out how to please her"). To see the reality of one's life requires working through all these stages to discover which facts have been omitted from the narrative. Only then can one take responsibility for oneself and one's happiness, letting go of responsibility for any other adult's life. No one in Al-Anon or AA would ever say learning this is easy or accomplished overnight.

Serving as a writing program administrator, I've found, requires the same dedication to reality and to telling the truth about that reality—especially if one is to maintain sanity in the midst of English department delusions. It often falls to the Director of Composition to explain to both students and teachers that their own choices have consequences and that different choices are available. But how do you do that? How does a writing program administrator tell the truth?

In this essay, I share what I've learned about truth telling in my experience as an administrator: assistant director of composition for a year in graduate school; associate director when I was an assistant professor; and writing program administrator at three large universities in the south. Of my thirty years in higher education, I've served 15½ as some kind of administrator, eight of those here at Kennesaw State University in Atlanta's northern suburbs. It is ironic that in using my own experience to write about the ethics of telling the truth, professional ethics require me to omit details and disguise others. Truth is more complicated than it appears, as any rhetorician knows.

Being the WPA

Putting out fires is not what the job is about, though some days it surely seems like it. Once, venting about the endless stream of negativity coming into my office, I was gently admonished by my friend Mara Holt, at Ohio University, who said, "When you're the WPA, Beth, every day you have a chance to do something good for somebody." I'd never considered that perspective. When I look for something good to do for the students and teachers I work with, I actually feel better. The first good thing I can do is listen, just listen—not always an easy task for a person like me who talks all the time. The second good thing is showing that I understand: "What I am hearing is that you are angry"; "I can see why this would upset you"; "Oh, my. So tell me what happened then."

Doing something good for students is fairly easy: teaching a first-generation student

²² Al-Anon is an organization for family and friends of alcoholics. Patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon uses the same Twelve Steps, with only a few words changed as a path to "a spiritual awakening."

how to talk to a college professor, translating a teacher's marginal comments into language a student can understand, sympathizing with a student in trouble. Recently a first-year student came to my office frightened by her English 1101 teacher, who had implied that because she came from a small town, she did not have the background to pass his class, a judgment made on the basis of one initial in-class essay. The student and I talked about study habits and chatted with the Writing Center Director, who set up a series of appointments for her. As this young woman was leaving my office, I stopped her saying, "Just a minute, please. Want to tell you something: I grew up in Thomaston [a small town south of Atlanta], and I have a PhD from one of the finest public universities in America." She smiled, "Thank you for telling me that." That was a good thing. (Dealing with the teacher was a whole 'nother story.) The student made an A.

Similarly, when teachers deplore the attitude or behavior of a student or a class, I listen, ask some questions, and more often than not offer some practical solutions, some of which actually turn out to be theories the teacher may not know. Because many of the teachers I supervise have little formal knowledge of the field of composition and rhetoric, the idea that writing, language, and learning are social opens up a new perspective on what's going on in class, and it makes the pedagogical strategies I suggest make sense. When the problem is classroom management, I can usually offer two or three possible solutions to consider, often prefaced by a sentence like, "Almost the identical thing happened in one my classes the first year I was here" or "Oh, Lord, about twice a year some teacher has to deal with that very same problem." Such comments tell the instructor that the issue is a common one, one that others including me have dealt with successfully. Kenneth Burke is right about the power of identification.

Telling the Truth?

But there are situations that require wrestling with what truth to tell and how much and in what language. In these situations, I turn to Scott Peck's advice about telling the truth in *The Road Less Traveled*. Because I think Peck makes so much pragmatic, ethical, and spiritual sense, I quote what he says exactly:

What rules, then, can one follow if one is dedicated to the truth? First, never speak falsehood. Second, bear in mind that the act of withholding the truth is always potentially a lie, and that in each instance in which the truth is withheld a significant moral decision is required. Third, the decision to withhold truth should never be based on personal needs, such as a need for power, a need to be liked, or a need to protect one's map from challenge. Fourth, and conversely, the decision to withhold truth must always be based entirely upon the needs of the person or people from whom the truth is being withheld. Fifth, the assessment of another's needs is an act of responsibility which is so complex that it can only be executed wisely when one operates with genuine love for the other. Sixth, the primary factor in the assessment of another's needs is the assessment of that person's capacity to utilize the truth for his or her own spiritual growth. Finally, in assessing the capacity of another to utilize the truth for personal spiritual growth, it should be borne in mind that our tendency is generally to underestimate rather than overestimate this capacity. (62- 61)

To tell the truth, sometimes a student's spiritual growth is not my concern; I am interested only in a change in behavior: "Your feelings about the attendance policy are really not relevant. Unfortunately, your absences are."

Because some students are not capable of using a truth I might tell for their own spiritual growth, sometimes I refrain from telling them what I believe to be true. To tell that truth might mean using it as a weapon—never a good idea. For instance, a student comes to my office ostensibly complaining of a teacher's incompetence, meanness, or unfair grading practices, but sends a signal that the underlying issue is the student's own racism, homophobia, misogyny, religious intolerance, or aggressive ignorance of another culture. In such cases, I often find it difficult to "operate... with genuine love for the other" (Peck 63). But because these underlying issues remain unarticulated, I am not obliged to take them on directly. Even if I were inclined to, the result would likely be stubborn, angry resistance. College threatens first-year students' identities—all these new people, all these ideas, all this strange reading, all these different assignments, all these strange teachers. When people feel threatened, they are often incapable of learning or rational thought, a general rule that applies especially to first-year students. If I said, for example, "The real reason you don't like this teacher is that you're a racist," or "Might the real problem be that the teacher is Muslim?" the student would at that exact moment cease listening to anything I might say. My hope is such a student will stay in school long enough to feel *less* threatened by difference so that she or he might learn from it. My classroom experience tells me that labeling students is less effective than giving facts and information—and time.

Focusing on the obvious issue rather than on the subtext may not change the student's underlying feelings, but it diffuses the surface emotions: "The point of the assignment is not whether *you* believe in global warming. The point is to analyze the writer's ethos. In other words, your task is to point out the things the writer does to seem believable"; "Yes, you really do want to learn about Buddhism. You came here to become an educated person, right? Living in the twenty-first century means we all have know about other religions. What other things have you been reading in this class?" Interestingly, from time to time a student complains that a woman instructor asks to be called *doctor*; typically, this complaint comes from white students about African American women instructors. My response? "Lots of women college teachers with PhDs ask their students to call them Dr. So-and-so. I do. You know why? Because I worked as hard as any man in this department for that degree, and if the men professors are called *doctor*, then I should be, too." No student has ever had the nerve to dispute this with me. Withholding truth is sometimes necessary when youth and fear combine to render students incapable of learning from it.

Spiritual Struggles

Some problems are more vexed, more complicated. Last year, for example, a young man arrived in my office furious that his teacher had penalized him for turning in an essay late. Angrily, he explained why the ten-point penalty was unfair. Then he repeated the whole story, emphasizing this time the moral failings of the instructor. When I attempted to ask a question, he rehearsed the entire story in a louder voice with even more emphasis

on the teacher's faults. He talked about not having money on his print card and the amount he had already spent on tuition, room, books, and so forth. He talked about his position at his previous school, hinting broadly that someone there had told him that he had a lawsuit.

When he took a breath, I asked whether he had the syllabus for the course with him. He did. It included a policy for late papers, which I pointed out. That was not the point, he said; the point was the teacher did not care about the students. The more he argued his own victimhood and the more he complained about the teacher's indifference toward his difficulties, the louder he became and the closer he moved his chair to mine. No explanation I gave could mollify him. Having heard the same complaints and threats several times, I stood up and told him that I would investigate and get back to him.

