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JAEPL, Vol. 15, Winter 2009-2010

Kristie S. Fleckenstein
Editor

Linda T. Calendrillo

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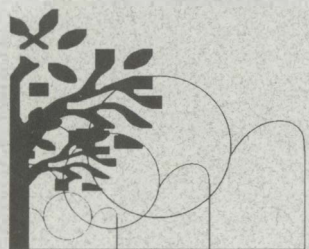
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J A E P L

The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

Pictures of the Believing Game

Volume 15 • Winter 2009-2010

The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

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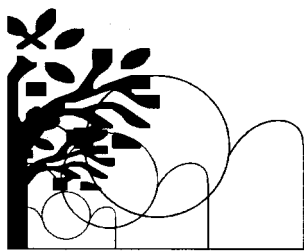
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Guest Editor

Peter Elbow

Editors

Kristie S. Fleckenstein
Florida State University

Linda T. Calendrillo
Valdosta State University, Retired

Book Review Editor

Judith Halden-Sullivan
Millersville University of Pennsylvania

“Connecting” Editor

Helen Walker
Messiah College

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J A E P L

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 traditional disciplines and methodologies.

The purposes of AEPL, therefore, are to provide a common ground for theorists, researchers, and practitioners to explore ideas on the subject; to participate in programs and projects on it; 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*, meets this need. It 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: aesthetic, emotional, and moral intelligence; archetypes; body wisdom; care in education; creativity; felt sense theory; healing; holistic learning; humanistic and transpersonal psychology; imaging; intuition; kinesthetic knowledge; meditation; narration as knowledge; reflective teaching; silence; spirituality; and visualization.

Membership in AEPL is \$20. Contact Laurence Musgrove, AEPL Membership Chair, Department of English, ASU Station 10894, Angelo State University, 2601 W. Avenue N, San Angelo, TX 76909. email: musgrove@angelo.edu. Membership includes that year's issue of *JAEPL*.

Send submissions, address changes, and single copy requests to Joanna S. Trapp, Co-Editor, *JAEPL*. email: jtrapp@waynesburg.edu

Address letters to the editor and all other editorial correspondence to Joanna S. Trapp, Co-Editor, *JAEPL*. email: jtrapp@waynesburg.edu

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Contents

vii Editors' Message

Essays

- Peter Elbow* 1 **Reflections from a Grateful Guest Editor**
- Sheridan Blau* 8 **Believing and Doubting as Hermeneutic Method:
Reading and Teaching *Paradise Lost***
Using a variation on Peter Elbow's believing game, I help students discover the degree to which Milton in Paradise Lost succeeds in his explicit attempt to justify God's ways to man and in that success also offers us an account of human happiness and misery that is psychologically sophisticated, spiritually illuminating, entirely rational, and supremely wise as a guide to living a humanly satisfying life. Such an approach to Paradise Lost also fosters an experience of the text through which many students undergo a modern version of the spiritual transformation and enlightenment that Milton explicitly aimed to make possible for readers of his epic.
- Tim Doherty* 16 **Lessons from the Believing Game**
My essay reflects on different lessons I have learned in using the believing game to promote deliberative dialogue in first-year writing courses. I have learned that it helps not to be in a hurry: spending enough preparation time with students thinking about belief itself, listening to students' stories and sense of attachment to beliefs, and playing the game repeatedly. I also explore the believing game as a mode of play, especially the fruitful way that role-play can be integrated into the believing game.
- Anne Ellen Geller* 27 **The Difficulty of Believing in Writing Across the Curriculum**
What would happen if we tried to consider writing-across-the-curriculum work through the lens of Peter Elbow's methodological believing? If we were to believe that every faculty person in the university is a writer, thinks about writing, and teaches writing in his or her own way, what virtues would we find that doubting leads us to disqualify?

Shelly Sheats Harkness 37
 Catherine Pullin Lane
 Sue Mau
 Amber Brass

**The Believing Game in Mathematics:
 Stories in a Discipline of Doubt**

Many people view mathematics as a discipline of certainty and rigidity. Answers are either right or wrong, and, when they are wrong, it is easy to play the doubting game. We invite readers into our mathematics classrooms as we story our attempts to play the believing game. We provide a lens into how we suspended our own logic, assumptions, and interpretations until we first tried to "unpack," understand, and honor our students' logic, assumptions, and interpretations. Within our individual stories, elements of tension, surprise, and wonder emerged as collective themes.

Judy Lightfoot

**50 Saying Yes to Freestyle Volunteering:
 Doubting and Believing**

My formerly academic interest in Peter Elbow's work developed fresh relevance a few years ago after a member of my family was diagnosed with schizophrenia. To volunteer "outside the box" with individuals who suffer from mental illness or homelessness, I needed a skeptic's doubt as well as an enthusiast's belief. But the first step was believing.