In the subsequent talk with the instructor, a young-looking teaching assistant, I realized that the TA had given the student one day's penalty when in fact the paper had been two days late. Why had he given the student less penalty than the policy allowed for? The student had been absent the previous week for a family issue—a death in the family, the TA had surmised—and so, feeling bad for the student, the teacher had cut him a break. The day the teacher had returned the paper with the penalty, after class the student had yelled at the instructor, “getting in his face,” as the saying goes. Was this out of character? In intensity, the instructor said, but the student had been resistant to instruction all semester, arguing the specifications of every assignment, dismissing necessary information.

I was angry. It's one thing to yell at me; it's another to yell at a TA. Well, I would just get that kid back in my office and I would say—and I would invite the teacher, too—and I would tell him—and I would explain—and I would—and I would.... I realized I needed to calm down.

Over the next few days, I thought about the death in the student's family and how young people, with little experience with grief, often don't allow themselves expressions of sadness. I have lived long enough to know that grief will show itself one way or the other, and anger is one of those ways. I considered the student's talk about his status at his other school, a community college in a small town in south Georgia, a place where extended families see each other daily, unlike the scattered families of many of our suburban students. A student from a community college might well see Kennesaw with its 25,000 students as huge and impersonal.

Then I remembered being far away from home and being mad at the new place, not realizing that I was grieving the loss of home and status. I remembered how it feels to start over, having to prove yourself again. I know what it's like when people don't understand your sacrifice. And, God knows, I understand being afraid about money. These memories didn't come all at once.

Once I got past the need to tell the student off, once I no longer needed to exhibit my political power over him, once I found compassion for him by identifying with him, I realized that this young man nonetheless needed to hear a description of his behavior. I composed and revised (and revised again, and again) an email informing the student that because of the clarity of the teacher's policy on late papers, the grade would stand. I pointed out that he could appeal my decision and told him how to do so. I wrote that

his teacher had in fact already shown him compassion by giving only one day's penalty instead of the two that the teacher could have given.

Next I said that as a writing teacher, I was much more concerned with the fifteen points he had lost on that particular essay by not attending to the requirements of the assignment. I gave him two specific suggestions for how to read assignments. Then I wrote that as an administrator I was troubled by his behavior in my office, specifically the shouting, the threats, but also the repetitions, the distortion of facts about the teacher's practices, his failure to accept any responsibility. A ten-point penalty did not merit such a response, I said, and suggested that perhaps the reason for his anger lay not in the late penalty, but rather in the family issue that his teacher had mentioned to me. I wrote that the fees he had already paid allowed him to talk his anger with a counselor. Then I sympathized about the price of college.

I did not know whether the student would hear me, but I did know that when I composed and revised the email, I was "operat[ing] with genuine love for the other" (Peck 63). Love, as Peck defines it, is "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (81), and I had extended myself by taking a great deal of time working through my own emotions and wording the email as carefully as I could. I wasn't sure that this student had the capacity to "utilize the truth for his . . . own spiritual growth" (63), but experience tells me that Peck's seventh guideline for telling the truth is reliable: we mostly tend to underestimate the capacity of people to use a truth to grow emotionally and spiritually.

How a reader will interpret anything you write is beyond your control, despite your best rhetorical skills. Precisely how this young man took my email, I will never know. I do know from his teacher that his classroom behavior changed. The student's challenges to the teacher's authority, instruction, and assignments ceased. He became, the TA told me, "a model student."

Avoiding and Finding the Truth

Not all my stories have happy endings. Sometimes the spiritual struggle continues. As I have indicated, I like to think that I provide support for the teachers who work in our program, and I strive for a collegial working relationship with them. If at all possible, I uphold teachers' decisions. I remember only three times in eight years telling a teacher that if the appeal went to the dean's office, the student's grievance would be upheld. I invite the teachers' opinions and we decide together on new policies—well, except for the fiats that come down from on high. When an instructor violates a university policy or has a lapse in judgment, my usual practice is to explain the policy or the reason for the problem and then say something like, "So don't do this again." That's typically the end of it. Almost always, a clear but gently worded email about the deficiencies of a syllabus means improvement. Nonetheless my administrative position requires written evaluations of the instructors' teaching for annual reviews. Because most of our instructors are such excellent teachers, this is usually a pleasant experience. But once in a while there is resistance. And then I go through the same process as I do with students, though the spiritual and emotional work is more taxing because my relationship with the teachers is more complicated.

Students know from the get-go that I have power. Even when they do not like my answers, they can see that I've listened to and investigated their issues and that my response is supportive of them as human beings. From time to time, a student appeals to the chair or even to the dean's office, but this happens rarely. But with some instructors, my assessment can be more threatening. With part-timers, I can recommend non-renewal and have done so on occasion when repeated messages have been ignored. With full-time faculty, my assessment of their teaching becomes a permanent part of their performance documents, though only the chair and the personnel committee can recommend non-renewal. Complicating the relationship between me and a few teachers are other typical English department issues—specializations, gender, length of service at Kennesaw, long-standing relationships with other senior faculty—which sometimes put a woman with a specialization in rhetoric and composition (not literature) at a disadvantage. Aware of these complications, I strive to word negative messages carefully.

In the last few years two teachers have resisted my evaluations and/or specific requests for changes. I wish I could go into more narrative detail, but because personnel matters are confidential, I cannot. One, a full-time instructor clearly past middle age but with little experience teaching, seems unable to admit any flaw in her teaching or in her relationships with her students. When anything even slightly negative appears in her review documents, she writes long, tortured rebuttals. The first of these was a dozen single-spaced pages, built on a con/pro structure: *Dr. Daniell says this . . . but this is how it really was*. Despite repeated assurances from both the chair and me that our department never expects perfection but does value both pedagogical reflection and corrective plans, we have been met over and over in annual review conferences marked by tears, anger, denial, excuses, blame, defensiveness. Her less than stellar third-year review by the personnel committee, the chair, and the dean resulted, she explained to me, from her writing "style," rather than from any weakness in her narrative.

Another instructor, this one a man, has consistently ignored my requests for changes to his syllabi so that his composition classes would look more like composition classes and less like literature classes. When in annual review or conferences I have mentioned negative comments on his student evaluations, such as returning papers late, his response has been to wink at me, while reminding me that his overall evaluations are very good, thereby dismissing my concern as unimportant.

To deal with the woman instructor, I have called up my own moments of fear of authority figures and those periods when my own ego was so shaky that I had difficulty admitting mistakes. I've remembered times when I believed I had to be perfect, when any criticism was devastating, when mistakes brought guilt or shame. Using these memories to get to empathy, I've also recognized that I've been far luckier than she. Because I began teaching at age 21, I learned a lot of hard lessons early. The greatest of these: In the classroom, it's not about me.

Truthfully, I have not done this kind of work with the other instructor. Instead, reverting to the southern woman model, I have tried to take care of what I have seen as his fragile ego. Only in writing this essay have I realized how remiss I have been and how that has done us both damage. I have not used Peck's guidelines for telling the truth in my dealings with this teacher. I have, rather, withheld the truth—in the interest, I have told myself, of "being professional," which requires women to pretend *not* to notice

patronizing sexist gestures in the workplace. At least in the south, I have found, men get real insulted when you suggest that perhaps their attitude or judgment or behavior might be skewed by traditional gender privilege. In addition, I have judged negatively this man's "capacity to utilize the truth for his...own spiritual growth" (Peck 61). Peck may well be right that I have underestimated this instructor—but, so far, I have observed no evidence for that position.

Both situations require me to look at myself: Am I being too judgmental? Am I taking things too personally? Am I not being patient enough? Have I been too blunt? Why have I repressed this? Not paid attention to that? Why have I been too reluctant to say what I see? I speak clearly with students and other teachers all the time. Why not with these two? Long ago, Al-Anon taught me that before I can move forward, before I can deal honestly with another human being, I must attend to my side of the street, confront my own failings, be honest with myself, tell myself the truth. Writing this essay has helped me realize that with both these instructors I have been trying to keep the peace and to avoid additional unpleasantness. Taking the "more flies with honey" position, I have been trying to get them to like me, something I had not realized until just this moment. Thus in my attempts to be "professional," I have suppressed my own feelings. Now, as I write, I see that I must face myself squarely—must analyze and name my own emotions—before I can tell either of these instructors the truth. Now that I am recognizing—and accepting—who I am in these relationships, the next step will be to accept these two individuals as they are—not as I wish them to be, not as their colleagues are, but as they are. Now that I am telling myself the truth, I see that my responsibility is not to flatter or appease these two instructors, but to tell them the truth in ways that are both clear and kind.