Clyde Moneyhun

54 Believing, Doubting, Deciding, Acting

I used Peter Elbow's believing and doubting games and cooked up two games of my own, to structure a first-year writing class aimed at teaching students to read and reason critically. The first new game has been hinted at by Elbow himself: the deciding game, in which students used their exercises in believing and doubting to make up their minds about a topic. The second new game, which my students called the living game, asked them to extend their intellectual decisions into the world and take or recommend actions based on them. This was all enacted through a series of assignments for reading journal entries, a term paper, and an elaborate oral presentation. I learned a lot from teaching the course this way, including the enduring power of unreflective skepticism in my students' ingrained thinking patterns.

Irene Papoulis

63 A Reflection on Habitual Belief and Habitual Doubt

Some people are habitual "believers" while others are habitual "doubters." I'm a believer, but doubting others helps me believe myself. I explore the idea that examining our individual habitual relationships with believing and doubting helps us think better and relate better to others and to ourselves.

Stephanie Paterson

68 Friday Writes: An Exercise in the Believing Game

I introduce the basic principles for the practice of proprioceptive writing and describe the experience and outcomes of incorporating this ungraded writing into three undergraduate composition classes. I offer this as a case study of a writer, teacher, and reflective practitioner emboldened by Peter Elbow's believing game, and I point out some of the intellectual and pedagogical discoveries that emerged in my fourteen-week experiment.

- Donna Strickland* 78 **Before Belief: Embodiment and the “Trying Game”**
I use my experience of teaching “Mindful Writing” to reflect on the pre-cognitive act of “trying out” new ideas. It seems that there’s an important piece of the believing game that happens before the cognitive act of belief and that involves the body as much as the mind.

- Peter Elbow* 87 **A Highly Incomplete Bibliography**

Reviews

- Julie J. Nichols* 90 **Meaning and The Evolution of Consciousness: A Retrospective on the Writing of Owen Barfield**
 (Owen Barfield, various works)

- Charles Suhor* 96 **The Great Transformation: The Beginnings of Our Religious Traditions**
 (Karen Armstrong, 2006)

The Chalice and the Blade
 (Riane Eisler, 1988)

- Edward Sullivan* 99 **The Art of Learning: An Inner Journey to Optimal Performance**
 (Josh Waitzkin, 2007)

Connecting

- Helen Walker* 102 **Section Editor’s Message**

Andrew Statum

The Question

Vic Kryston

Conflict Resolution

Jie Li

Teaching with Accent

Dominique Zino

Space

Joonna Smitherman Trapp

Composition Class 7:45 AM

Editors' Message

In 1996, on a gloomy Sunday afternoon in Chicago, Linda and Kris were struggling to pack new books, posters, flyers, and clothes into suitcases for our return home from NCTE. Then the phone rang. AEPL chair and founding member Dick Graves called with an invitation that changed our professional lives: "Would you consider editing *JAEPL*?" We looked at each, stunned at the opportunity and the board's confidence in our abilities. The packing forgotten, we asked ourselves, "Would we consider it? Could we possibly live up to the high standards set by Alice Brand, the journal's founding editor?" As charter members of AEPL, we had been involved with the assembly from its inception, we had both published in the early issues of the journal, and we had both served on the board, Kris as ex officio member and Linda as secretary. Without a doubt, we were engaged with and dedicated to AEPL. But could we do the journal justice?

That cold Sunday afternoon marked the beginning of our work with *JAEPL*, and, now, on a sultry summer day in 2009, we write our last editors' message, welcoming Joonna Smitherman Trapp and Brad Peters as the incoming co-editors of *JAEPL*. More than 12 years have passed, and more than 11 co-edited volumes have been mailed to assembly members and to those committed to our precepts but outside of our organization. During that time, we have had the privilege of working with scholar-teachers exploring nontraditional topics that have renewed and enriched the goals that form AEPL's core. We look back over our work and plot our editorship according to the themed issues that arose from each year's accepted submissions, beginning with "Mind, Body, Spirit: Teachers Making Connections" and ending with "The Believing Game." And we have been blessed that NCTE has also found value in those themes, selecting through a rigorous review process volumes 4 through 14 for national promotion through their web site and catalog. We have high hopes that Volume 15, guest edited by Peter Elbow, will also receive that same recognition.