With these intentional spiritual exercises—memory, identification, gratitude, self-examination, acceptance, and (now) prayer—I am learning all over again to tell the truth.



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BOOK REVIEWS

Paradigm Shifts

Judy Halden-Sullivan, Book Review Editor

Often our *JAEPL* book reviews focus on studies thematically linked, different books dealing with a single overarching subject. Not in this issue. The texts explored here are rich and ranging, distinctive arguments. What *is* common among these studies is their purpose: they each invite readers to boldly shift paradigms, sometimes, as two of our four reviewers reveal, with questionable promises.

Lauren DiPaula's review of *Mad At School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* by Margaret Price (University of Michigan Press, 2011) demonstrates nothing short of a radical change in mindset—DiPaula's own. Price's study of mental disabilities in the context of the academy made DiPaula "re-evaluate my scholarship and teaching . . . taking a hard look at what I do." Price interprets mental disabilities—sometimes termed mental illness, neurodiversity, or even madness—as a mode of difference, employing a Disabilities Studies framework. As DiPaula explains, this paradigm shift brings into question the predominant medical vision of mental disabilities as problems that need to be "fixed" so that these individuals better fit into the dominant culture. Price offers practical suggestions for richer modes of inclusion in the academy for both students and faculty with mental disabilities, advising, as DiPaula explains, a culture of compassion, appreciation, and interdependence.

Interdependence in an electronic collectivity is critiqued by William Archibald as he reviews Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown's *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change* (CreateSpace, 2011). Archibald, a composition studies scholar with specialization in technology applications in the writing classroom, examines the authors' emphasis on using massive, multiplayer online games, or MMOGs, to create "collectives" in which students join in on games like *World of Warcraft* to strengthen their agency—to assume active roles in creating and molding knowledge of the game itself. While affirming that our students are magnetically drawn to and have natural facility with the videogame environment, Archibald questions Thomas and Brown's exclusive use of gaming as *the* new educational paradigm, pointing out its emphasis on agonistic, collective action often at the expense of critical reflection.

Critical reflection and response—and how they should be effectively enacted—are at the heart of teaching creative writing, as Carl Vandermeulen asserts in his study, *Negotiating the Personal in Creative Writing* (Multilingual Matters, 2011), reviewed in this issue by Noam Scheindlin, himself a professor of creative writing. Supported by his own original research into creative writing pedagogy, Vandermeulen recommends a change in emphasis in the creative writing classroom from focusing on publishable products to engaging students' facility with the processes of creative production. As Scheindlin notes, Vandermeulen imports teaching techniques from composition studies to creative writing classes to spur *response*: dialogues inspired by how drafts-in-progress address both their authors and readers as thoughtful co-creators of texts.

Finally, Martin Cockcroft evaluates perhaps the broadest reconsideration of paradigm: a redefinition of a discipline. In their manifesto *Teaching Literacy for Love and Wisdom: Being the Book and Being the Change* (Teachers College Press, 2011), Jeffrey D. Wilhelm and longtime AEPL leader Bruce Novak assert that the term “English department” no longer provides any adequate sense of what is taught in such a discipline. Wilhelm and Novak commit to reinventing “English” as “Personal Studies”—joyful, situated, pragmatic, philosophical explorations of humanity that pursue the many meanings of life, love, and wisdom. Wilhelm and Novak ground their new paradigm in John Dewey’s sense of “aesthetic transaction,” an experience “that is personal, but not merely subjective” (Wilhelm and Novak 12-13), an experience that invites dialogues among authors, their readers, and the worlds both groups of thinkers occupy. As Cockcroft characterizes it in his review, *Teaching Literacy for Love and Wisdom* is an overwhelming amalgam of scientific thinking, philosophies, teaching practices, and intellectual histories, wildly energetic in its “everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach” to re-envisioning the possibilities of an entire discipline.

Four different studies, four distinctive arguments: all invite mindful conversations that promise to transform students and faculty alike.

Price, Margaret. *Mad At School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.

Lauren DiPaula, Georgia Southwestern State University

Margaret Price's *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* made me re-evaluate my scholarship and teaching. I had hoped, upon picking it up, that it would have the opposite effect; I had wanted to be affirmed. Instead, I found myself taking a hard look at what I do.

The book is, according to Price, "a kind of smorgasbord, not a single sustained argument that must be read from beginning to end" (21); yet it is indeed an argument, an argument for greater inclusion and access for those with mental disabilities, also referred to as madness, mental illness, neurodiversity, or any of a number of terms—Price gives a list of 10 on page nine. In these chapters, she brings up representations of mental disability in the classroom, the conference, the job interview, and the media (specifically regarding school shootings), showing how these representations are disabling. She also shows how access might be achieved and gives examples of writers who are making themselves heard and the techniques they use to do so.

Price begins the book with the reason that all our minds are not already included in academic conversations, why not everyone is listened to. She contextualizes this lack of inclusion with the help of Catherine Prendergast's term *rhetoricity*, a term Price explains as "the ability to be received as a valid human subject" (26). Price then calls academic discourse itself into question. Her focus on the rhetoric of academia is in part due to her belief that rhetoric "is who we are, and beyond that, it is *who we are allowed to be*" (27). Individuals with mental disabilities, Price writes, "speak from positions that are assumed to be subhuman, even nonhuman; and therefore, when we speak, our words go unheeded" (26).

Price's stance throughout heavily relies upon a Disability Studies (DS) framework. Price explains early on that,

According to DS scholars and activists, disability is popularly imagined as a medical "problem" that inheres in an individual, one that needs to be fixed ('cured') and is cause for sorrow and pity. DS countermands this dominant belief by arguing that disability is a mode of human difference, one that becomes a problem only when the environment or context treats it as such. (4)

Seeing mental disability *as a mode of difference* calls into question the biomedical paradigm, that on which I've based my own research.

In fact, Price does more than call into question the paradigm. Chapter One, which is entitled "Listening to the Subject of Mental Disability: Intersections of Academic and Medical Discourses," also explores how psychiatric discourse—which is not necessarily separate from academic discourse—works to keep out or push down those with mental disability. In a section entitled "Rhetorical Approaches to Psychiatric Discourse," she discusses the rhetoric of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), a book used by mental health professionals to diagnose mental disorders, diagnoses

which are then used by insurance companies in decisions whether to fund treatments. Price is highly critical of the text and the discourse that supports its primacy; in fact, she demonizes it. Rather than analyzing the discourse surrounding it herself, she reviews how others have analyzed the DSM, specifically the DSM-III, which represented a turn that leaned most heavily toward a medical model of mental disorder. What is not taken into account in Price's study is that a reason for the biomedical shift might be that lithium was found to effectively treat bipolar disorder, thereby convincing many of the projected usefulness of pharmacology in the amelioration or control of mood disorder symptoms (see Goodwin and Jamison 699).

Price also introduces readers to the Psychiatric Survivor or Mad Pride Movement, a movement that resists the psychiatric system and its mechanisms of treatment, a system that could be interpreted as a path to healing for some, but a way of being controlled and oppressed for others. I expected Price to critique not only the rhetoric of the psychiatric community but also that of the survivor movement. Instead, she tries to understand her position as that of the survivor. She is conflicted about this stance until a friend helps shift her view of the survivor "as one who has undergone and emerged from some traumatic experience (such as incarceration in a mental institution)" to "one who is actively and resistantly involved with the psychiatric system on an ongoing basis" (12).