We are grateful for the confidence that Dick, Alice, and the long ago board had in our abilities. The experience of working with each other, with a cadre of top-notch reviewers, and with writers dedicated to researching and teaching beyond conventional boundaries has been rewarding beyond measure. We are confident that Joonna and Brad will discover the same gratification, the same joy. So we are again packing. But instead of books, papers, and clothes, instead of suitcases in a hotel bedroom, we box up 12 years of co-editing to send with warmest congratulations to Joonna and Brad, who will take the journal in new and exciting directions. ☺

Reflections from a Grateful Guest Editor

Peter Elbow

“A sign of health in the mind,” Donald Winnicott wrote in 1970, “is the ability of one individual to enter imaginatively and accurately into the thoughts and feelings and hopes and fears of another person; also for the other person to do the same to us.” (Phillips and Taylor 28)

I’m enormously grateful to *JAEPL* for inviting this special issue and inviting me to edit. I’m excited about these essays. Since 1973, the believing game has been getting bigger and bigger inside my little head, but, all along, I’ve feared that it had no real existence in the world. Here at last are pictures of the believing game not just in other people’s heads but as action in the world.

What I’ve written here are responses after reading all the essays, so you may find it more useful to read my thoughts after you read the essays. (You can use the Expanded Table of Contents to help you decide which order to read them in. I couldn’t find an ideal order, so they are printed according to the alphabetic order of the authors’ last names.) After the essays, I’ve put a limited bibliography of works that pertain to the doubting and believing games.

There were a lot of strong essays submitted for this issue, and so I had to turn down other good work for lack of space. I hope some of those writers—and other readers—might consider further work on the believing game for future issues of *JAEPL*.

And let me call attention to a past issue. There are four more important essays about the believing game published in *JAEPL* 14 (2008-2009): essays by Pat Bizzell, Mary Rose O’Reilly, Nathaniel Teich, and me. My essay is the most recent of various essays I’ve written about this topic (starting in 1973), and I think I’ve managed to summarize my essential train of thinking more briefly and clearly here than before.

• • •

In the following reflections, I can’t try to do any kind of justice to these rich essays. Rather I’m using a kind of collage form for one of my favorite forms of response: noticing. To notice, in this sense, is to brush aside any impulse to evalu-

Peter Elbow is Professor of English Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst where he directed the Writing Program. He taught at M.I.T., Franconia College, Evergreen State College, and SUNY Stony Brook where he also directed the Writing Program. He is author of Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing and Teaching Writing. He’s also written Writing Without Teachers; Oppositions in Chaucer; Writing With Power; Embracing Contraries; What is English? And with Pat Belanoff he wrote a textbook, A Community of Writers. He has edited books of essays about voice in writing and about freewriting. Three of his essays have been given awards by the journals in which they appeared. The National Council of Teachers of English gave him the James Squire Award “for his transforming influence and lasting intellectual contribution”; in 2007 the Conference on College Composition and Communication gave him the Exemplar Award for “representing the highest ideals of scholarship, teaching, and service.” Writing With Elbow (Utah State UP) is a collection of essays by other scholars devoted to his work.

ate and instead try hard to look, to see, and to say what you notice. C. S. Lewis put his finger on a big problem at the root of most school responses and indeed much human interaction when he wrote that “most people are . . . far more anxious to express their approval and disapproval of things than to describe them” (*Studies in Words* 7).¹

The Need for Experiments

I see this as a pervasive theme. “Don’t take my word for it, the Buddha would always insist, try it out for yourself. . . . [Come] to know through testing and experiencing.” This comes from Donna Strickland’s essay. Interestingly, the Buddha is inviting *both* the doubting and believing games. To try out is obviously a doubting test—putting something to the test to find flaws. The folks at *Consumer Reports* have an intriguing job that I’ve often envied: designing clever ways to stress and even misuse cars and washing machines to see which ones break down first.

But trying out is a test that also uses the believing game. We try out alternatives to see which one “believes best.” In fact, that’s how perception works: we see a figure in the distance and can’t tell if it’s a dog or a horse. When we do manage to see what it is, it’s not usually by means of a skeptical test that “disproves” horse (checking, say, for neck length); more often the testing is a process of “trying out”—trying to see it as dog and then as horse—perhaps back and forth—and finally we find that it “sees better” as dog. As dog, it snaps into the best focus.

And not just perception. Judgments about *interpretation* too rely on the believing game as test. When we encounter a difficult novel or poem or an inscrutable remark by a friend, it’s more common to “try out” different interpretations in an effort to see which one makes the best sense. It’s not that we never bring the doubting game to bear, but this is usually a later retrospective process—as in critical (!) essays and scholarly seminars.²

But let’s think a little further about critical essays and scholarly seminars. They seem to go on and on, don’t they, and arrive too seldom at any closure. We can see here—if we dare—the extraordinary centrality of the believing game in our intellectual lives. For in fact *no interpretation of a set of words can ever be proved wrong*: a text can mean almost anything—to some degree or in some sense. None of the wildest of the odd readings of *Hamlet* can be proven wrong. Someone can always find in a text a *little* scope for some odd reading. (When interpreters are stuck, they can even say, triumphantly: “Look at what the text *doesn’t* say! The author’s *silence* speaks volumes about how important this interpretation is.”) It’s only the believing game that helps us decide how much *weight* to put on the myriad of possible and to-some-degree valid interpretations of a text. Try proving to someone that his or her interpretation of an inkblot is wrong. The interpretation of a text is much more like interpreting an ink blot than disproving a mathematical or logical computation. A serious flaw can torpedo a piece of logic or geometry. A serious “flaw” never seems to slow down anyone’s commitment to some interpretation of a text.

¹On noticing, see Carini; Knoester; and Weber. Noticing could be thought of as a certain kind of “pointing”—on which, see Elbow.

²See the Nobel scientist Peter Medawar on the difference between scientific articles—which are usually retrospective attempts to prove a hypothesis to be valid—and the actual messier and more belief-oriented process by which the authors came to understand their hypothesis.

But how about arguments? They are made with logic. We can find indubitable errors in an argument—even in arguments about the interpretation of a text. Yes, but have you noticed how seldom you get people to change their mind when you show them their bad reasoning? It's not just because you are smart and they are stupid. The fact is that bad reasoning in support of an interpretation does not make that *interpretation* itself bad. It might in fact be good. The folks at *Consumer Reports* have the doubting fun of showing that cheaper products last longer and work better than expensive ones. But the doubting game is toothless in arguments about interpretation.

Indeed this applies to all arguments: any *claim* can be right even though the supporting arguments for it are flawed. We see this all around us: good arguments for bad claims and bad arguments for good claims. Yes, we need the doubting to test the validity of arguments, and, yes, arguments count for a lot. But this kind of disconfirming argument often doesn't bring results in the real world of discourse.

Consider the typical rhetorical situation. You have what you think is a good claim, and all your arguments for it have been shown to be flawed; or you are troubled by someone's claim that you think is bad, but you cannot find any flaws in their arguments for it. In both these situations, you have two uses for the believing game. First, you need play the believing game with the positions you don't like—to try hard to believe them and actually understand and appreciate what's good about them. You may discover they are right and you need to change your mind. For the quickest results, this is the way to go. (Imagine here a smiley emoticon.)

But if after this sincere test of believing you still think you are right and they are wrong, you have the harder job of trying to persuade "the enemy" to play the believing game with your idea. For reasoning will not do the trick. The best you can do is to speak to them as follows: "I tried as hard as I could to believe your idea. In the process I found the following good things in it, and I now understand why your position is appealing and why it seems right to you. So now that I've done that, would you please do me the return favor of playing the believing game with my idea?"

The larger principle here is this. The doubting game has coercive leverage when applied as logic to any piece of reasoning. (Socrates was excited as he began to figure out logic and said that it permits the single person to outvote the crowd.) But when it comes to claims or positions or interpretations themselves, the only leverage comes from the human act of *entering* in or *mentally participating*—and this process has no binding or coercive force. For us to use it within ourselves, we have to muster both effort and pliancy to enter into places we don't like. If we want others to use it, we have to persuade them to join with us by choice and enter into our views. There's no reason for them to want to do this unless we first demonstrate that we are willing to do it for them with their views. This is why (as Pat Bizzell emphasized in her essay in the last issue) the believing game is such a weak reed when it comes to powerfully emotional religious or political views that people stake their identities on.

So the essays we see in this issue of the journal are examples "trying out" that don't have the coercive force of disproof. They simply help us decide how much of our weight to put on this ladder or bridge that looks rather frail—that is, on a particular way of using the believing game.

Both Clyde Moneyhun and Tim Doherty experiment with first-year writing courses that put the believing game near the center. Shelley Harkness and her

colleagues try believing wrong math answers that students give. In a classic piece of literary interpretation, Sheridan Blau tries to see Milton's orthodox religious views as true—even through a modern secular lens. Judy Lightfoot speaks to someone on the street who qualifies as crazy and says, "Let's sit down and have coffee and chat for an hour." Stephanie Paterson tries the effects of devoting every Friday's class to uninterrupted writing—supplemented by lowered lights, candles, and music. Anne Geller does what may be the most radical thing for an academic: trying to believe *colleagues* who seem wrong—colleagues from other disciplines who lack our wisdom about writing across the curriculum. Irene Papoulis—who has always prided herself on practicing the believing game—experiments with pushing it away.