Overall, however, a Disability Studies stance may be the most useful and hopeful in the discussion of mental disability. Price asks persuasively, "What does 'participation' in a class mean for a student who is undergoing a deep depression and cannot get out of bed?" (5). Price is concerned with movement in kairotic spaces—where rhetoric is drawn from the immediate resources of the moment in context, movement which is more complicated for people with mental disabilities (60). She defines such spaces as those that are "characterized by all or most" of the following criteria: (1) real-time unfolding of events; (2) impromptu communication that is required or encouraged; (3) in-person contact; (4) a strong social element; and (5) high stakes (61). This precedes the most compelling part of the book where she discusses seven ways to redesign "the classroom's kairotic spaces" to be more inclusive. Among her suggestions: be explicit with expectations; use multimodal communication; hold office hours in person and in online chat (90, 96-97).

Price then examines other kairotic spaces—those which academics regularly engage in, including the job interview and the academic conference. Such high-stake places are not always accessible. She offers "recommendations for professional practice," including etiquette advice such as posing the open-ended, situation-centered inquiry, "What do you need?" instead of a closed yes/no query such as, "Is there anything I can do?" (129; 133). But especially interesting is her discussion of productivity and collegiality, both of which are sometimes considered at odds with mental disability. In fact, Price asserts, "The notion of *collegiality* itself is regularly *defined against* mental disability" (114). People who aren't collegial are often supposed to have a mental disability or illness of some type.

Next, Price analyzes school shootings and violence, looking carefully at representations of two recent school shooters—one from Virginia Tech and the other at Northern Illinois University. Price reveals the narratives that underlie explanations of the tragedies. A common one, for instance, is "that madness can be overcome, and that the key to this process of overcoming is *control* or *containment* of the mad person by means of medical treatment or incarceration" (153). This narrative then leads us down the slippery slope

of removing basic rights of people with mental disabilities in the name of “safety.” In exposing these narratives, she points out that they do nothing in helping us end the violence. Instead, Price finds hope in acknowledging that the shooters were fellow students and acknowledging the tragedy of what happened—to humanize and try to understand rather than dehumanize and expel the madness.

Price’s following two chapters bring up what she calls “microrebellions,” examples of people with mental disabilities who resist their lack of rhetoricity. She analyzes the use of first, second, and third person pronouns in three autobiographical, “transgressive” texts by people with mental disabilities (176). It is inconsequential which disabilities they have—what Price points out is that they are engaged in an act of rebellion and resistance in writing in an alternative way. Price introduces the term *counter-diagnosis* to mean a strategy by which “the autobiographical narrator uses language . . . to subvert the diagnostic urge to ‘explain’ the irrational mind” (179). “The counter-diagnostic story does not merely parallel or replace the conventional diagnostic story,” Price says, but “it ruins it altogether, attacks its foundations, queers it” (179). In pointing out pronoun use, she shows how autobiographical writers with mental disabilities subvert what we, the audience, think we know. For instance, the use of the pronoun *I* does not necessarily bespeak a unified self and does not progress through a linear narrative; it appears disorganized, embodying an “unruly existence” (180). Price calls for more study of autobiographies by people with mental disabilities because such “will refigure key assumptions of autobiographical discourse, including rationality, coherence, truth, and independence” (179).

Price then presents information about three independent scholars who have mental disabilities, highlighting the fact that much of academia can be inaccessible to persons with mental disabilities.

What Price ultimately creates is a space in which research on mental disability will be heard. She does this in two ways: (1) furthering a serious discussion on mental disability and academia, and (2) arguing for better access for scholars with mental disability so that such scholars can enrich the profession. She ends the book, claiming: “If we wish to change the educational system, we will need all our minds” (234).



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William Archibald, Millersville University of Pennsylvania

At the beginning of *A New Culture of Learning*, Thomas and Brown posit this question: “What happens to learning when we move from the stable infrastructure of the twentieth century to the fluid infrastructure of the twenty-first century, where technology is constantly creating and responding to change?” (17). Their response to this question, which has everything to do with the current information explosion, is to encourage everyone in education to get their game on. In their project to “gamify” education, they appear to have given over learning to the machines (see Feiler).

The authors recognize an anxiety in society about the glut of information, and they perceive a lack of response to these changes by educational institutions, which together actually creates an opportunity, they say, to change education. The way they wish to assuage this anxiety and affect change—by literally playing around—makes their book problematic and frustrating.

A major source of this frustration for readers of their book is the implied notion that technology has agency—that it responds to causes and is propelled by its own purposes. This implication sets up a solution to a problem that the technology seems to have actually caused. Their reasoning goes like this: we are being forced to process more and more information, and our educational system as it is cannot do the job; therefore, educational culture has to change. But, in this logic, the effect—the overload of information—becomes the source of our difficulties, so that technology then needs to help us deal with a problem it has caused.

But doesn't the machine have agency only when we give it over? A technology like the Internet has inundated us with information that we must manage so that we can create knowledge that is abundant and useful. What Thomas and Brown suggest is that these changes produced by information technologies have created a moment when we need to abandon traditional ways of learning in order not to be overwhelmed. However, their recommendation seems to overstate the problem and simply manifests the seduction of the new. Giving in to the newest new thing does not preordain its usefulness but merely describes its current power of suggestion.

What occurs to Thomas and Brown when they listen to technology's siren call are “frameworks”—structures that will allow us to function in this changing world (18). They propose a “new culture of learning” that is made up of these structures that contain (1) “a massive information network that provides almost unlimited access and resources to learn anything” and (2) “a bounded and structured environment that allows for unlimited agency to build and experiment with things within those boundaries” (19). The new culture of learning combines these two elements and (literally) plays off of them.

The authors make a point of highlighting the educational usefulness of massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) like *World of Warcraft* that contain collectives called Guilds where players band together to “engage in complex raids” (109). These games force players to learn strategies that allow them to succeed in battles with other players.

The game is a simulated war that provides the sweep of a real war. It pulls and pushes players along until one side wins. There is no doubt that players in *World of Warcraft*, who simulate real soldiers fighting in real wars, have a certain amount of agency when it comes employing strategies, but a war itself can be considered a machine that crowds out human agency and destroys what gets in its way.

In *New Culture of Learning*, the online game *World of Warcraft* provides the only viable model for Thomas's and Brown's learning environments. The problem I see with this model starts back with the idea of agency. If, on the one hand, they say the machines have agency, and on the other, we have "unlimited agency," then there must be the ability to opt out, to stop playing. We might not choose to leave agency to the machines and decide not to be part of this new culture of learning. And if we do that, are we out of luck, coping with and learning in the twenty-first century? Not likely. Instead, I prefer to see the authors' proposal for a new culture of learning as just one option. In the most generous sense, the authors describe a way to continue playing and not simply a way to win (Carse 3). And, as an option, it needs to be critiqued along with the older educational system that they say it replaces.

In their new culture of learning, the authors invoke an environment where "teachers no longer need to scramble to provide the latest up-to-date information to students because the students themselves are taking an active role in helping to create and mold it, particularly in areas of social information" (52). This environment they call a "collective." And they distinguish it from a community in these ways: "where communities can be passive (though not all of them are by any means), collectives cannot. In communities, people learn in order to belong. In a collective, people belong in order to learn" (52). While it's true that many online collectives encourage learning, so do most physical classrooms. Nothing special distinguishes online-learning collectives, which work as well as physical communities when they work at all. What disturbs me is the agonistic spirit that is foundational to many gaming collectives, a spirit that would likely transfer to the sort of learning collectives the authors envision.

These collectives are exemplified, as we've seen, by MMOGs like *World of Warcraft* (107). It is not an accident that our students flock to such games; they grew up playing video games. Our students desire to play games motivates much of what Thomas and Brown say in their book. Games are one of the trendiest learning tools of the moment, but they are also evident as a strategy for society-wide learning. There are games played as psychological therapy, as dieting programs, as ways to recover from injury, among others (Feiler). The tendency to use games as vehicles for learning is based on the undeniable fact that our children have learned very practical skills playing games. For instance, if you listen to anecdotal evidence, children today learn to read because they want to know how to play a game better. Those of us of a certain age learned to read because we found books that thrilled us. Books provided worlds where our imagination could explore and develop. Our children find these opportunities in the world of games.

The sense of learning in the collective has a retro feel to it. For most of the mid to late twentieth century, we've been advised to join a collective niche, told to specialize as a bulwark against the anxiety of change. Change fills us with dread and makes us hunker down in our knowledge silos and become distanced from the consequences of our work. Those who have worked on systems from the atomic bomb to the Internet have not

been able to see the sort of unintended consequences that their projects produce. And it has been just the sort of collective action these systems have generated that the authors promote as solutions to the heavy burden of information and the lack of practical learning that is going on—collective action often without critical reflection.

It remains debatable whether we want to structure our educational system on the basis of game playing. There are those—the authors being two such people—who say we have to change how we teach because our students are different and learn differently. They're gamers. I am of the mind that learning within a gaming environment is just another way to learn, that we should provide these opportunities but not eschew more traditional ways of learning just because our students don't have experience with them.

The authors argue that the only way to learn in 21st-century—a time of constant change—will be to learn in renditions of gaming collectives that we establish in our classrooms, and we should adapt to teaching our students in this way. I believe this is short-sighted and counterproductive. The technology has changed us and will continue to change us, but we have always adapted to these changes in the past and will continue to do so. What has not changed is how we learn from each other. It's not a matter of becoming more machine-like; it's a matter of becoming more human and more critical. We still need teachers to pattern and encourage ways of thinking critically. When we are overwhelmed by technology, the answer to this anxiety is not to let it absorb us. Instead, let us provide still, quiet places for people to step back and see how change affects them and what they should be doing to learn from this change. Abdicating our responsibility for our own agency in the face of the information maw is not a solution, and this book, as far as it suggests such a route, should be ignored.



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Noam Scheindlin, City University of New York / LaGuardia

Creative writing is flourishing in American universities. The Association of Writers and Writers Programs lists 852 writing programs, an increase of almost 40% from 1994 (Fenza). But this is only part of the story. Now that creative writing courses have become common, if not standard for students in all majors, more students than ever are taking creative writing courses during their college career.

Such an increasing emphasis on creative writing in college curricula would seem to offer new ways for approaching critical thinking and reflection. Creative writing courses have the potential to offer students an additional semester of experience and instruction in writing beyond that of their composition course. They could permit students to build up a repertoire of expressive and compositional possibilities that could be applicable in nearly any course of study. Yet Carl Vandermeulen, in his fine new book *Negotiating the Personal in Creative Writing*, argues that these possibilities are not being exploited enough.

The problem, Vandermeulen argues, is that the prevalent model for the college creative writing course is the traditional writer's workshop, popularized by such institutions as the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference and the Iowa Writer's Workshop. Vandermeulen contends, however, that such workshops were not designed for the novice writer but, rather, for the writer who has already demonstrated a commitment to the practice. Further, Vandermeulen argues that this model remains entrenched in a romantic paradigm which takes as its premise the notion that good writing can be honed, but ultimately cannot be taught to those who do not demonstrate talent to begin with.

Vandermeulen, however, is less interested in isolating the few "geniuses" from any given creative writing class and much more in activating "the process by which students with lesser talents might nevertheless become persons who write" (9). Yet, if this is to be the case, then the discipline of creative writing would need to cultivate precisely what so many instructors of creative writing proclaim is unnecessary: a pedagogy. In stark contrast to the traditional workshop, which is organized around the authority of the successful writer-instructor as the model to emulate, Vandermeulen stakes out his position clearly: "Trying to teach without pedagogy," he writes, "is like trying to live without literature" (9).

A pedagogy is needed, he argues, because creative writing courses in college should focus on the process of writing, rather than the product. As such, creative writing pedagogy has much to learn from the college composition course, where students are not expected to come to the course with a product ready to be critiqued. Much of Vandermeulen's book involves a thoughtful re-shaping of these practices to meet the needs of creative expression. Yet Vandermeulen maintains that a pedagogy for creative writing by no means requires that the course be less rigorous or less challenging. Rather, in shifting the emphasis from product to process, he offers an eminently practical approach to helping students both generate content and engage in the kind of critical response and reflection that fosters attentive and rigorous revision. For Vandermeulen, the life of a creative writing class is not in the encounter between students and the finished text, but rather, in the dialogue between writers that the text elicits. It is from this notion that the book gets its

title: the successful creative writing class, Vandermeulen argues, is always a negotiation of the personal; it is the place where apprentice writers struggle *together* to express themselves in a shared medium. The classroom, then, is the place where the product must confront its own pliability and permeability as process.

At the book's core is a survey of teaching practices and instructional goals of American creative writing instructors: respondents rate a series of statements regarding their approach on a continuum of importance. They are also asked to comment on their challenges and frustrations, and on their triumphs. Drawing on this survey throughout, Vandermeulen proposes a series of practices that could serve to reconfigure the creative writing workshop, offering strategies for facilitating students' responses to each other's work and for reflection on their own work. Other chapters address possibilities for rethinking the role of the instructor in the creative writing course and offer useful approaches to grading, to responding to students' work, and to managing cases of "pretentious" or "blocked" writing (153). While never departing from his focus on practice, Vandermeulen draws on a wide array of theorists to make his point, from compositionists such as Peter Elbow and Patrick Bizarro, but also from literary critics and sociologists such as M.M. Bakhtin and René Girard.

The book itself is true to the dialogic method that its author advocates. Vandermeulen draws liberally on the comments of survey responders throughout, turning the book into a kind of polylogue of experiences in the classroom. As such, the book becomes a compelling collective narrative. Vandermeulen does not critique the responses that he presents; rather, like a good classroom facilitator, he tells his story through the careful juxtaposition of these responses: behind the plurality of classrooms to which the reader of this book is privy, resounds the gentle but unwavering voice of the author/teacher, who ultimately draws out the lesson.

The juxtaposition of responses is revealing. For example, Vandermeulen asks his respondents to rate the claim, "Students should want to publish and master the craft of the genre well enough to become more likely to be published." Only 7% of those surveyed for this issue saw this as "highly important" (14). Yet a clear majority responded that "Whole-class workshop/critiquing of students' drafts" is "highly important." If, to the bulk of respondents, the *product*, as a publishable text, is less important than the process, nonetheless, Vandermeulen's point is that the whole class critique in which the writer traditionally remains silent and receptive, was in fact created not to further the process, but to evaluate the product! It is out of this disparity that Vandermeulen carves the space his book occupies. Vandermeulen delicately and gracefully points out the inconsistency, and then proceeds to offer an alternative.

Vandermeulen delineates three tenets of the traditional writer's workshop and then "translates" these practices into those that would be more appropriate for the college creative writing workshop. The first indeed addresses that longstanding tradition of the writer's workshop: the whole-class critique. Vandermeulen recommends that this should be replaced with small "writer's groups." Because the focus here is on the cultivation and development of apprentice writers, the group workshop, he argues, provides a more nourishing environment for this work. With the risk of marginalization lessened, students would be more confident and, thus, less likely to be stymied by a competitive atmosphere for which they are not yet ready.

Vandermeulen also advocates replacing the workshop critique with that of the *response*. Instead of evaluating each other's work, students offer their groupmates narratives of their reading; they provide an audience that helps to mirror the writer's work so that he/she can know whether what was written has made its way all the way over to the reader. Vandermeulen provides a series of extremely useful rubrics that help students past the good/bad duality and into the role of the engaged reader.