I can't resist saying that there is at least one indubitable proof that all these experiments yield. Minimal, perhaps, but it's big for me—and something that would help lots of others. The experiments prove that it was possible for these particular writers in their particular circumstances to do what their culture and their habits call wrong—and live to tell the tale. One of the best favors that anyone can do for me is to show that even though I'm having a feeling or thought that everyone thinks is wrong—including me!—nevertheless, I am not crazy. The most effective way to silence us and instill fear is to make us suspect we are crazy for seeing or feeling or believing as we do.

The Difficulty of the Believing Game

Difficulty strikes me as the biggest theme here. It's not that believing is hard in itself. It's probably more natural than doubting. We all started out as naive credulous toddlers and children (though most of us took a little break during our "terrible twos"). But through the process of being socialized and civilized and educated—at least in modern Western culture—we got rich training in skepticism. Have you noticed that *critical thinking* is the one common element in all curricula at all levels—no matter how different those curricula might seem in spirit or emphasis or ideology? Critical thinking is the one thing never doubted. When we label a culture "primitive," it's usually a culture that doesn't practice skepticism and critical thinking.

Still, all this training against believing makes sense. Believing often gets us into trouble—for instance, when we get an email that says we've won \$10,000 and we only have to send \$1,000 to expedite shipment. Believing has become a bad word, and "true believers" feel defensive. (Stephen Carter, on the faculty at Yale Law School, writes about "how American law and politics trivialize religious devotion.")

But despite the training against it, "mere believing" or true believing is easy and actually very common in our culture. You just have to give in. Virtually everyone has one or more things they've found truly worthy of belief, and they give in and believe them. (They may not think of themselves as believers because they have not articulated or examined these beliefs.) What's truly difficult is a more sophisticated and disciplined form of believing: a conscious methodology or technique or game that uses believing as a *tool*. And it asks something peculiar: to believe *all* views that anyone wants to advance—some of which will be difficult to believe and not worthy of serious belief. At least the believing game doesn't ask us to *commit* ourselves to all these views; but there's something odd and unfamiliar about the act of *conditional* belief.

Interestingly, most of us already know how to *doubt* conditionally. The doubting game or critical thinking trains us to use doubting as a *tool* or methodology or game. Critical thinking doesn't ask us to commit ourselves or reject positions we doubt—even necessarily where we find flaws. It asks us to doubt even what we are committed to—just to see it better and think better. And thus we don't have to be skeptical or cynical in temperament to use this good tool.

But our culture mostly hasn't taught us how to use *belief* as a tool and bring it to bear even on what we know we will never accept—just to see it better and think better. In the absence of this tool, the word “belief” still tends to connote full, naive belief with commitment (“Yes, Lord, I believe.”) So, while our culture (especially the school and intellectual culture) rightly warns us against naive or mere belief because it can do such harm, it hasn't trained us how to use belief as a tool (which, among other things, can help us avoid the dangers of credulity.)

Thus Clyde, Tim, and some of the other contributors note the reluctance of students to entertain alien views even when the assignment is explicitly to try them *all* out, and there's no pressure to actually adopt any of them. Sheridan and Anne both show us the discombobulation of trying to entertain opposite ideas at the same time. In addition, Anne notes how strongly people in the WAC field resist views that don't fit the prevailing wisdom. It takes training. We need to remember that it took training and special help to learn to use doubt as a tool.

Many of the experiments in this issue involve extra help. Tim brings in play, games, and role playing for entering alien positions so that people don't feel that the stakes are too high. Tim and Stephanie both show the importance of warming up not just the mind or feelings but even the body—for this helps give flexibility to the mind and feelings. Stephanie adds inviting sensory conditions: lowered lights, music, and candles. Clyde shows how helpful it is to get company as we try to use believing as a tool—that is, adding the element of collaboration. Anne shows the power that comes from joining a larger ongoing enterprise like the Difficult Dialogues Project or the Public Conversations Project. (I'd mention another good enterprise of this sort, Educators for Social Responsibility, ESR. They have built the believing game into many of their curricula and workshops.) Shelly Harkness and her colleagues found they had better luck playing the believing game with students' wrong answers when they were *observers* of a class; that helps them when they return to their own teaching and have to carry the responsibility (and even anxiety) of being in charge.