Finally, Vandermeulen argues against the long tradition that the writer whose work is being discussed must remain silent. Rather, he suggests inviting the writer whose work is under consideration to speak. In this way the writer can ask targeted questions of his/her readers, questions that might, without the dialogic situation, not otherwise be formulated, let alone answered.

While the target of this book is naturally the college creative writing instructor, this book could be productively used in other spheres—no reason why the pedagogy Vandermeulen advocates could not be put to use in the high school creative writing class as well. Likewise, many of the practices that Vandermeulen proposes could also be re-deployed in the college composition class.

Yet the approaches that Vandermeulen offers might be equally effective even for workshops designed for practiced and accomplished writers. The “workshop poem,” for example, has been roundly criticized in recent years for its generic quality. Vandermeulen's call to emphasize the writing process over its product might go a long way to rejuvenate the kind of writing that is being produced in these settings. Indeed, process-based writing might not only produce better writing but new kinds of writing.

The novelist and poet Georges Perec writes that “literary history seems deliberately to ignore writing as practice, as work, as play” (97). Vandermeulen's book brings us back to the scene of a work's creation, and to the practice and play involved in it. He reminds us that writing is, in fact, made by writers. In *Negotiating the Personal*, he makes a respectful, but earnest case, for defying convention.



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Martin Cockroft, Waynesburg University

While Jeff Wilhelm and Bruce Novak's *Teaching Literacy for Love and Wisdom* is not supersized (a modest 250 pages, including backmatter), its authors' ambitions are. The front cover bears a visual hint of what's to come, featuring side-by-side photographs: a teenage girl sitting in the grass reading next to a photo of a more sophisticated, apparently liberated young woman, sans book and backlit by the sun, looking heavenward, arms spread like Kate Winslet's Rose on the prow of the Titanic. A subtitle rises above both of them: *Being the BOOK and Being the CHANGE* (emphasis theirs). Four pages in, the authors include epigraphs from the likes of Walt Whitman, Mahatma Gandhi, Franklin Roosevelt, and Albert Einstein—and that's just table setting; later, Wilhelm and Novak announce plans to rename the discipline of English, which they validly claim no longer "offers anything close to an adequate description" of what is taught and devote a chapter to synthesizing science, philosophy, and pedagogy "in a way no one has done before us" (21, 50). What the authors lack in page count they more than make up for in confidence and the sheer scope of their agenda.

In their introduction, "Among Schoolteachers," Wilhelm, prolific author and Professor of English Education at Boise State University, and Novak, Director of Educational Projects for the Foundation for Ethics and Meaning (and longtime leader in AEPL), give rationale for their go-big approach. We're in trouble, they say. Standards-based primary and secondary education, with its emphasis on accountability and results, has drained nearly all the joy out of classroom teaching. Worse, students themselves view school as "a barren way station, . . . a locale to pass the time, turn the pages, and get the credit" (Christenbury qtd. in Wilhelm and Novak 9). At the same time, the authors find the other of "two schools of thought," the critical theory approach that has dominated university English departments, to be valuable but ultimately ineffective, best at instituting "highly intelligent forms of anarchy" (52). What is needed, they say, is a third way—one that remembers the formation of people (as Sheridan Blau notes in his forward, even Nazis read great books) and one that can capture the public imagination and institute positive, lasting change. This third way will "foster the kinds of teacher thinking and educational conditions . . . that make being alive worthwhile" and "provide a coherent, readily communicable view of education" (8). Pursuing this path is their focus in this study.

Teaching for Love and Wisdom is organized in three parts, each part consisting of three chapters, each chapter divided into numerous short sections identified with boldface headers. Part 1 details the history and theory behind Wilhelm and Novak's key ideas. Chapter 1, for example, provides a fascinating overview of two prominent national education reform seminars, Dartmouth (1966) and Wye (1987), examining the contributions and failings of each. In Chapter 2, the authors pay particular attention to Wye, focusing on the tension between the final report of the seminar's main College Section, which favored an "issue-centered" approach to curriculum, and the work of

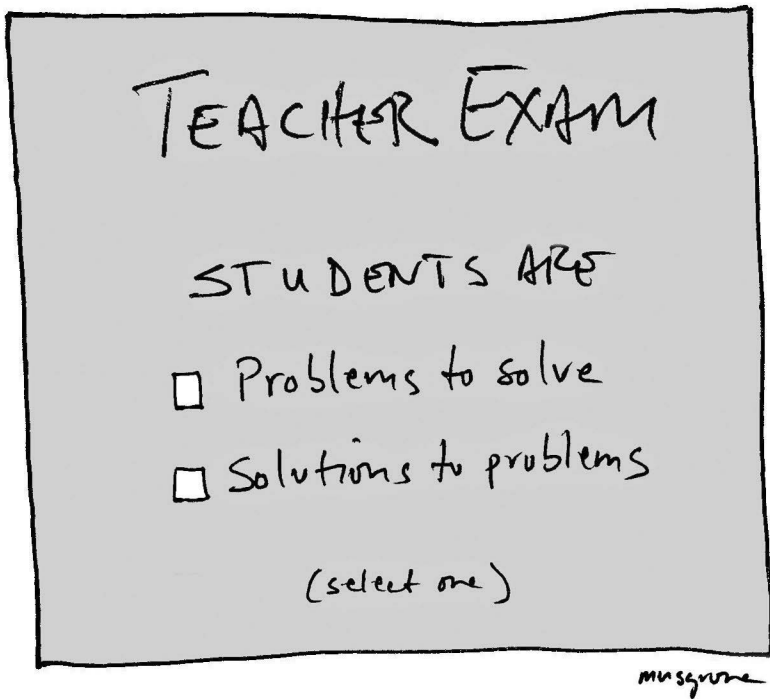
two marginalized groups, the Elementary [teachers'] Section and the self-proclaimed "wholistic/Joy" group—three female college professors the authors characterize as voices in the wilderness. Wilhelm and Novak see consonance between these two groups' emphasis on student-centered "truths of personhood" (Moffett qtd. in Wilhelm and Novak 42) experienced in literature and the groundbreaking educational philosophies of John Dewey and his protégé, Louise Rosenblatt. The authors are especially convinced by Dewey's later work, his move away from strict social constructivism and toward what Dewey called "aesthetic transaction": "experience that is personal, but not merely subjective," which engenders powerful relationships between reader and author, self and world (12-13).

At the end of Part 1 and throughout Part 2, the authors attempt to align Wilhelm's "three dimensions of [a reader's] response to literature"—evocative, connective, and reflective—with the book's central topics of life, love, and wisdom. *At the same time*, they align these topic with philosopher Paul Ricoeur's three dimensions of "narrative time," present-past, present-present, and present-future (10-11, 70). They also disclose their proposed reinvention of the English department as instead "Personal Studies" and introduce practical tips and exercises to enact that transformation. For instance, they talk about the importance of "frontloading" assignments, offer a list of "Ten Easy Ways to Ruin Reading" in the classroom, and show how "hotseating" a text's author (role-played by one or more students) helps explain why a writer might have written what she did. If this sounds like a lot to weave together, it is: Chapter 5 alone contains at least 14 different sections and sub-sections. Though it's impossible not to admire Wilhelm and Novak's enthusiasm, I found reading Chapters 4 and 5 straight through to be like spending the day with Richard Simmons; I was almost physically exhausted by the regimen, and I began to wonder whether Part 2 suffers as much as it gains from the collaboration of two brilliant teacher/thinkers: their kinetic energy outstrips their ability to effectively communicate the ideas they most eagerly want to share.

Part 3 consolidates the book's preoccupations by profiling teachers—Wilhelm, Novak, and four others Wilhelm recently worked with—who embody Dewey and Rosenblatt's "transaction" in their teaching. I was particularly impressed by junior high teacher Andrew Porter's use of an alter-ego, "Friedrich Mantooth," to help students understand critical lenses (Mantooth summarizes and interprets a chapter of *To Kill a Mockingbird*) and by high school teacher Debra Smith's articulate thoughts on how American literature creates and critiques a democratic society (164, 167). Though these profiles work a bit like product testimonials, since the teachers have all been closely mentored by Wilhelm, it's hard to argue against the quality of the product these educators seem to deliver. And while their methods might appear subversive to school or district administrators, their pedagogy would surely seem spot-on, if a tad intimidating, to most teachers. Part 3 wraps with a chapter on cultivating a "third space" where students and teachers seek "shared stories, shared life, and shared possibilities" and a final, rangy chapter that settles into a brief consideration and history of wisdom (174).

That chapter, the book's ninth, exemplifies the strength and weaknesses of *Teaching Literacy*. The authors are passionate, their call urgent (as it ought to be), and their convictions grounded by long years of study and practice. They are sold on their ideas and believe we should be, too; "Given all this, one would think everyone would readily embrace 'personal studies,'" they say earnestly in the conclusion (216). But theirs is an

everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach: just in Chapter 9 we have a look at material excess, military might, and the nature of democracy; a short take-down of the federal “Race to the Top” program, in which schools compete for funding to spur innovation in K-12 education; a detailed list of support organizations for teachers interested in “wisdom in teaching and learning”; and a primer on the flowering of wisdom in the Axial age. In this final chapter and throughout their study, the authors link these subjects admirably, but not altogether successfully, and ultimately dazzle us more with their knowledge and zeal than persuade us of the merit and coherence of their cause.



CONNECTING

Trust, and Gaps

Helen Walker

Let's consider what is next to impossible to practice with any regularity: *trust*. We open the door with our hair brushed, zippers checked, brief cases bulging with the results of a pedagogy developed out of deep passion and forethought based on experience and study. Yet we know that no amount of preparation will take care of the contingencies created by who we open our doors to: students.

Whatever we plan for, students will surprise us, turning the classroom into a stage where our performance demands trust.

Since I teach playwriting this semester, and since I keep finding evidence of trust in the narratives I receive for "Connecting," I will expand on the theater analogy. A good playwright creates a good play by setting up gaps. A gap is the space between expectation and reality. For example, a teacher enters a classroom, expecting to teach her students well, but she soon meets reality in the form of obstacles—a widely diverse array of students, some eager to learn but many others resistant, or worse, apathetic. The space after expectation and reality collide is the gap.

Here comes the good news. These gaps (reoccurring again and again in a good play) are the spaces in which a protagonist does the hard work of bringing together expectation and reality. In theater, without the gaps, the play dies. In the classroom, without the gaps, the teacher gets no opportunity to know and then show what she and her students are made of. Everyone goes home disappointed. So in the gap, marshaling the energy that comes from the conflict between expectation and reality, the teacher reaches out for her goal, using a "tactic" (another playwriting term). If she fails, she tries another. And so it goes, on and on. The drama and the tension come from the teacher trusting that she will find a tactic that awakens the desire in every student to learn. Not all tactics will work for all students. It takes trust, however, that the right tactics can be found.

Interesting analogy, isn't it? Maybe our classrooms are even more gap-filled than good theater, scene after scene after scene without a let up. Carl Vandermeulen's poem, below, is what got me thinking about trust. How trusting we must be to navigate through our teaching in "a way/ that is not a way/ until [we] make it."

As I close—so that you can read Carl's poem and then get a glimpse into other teachers' classrooms—I hope you will become mindful about the gaps these teachers reveal. The gaps are pretty much guaranteed when people get together in confined spaces to learn. The trust that we can fill those gaps, that we can reconcile expectation and reality? Well, that's another thing altogether! That's where, in our classrooms, our efforts stretch us into the role of the protagonist—or not.

I just got an image of me as my personal favorite protagonist, Spider Man, jumping off a very tall building with my eyes closed for a second, trusting that the webs I shoot out of my fingertips will hold me up and connect me to something real.

Happy reading!

Proverbs for Poetry Class

Carl Vandermeulen

If you are assigned to write a poem,
work till the poem works free
from the assignment.

Follow instructions and advice,
knowing that instructions
and advice do not write poems.

If you write desiring this woman's art
and that man's scope,
your poems as well will reject you.

If you write in fear, poems that wait to welcome you
will smell your fear and show their teeth,
and if you make effigies of your fears,
others will madly shape their own—
a pack of masks consorting in wind and shadow
begetting offspring none claim as their own.

You cannot catch a cat by chasing it, but if you wait
open-handed, it may come to you
and show you what you need to know
about touch and shape and sound.

Trust that you will learn
to go by a way
that is not a way
until you make it.

TJ, Whom I Like Very Much

Louise Morgan

(Part of an email a while back from my teacher friend Louise, telling me about her
day of teaching in an alternative high school in Harrisburg, PA):

. . . Well, I am getting my drama section off the ground today. Here is what I did.
When they walked into the room, they were given two things. A handshake by me and

a card with an emotion written on it. I asked them to sit in alphabetical order with that emotion. After they sat down, I told them we were going to learn about some elements of drama—emotion and script to begin with. So I asked them to write a very short script. To pick one line from anything—a song, a rap. Then I put the emotion cards in a box and the script in a box. I picked out the cards. I spoke the words with the emotion and asked them to guess the emotion. We talked about how some of the emotions did not go with the words and some did. I did several of those and then asked them to try. Some did.

Next I talked about how arts are used to express emotion and experience, and then I read a poem. A 15-year-old boy wrote it. It is about hiding yourself from others.

They didn't get into it at first. It took about 10 minutes for them to overcome all the junk that keeps them from trusting, involving and sharing. They finally started to laugh, or get interested. Some didn't, just stayed in a dark cloud.

One of them, TJ, whom I like very much, who smiles a lot, is never disrespectful, was picked up for rape. He broke into a house and raped a 32-year-old at gun point. What do you do with that? He is in Dauphin County prison. This will be the second boy that I am going to write to in prison.

All for now.....

History Lesson 101

Jill Moyer Sunday

I heard Joe before I ever saw him. Late on a Wednesday afternoon, I sat in my office, hunched over a pile of papers as the clock pushed toward five, rushing to finish a set of responses for my morning composition class. In the background, Joe's high, reedy voice rose and fell in conversation with a professor from another department.

I refocused on the papers in front of me. Seconds later another conversation began . . . this time between Joe and one of my colleagues, just two doors away. If I pulled the door closed right then, before he came any closer, he wouldn't know the difference. I quietly moved the door into its frame.

The next morning, I rounded the bend from my office to my classroom, coming face to face with a short, trim man, his white hair cropped in military style. This had to be Joe.

Gesturing at the professional-looking camera hanging around his neck, Joe identified himself as a graduate of our university, on campus to attend his 50th reunion. "I'm taking pictures for the Coast Guard auxiliary newsletter. Would I be able to visit your classroom?" I led Joe into room 321, my conscience slightly assuaged about last night's closed door.

Joe told me a little about himself while we waited for students to settle in. After WWII, he'd come to our university via the G.I. Bill; the changes on campus since then amazed him. "I didn't recognize the place," he said, as much to himself as to me.

"It's a coincidence that you're here today," I told Joe, just before he walked to the back of the classroom. "We've been reading and writing about WWII, the Holocaust really. They've just been to the Holocaust Museum on Monday."

We began class by discussing their visit to the museum. I asked them which exhibit took the Holocaust from historical notation to reality for them. They told each other about

piles of old shoes, covered with a blue patina of mold; about the boxcar, some hesitating to enter, some offering a prayer as they walked through; about the pictures drawn by children, the recordings of survivors, the silence of visitors. All of them mentioned the Tower of Faces, stretching upward for three floors of the museum, four walls covered with photos of the Jews of Eishishok, taken before a SS mobile death squad obliterated the entire population in just 48 hours. The photographs, submitted to the local Nazi regime for tallying purposes, are poignant signs of ordinary life stopped short—graduation and wedding shots, babies' birthdays, families picnicking on summer lawns.