I think the difficulty of the believing game is not just cognitive (which Donna points out), but moral. I'd like to think of the believing game as an exercise in developing courage. If we can learn to overcome the threat of entering into a view that we experience as alien, perhaps we can be braver in general. When I do something bad or fail to do something good, I can usually notice the role of fear or timidity (if I manage to stop and think about it afterwards). If I'd been braver, I wouldn't have ignored that person or that problem. When we tell white lies—or even big lies—we often simply didn't have the courage to tell the truth. (Ghandi felt that his larger virtues like nonviolence stemmed simply from telling the truth. He called his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.) Fear is what permits governments (like that of Bush, Israel, and Iran) to get citizens to stop seeing the “enemy” as human. When I feel brave, I find myself a better more generous person. C. S. Lewis again (this time from *The Screwtape Letters*): “Cour-

age is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the point of highest reality.”

And yet, interestingly, a couple of essays here open a window onto the believing game as easy: for Irene because her growing up led her to develop it as a habit, for Judy because something happened in her life that prompted her simply to “just do it.”

Sequence or Timing

In planning for some classes, I sometimes fall into a repeating loop. I want to have a discussion, so I plan some freewriting to prepare the soil for it. But then I realize that I want to prepare the soil for the freewriting with some discussion. But then . . . I can waste time in this loop because there’s usually no best answer. (Perhaps there’s a larger ironic principle here: what’s hardest is to start. Perhaps we can avoid having to start if we start by getting ready to start.)

So too with the believing and doubting games. Which comes first? Hard to say. They each prepare the soil for the other and help us understand the other. Believing comes first in the history of the child and of cultures. We naturally trusted what looked right or attractive, and we had to be trained to distrust it. So believing is a good way to start—a basic foundation. Whether we are alone writing or talking in a group, the believing game helps us *find* or *create* words and ideas. It doesn’t make sense to distrust and criticize things till we have a lot to criticize. What turns out in the end to be our best idea was often one that would never have arrived if we’d been critical at the start.

Thus Stephanie’s essay is all about the need to listen trustfully to ourselves in order to write productively. Yet she opens a paradoxical window onto how “listening to oneself” can feel like an act of standing outside ourselves and getting out of the way: a kind of “taking dictation” without letting one’s “own” feelings meddle or judge.

On the other hand, the doubting game can be helpful as a starting place. Especially in an academic or school culture, faculty members and students often cannot let down their skeptical guard until they’ve had a chance to use it. It’s only *after* critically testing ideas for flaws (and naturally finding some) that intellectuals dare to try using belief as a tool to see what can be seen and to think better.

Tim is particularly interested in the value of preparing the soil for the believing game in a different way: waiting, going slowly, holding off any use of the believing game for a while. He starts with activities to support and affirm students in their *present* views—before asking them to enter into new or different views. And he also helps people with believing by emphasizing the ludic dimension with outright play, games, and role playing. And Donna insists that *trying* is psychologically prior to believing.

Clyde gives lots of useful attention to what comes *after* the believing game: the deciding game and the acting (or living) game. Interestingly, the processes of deciding and acting may often re-activate the doubting game.

Stirring the Pot:

Complicating and Enriching Our Thinking About the Believing Game

Irene shows how doubting and believing are not simple opposites. Their relationship is paradoxical and complicated—even correlative. She had to learn to doubt others to believe in herself—or is it that she has to learn to believe in

herself in order to doubt others? She points out, too, that expert critics of others are often poor at doubting themselves—and indeed their skill in doubting others helps them *avoid* doubting themselves.

By working out a different way to slice the pie, she helps us think more richly about doubting and believing. She shows that there can be *two* different tendencies within each: healthy and productive vs. unhealthy and destructive. She's interested in how believing can nurture the self or undermine it; how doubting can help us work *with* others or against them. She shows doubting and believing are not single uncomplicated entities.

Donna makes what is for me a crucial addition to any theory of the believing game: "I find two different kinds of learning—the cognitive game of believing and the bodily, experiential game that I'm, for now, calling 'trying.' . . . We experience all things first of all with the body."

As soon as I read her essay, I saw she was pointing to an incompleteness that had needed figuring out all along. I think her large insight (not adequately summed up here) will be very productive at the level of both theory and practice. She gives the most explicit and theoretical emphasis to the role of the body, but the body became an important subtheme in a number of these essays: how the body opens the door to the mind.

In the end, these essays show the doubting and believing games reinforce each other. I'm grateful to the authors for trusting my initial train of thought enough to take a ride on it and thereby developing new ideas which can, in turn, be tried and tested—and that can even throw some doubt on my starting train of thought. The larger moral is that we are in trouble if only one side of the dialectic has a monopoly on what people call good thinking. ☹

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Believing and Doubting as Hermeneutic Method: Reading and Teaching *Paradise Lost*

Sheridan Blau

A Brief Critical History

From the time of its publication in 1660, Milton's *Paradise Lost* has posed for most of its readers a powerful experience of believing and doubting, either with respect to the doctrinal content of the epic or to its artistic integrity. Through the eighteenth century it seems to have been mostly an experience of believing, as it was for Samuel Johnson who revered the poem for its orthodox doctrine, while claiming (not surprisingly perhaps) that no reader ever wished it longer. Beginning with the Romantics—most notably Blake and Shelley—and continuing through much of the twentieth century, the poem more typically offered most of its readers—at least most of its scholarly and most famously literate readers—an experience of doubting, represented in the academic community by A. J. A. Waldock's extended analysis of what he identifies as the conflict between the doctrine and the drama of *Paradise Lost*.¹ Waldock's analysis may be said to offer a modern version of Shelley's claim that Milton was secretly or (in more modern terms) unconsciously on the devil's side, with the explicit Christian doctrine that the poem ostensibly asserts systematically subverted by a drama that shows more sympathy and political affiliation with Satan than with God and thereby implicitly refutes Milton's own explicit attempt to "justify God's ways to man." Aside from suggesting that Milton found Satan a better spokesperson than Adam for the "deepest expression of his own interests" (24), Waldock argues that Milton's poetic loyalties ultimately had to subvert the religious doctrine of his epic in order to meet the requirement of logical verisimilitude, which applies no less to the genre of the epic than it does to its successor genre of the novel. And there is no way logically and convincingly to dramatize disastrous choices and fatal actions on the part of our first parents, claims Waldock, except by constructing a pre-lapsarian universe that carries in it the seeds of its own inevitable destruction, thereby revealing the culpability of the creator of that universe.

Stanley Fish in *Surprised by Sin* reshaped the interpretive landscape of *Paradise Lost*, while challenging the prevailing canons of contemporary critical theory, by converting the "affective fallacy" of the New Criticism into a modern reader-

Sheridan Blau, Professor Emeritus of English and Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is now teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he heads the graduate program in English Education and the Teaching of English. He has published widely in the areas of seventeenth-century literature, composition theory, professional development for teachers, the politics of English teaching and learning, and the teaching of composition and literature. He is a former president of NCTE.

¹For a notable exception see C.S. Lewis's *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, which demonstrates Milton's theological and poetic integrity in the portrayal of Satan, but is otherwise surprisingly secular and literary rather than theological and moral in its focus on Milton's achievement in the poem.

oriented hermeneutic theory by which he offered a detailed account of a seventeenth-century reader's experience of both doubting and believing in the course of reading and interpreting the drama and doctrine of *Paradise Lost*.² According to Fish, Milton's rhetorical and dramatic strategy in *Paradise Lost* is to provide readers with a series of dramatic moments that can and often do tempt them into doubting the doctrines of faith that further reading of the poem eventually re-establishes. This process demonstrates to the readers who experience it the illogical or otherwise mistaken basis for their earlier doubting, thereby giving them an experiential education in their vulnerability to the same kind of doubt and faithlessness that Adam and Eve and most readers themselves will again succumb to in the climactic event of the poem. In this way, claims Fish, attentive readers of the poem will learn of their own responsibility for their virtual fall and therefore of Adam and Eve's responsibility for the primordial fall, and they will also learn with our first parents of the continuing need we all retain for the grace and mercy and forgiveness of an ultimately just and loving deity. In other words, the poem fosters a series of experiences of doubting in order to promote in its readers a more convincing final experience of believing. No critic or theorist since Fish has offered an account of the dramatic and rhetorical structure of Milton's poem that has such reach or explanatory power as Fish's own account, nor am I aware of any recent critic who has offered any newer reading that seriously undermines Fish's major interpretative claims.

Student Readers and the Hermeneutics of Condescension and Respect

However, Fish's interpretative analysis (like virtually every application of modern critical theory) presumes an ideal reader—in this case a theologically knowledgeable seventeenth-century Protestant reader or a highly educated modern reader, like Fish himself, who is attuned to the culture and theology of a knowledgeable seventeenth-century Christian reader with Protestant dispositions and spiritual experience. That does not describe the students who typically enter my undergraduate Milton classes, nor do I think it profitable to try to pre-educate students in the culture and theology that are inscribed in the literary texts they will be studying, texts that are themselves the second best vehicles (after direct cultural experience) for acquiring cultural knowledge.³

Nevertheless, an approach to reading Milton that is consistent with Fish's groundbreaking critical insight (and to some degree his method) can apply with considerable literary efficacy and productive pedagogical (not to mention spiritual) effect to the reading experience of modern readers of *Paradise Lost* who are enjoined, as I enjoin my students (both religious and non-religious), to read and study the poem as an experiment in what I take to be an instantiation or variant form of Peter Elbow's practice and theory of methodological believing and doubting—a procedure for reading and interpreting the poem that is unlike either the

²Fish's theoretical approach (but not its application to *PL*) was anticipated to a large extent by Louise Rosenblatt thirty years earlier, though mainstream English professors, who seem to have cultivated an ignorance of research in English education, have generally ignored or discounted Rosenblatt's earlier contribution to dismantling the hegemony of the New Criticism.