This may have been the most difficult class of the semester, as students confronted the reality of human betrayal. Our journey through the semester would eventually take us to a brighter place, in our research of people and organizations that worked against oppression. But on this day, we still had to view a film clip from *Sophie's Choice*. (If you haven't seen the movie or read the book, William Styron's beautiful mix of American naïveté and the residual effects of the Holocaust, put it on your list). The clip shows Sophie's arrival at Auschwitz with her two young children. In a desperate plea, Sophie tells an SS officer that she's a not a Jew, but a Polish Christian. He responds by offering her the "choice" of which child will be allowed to live. The clip ends with Sophie's little girl screaming for her mother as the officer carries her away under his arm.

The room was quiet. I turned on the lights and honored the silence for a bit. "Well?" I asked. "Let's put this all together. Reactions?"

"It could have been me," one of the students shared.

"It could have been any of us. What if my father were a Nazi? Would I have been able to stand up to him?"

"May I say something?" Joe asked from the back of the room. The students seemed to have forgotten him. One or two turned toward him. "I was eighteen years old," Joe began. "I was there."

The change in the classroom was physical. Every student—the majority of them just eighteen—moved as if part of a rippling wave building momentum, adjusting their seats to look directly at Joe. "My unit went to Auschwitz. We were one of the first at the camp." Joe said. "It was...it was..." Joe continued with a sob, raising his hands to cover his face, and the rest of his story became wet words wept into his hands.

In that moment, history came alive in my classroom. Movie images faded away, and Joe stood at the gates of Auschwitz.

His presence was still in our classroom when we met again. The students wrote about him, and many stopped by my office to discuss his visit. I told his story over and over again, knocking on colleagues' doors. I could sense their withdrawal when I began my story, hearing: "Oh, that guy. I heard him in the hall too." Some told me they had also closed their doors, anxious not to be disturbed. But when I told them about Joe's role in the liberation of Auschwitz, their faces changed, softening.

As for me, I will likely still be rushing to finish a stack of papers, but Joe's visit will stay with me for a long time. What did I learn from him? Sometimes history breathes. I'm keeping my door wide open now, just in case.

Shawn

Tony Mayo

For many, Johnny Cash is “the man in black.” For me, Shawn will forever be the man in black. This Metallica-obsessed, grunge-looking genius is a savant clad as a hair band roadie. Shawn defies first impressions and conquers history in defiance of his track record as a slacker and chronic pot smoker. He has snuck up on me and his own education: a ninja assassin, academically lethal, clad in the color of night.

The word, “teacher” implies wisdom. A teacher teaches others, molds minds, and influences those willing to learn. I was thirty-two. Shawn was fourteen. Shawn was my teacher; all this in spite of the long hair, the smell of teen spirit, and the aroma of marijuana.

Shawn taught me to never make assumptions about a student based on hair, musical interest, “recreational habits,” clothes, or previous academic failures. True, after years of experience and education, these are things I should have known, and probably did deep down, but Shawn was a stark real-world reminder. Shawn has credited me with allowing him to express and demonstrate his brilliance. He has said I inspired him to want to try. What Shawn fails to realize is that I was only able to do so once he inspired me.

This head-banging denizen shared an art room where we discussed World History. But our dialogue was not limited to the school setting. Shawn travels well, stealthily blindsiding museum guides on field trips with critical questions, illuminating tour groups with intricate knowledge of Renaissance art and medieval history. Shawn makes black bright.

We taught each other well, but I know that in our symbiosis I am the remora and he is the shark. I now listen to Metallica. I have done more good because this dark knight slew the dragon of ignorance within me years ago. Through social media posts, I still see the beacon within this man in black when he comments on things with historical references. I take it as a wink and a nudge and smile, hear guitar riffs in my imagination, and vow to continue to connect with men in black, purple-haired girls, and all who are pierced, painted, tattooed, or outside the box. And I always light the darkness with my smile if any one of them is wearing a Metallica tee shirt.

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Guidelines for Writers of JAEPL

JAEPL adheres to the format guidelines found in the current edition of the *MLA Handbook* or *Style Manual*. However, for experimental essays that bend MLA format for good reason, the editors are open to other choices.

JAEPL essays should cite sources parenthetically within the text as much as possible, using a “Works Cited” list on separate pages at the end of the essay. Use endnotes: 1) to offer commentary or facts that do not fit logically into the text, 2) to handle multiple citations, 3) to add editorial commentary regarding the source itself.

Authors are responsible for double checking all references for accuracy in page number citation, as well as the accuracy in the details of title, publisher, etc.

Avoid second-hand references to a primary source. Find the original citation, double checking it for accuracy. If citing an indirect source is necessary, explain why.

Any use of student writing or classroom research should be processed through the author’s institutional IRB committee for approval, and authors should obtain written permission from the cited student writers.

The editors reserve the right to reject any piece, even one that has been solicited, if in their view, the piece turns out not to be a good fit for the journal. The editors also reserve the right to make editing decisions for clarity or limitations of space. Revision of manuscripts is done in consultation with the writer.

If style or formatting questions arise, send a query to one or both of the editors: jstrapp@king.edu and bpeters@niu.edu.

Deadline: February 28, 2013 for possible inclusion in Vol. 19; rolling deadline otherwise

Typing: Double-spaced, numbered pages, including works cited and block quotations; at least one level of internal headings, when necessary; wide margins for feedback; author’s name to appear on title page only.

Title page: Title of Article; Name; Address; E-mail address; Home and Office Phone; Institutional Affiliation

Abstract: 1-2 double-spaced sentences on title page

Preferred length: Articles, 5-6000 words, including works cited

Documentation style: Current *MLA Style Manual*

Copies: Electronic submission in rich text format (RTF)

Images: 300 dpi or higher, in uncompressed TIF or JPG format, greyscale. Images that contain text or line art should be 600 dpi for legibility.

Special sections: Book reviews (1000 words) are determined by book review editor (Judith.Halden-Sullivan@millersville.edu). “Connecting” editor (walker@messiah.edu) determines 500-1000 word personal essays and short poems.

Editorial report: Within 8-12 weeks

Compensation: Two complimentary copies

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Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

June 27-30, 2013

Estes Park, Colorado

Featured Speaker: Peter Elbow



This year's conference is inspired by keynote speaker Peter Elbow's recent book, *Vernacular Eloquence*, in which he revisits the relationship between writing and speaking and considers the power of embodied speech—what he has referred to as “the untutored tongue”—to transform our relationship to writing. The conference will offer participants chances to interact informally with Elbow and each other, and will include Elbow's plenary talk: “Vernacular Eloquence: Exploring the Linguistic and Rhetorical Power in Everyone's Ordinary Spoken Language.” We suggest that participants read Elbow's book before the conference, and we invite proposals

for 75-minute workshops or panels, or 30-minute presentations, that explore the connections and disconnections between speaking and writing in our theories and practices of writing, speaking, teaching and learning.

We welcome proposals for 30-minute presentations and 75-minute panels or interactive workshops, exploring connections/disconnections in theories and practices of writing, speaking, teaching, and learning.

Possible topics include:

- Responses to Elbow's *Vernacular Eloquence*
- Reflections on, and resistances to, the concept of an “untutored tongue”
- The historical connection/disconnection between writing and speaking in rhetoric
- The treatment of vernacular literacies in theory and practice
- The role of speaking/voice/sound in traditional and new media/multimodal composing
- Speaking and writing as embodied acts
- Speech in our classrooms and academic practice
- The uses/abuses of “voice” in composing and teaching

Please email proposals by April 1, 2013 to untutoredtongue@gmail.com.

Conference co-organizers:

Irene Papoulis, Trinity University, irene.papoulis@trincoll.edu

Wendy Ryden, Long Island University, wendy.ryden@liu.edu

Conference description and registration at:

<https://www.sworps.tennessee.edu/aepl/html/home.htm>

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