³On the problem of teaching background knowledge to students, see Blau, *Literature*, Chapter 4.

believing of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers or the doubting of the Romantics and the twentieth-century debunkers of Milton's poem by virtue of its employment of believing and doubting both as heuristic and hermeneutic methods. That is to say, my students and I together deploy believing and doubting as methods of inquiry serving to advance our own understanding of a text from which we presume we have something to learn, and to advance our learning at the very least by clarifying our questions and our problems in understanding that text.

What I ask of my students, more specifically, is that they study the poem under a set of assumptions that represent our provisional belief in the profound wisdom of its author and the integrity and truth of his text—a belief that has been largely confirmed for me, I assure my students, in my own experience of teaching and learning the poem with generations of students fairly continuously over a period of some 40 years. Thus I ask my students to approach the poem under the assumption that it is poetically and humanly and universally true as the greatest works of literature are also true, that we have much to learn from its wisdom, that it will continue to reward study and re-reading with additional insight over a lifetime of readings, and that it is almost surely the case that the contradictions and inconsistencies we discover in the poem—which we will experience and may want to present as doubts—represent some failure on our part to understand a text whose dramatic logic and psychological insight is probably more nuanced and profound than we are at the moment prepared to appreciate. Thus the places where the poem seems weakest in its logic or where its drama seems either least believable or most at odds with its own doctrinal claims become the places that hold the greatest promise for teaching us what we do not yet understand. For this reason we will focus our class discussions and our writing largely on passages or scenes or conceptual or narrative problems in the text that puzzle and confound us (and there remain many for me too after 40 years of teaching the poem), and we will never accept as the solution to any problem in understanding the text the excuse that it represents one of the mysteries of Christian religious faith. We'll assume instead that, when Milton promises that his poem will justify the ways of God to man, he means what he appears to say: that the poem will make those ways accessible to human understanding, though he also says that he seeks an audience of readers who are "fit . . . though few" (7.31). Our task then is to render ourselves more fit.

These are important assumptions or premises to adopt in order to ensure that we read *Paradise Lost* with the same kind of demand for verisimilitude and logical coherence we readily apply to most other literary works (as Waldock did to the critical detriment of Milton's poem) because the characteristic tendency of modern student readers—again, religious and non-religious alike—is to dismiss what appear to be logical inconsistencies in Milton's poem as if they represented either "mere Christianity" or a narrative that is textually and dramatically coherent only for those readers whose own religious faith allows them to require of it neither verisimilitude nor narrative consistency. But to read the poem in such a manner is to employ what we might call a hermeneutic of condescension that presumes to find the poem humanly comprehensible and psychologically persuasive only to Christian readers who read it (as it is finally read, perhaps, by the ideal readers whose intellectual and spiritual experience Fish describes) from an ultimately uncritical religious perspective.

Such interpretive condescension, allowing readers to "appreciate" the poem

in spite of its apparent failure to achieve artistically what it explicitly claims as its didactic aim or in spite of the limitations of its theological and moral vision, seems to me both disrespectful to the object of its attention and an act of intellectual pride insofar as it arrogates to the reader the position of one whose understanding is larger than the author's own (a position Wayne Booth in *The Company We Keep* memorably characterized as "overstanding a text" [115]), at the same time that it excuses the reader from the more provisional and generative doubting that questions his or her own possible failure to understand a poetic and intellectual structure that may be more coherent, harmonious, and illuminating than the reader at that moment can apprehend.⁴ A more respectful gesture of doubting and believing would acknowledge the reader's experience of incoherence or inconsistencies in the poem but treat that experience as a problem that might be located more in the reader than in the poem. It would, in other words, construe doubt as a state of confusion that calls upon the reader to re-read and reflect more deeply about a narrative and conceptual scheme that demands greater resources of attention, imagination, and reflection than a reader is likely to allocate in a reading until challenged by such doubts and confusions as the poem seems to engender.⁵

In treating doubt as an occasion not for skepticism but for problem-solving in order to resolve the doubting, I might be accused of denigrating the efficacy of the tradition of skeptical doubting to which Elbow himself has persisted in paying homage in his various explications of believing and doubting. Or I might be accused with equal justice of wanting to obliterate doubt entirely in its service to the more capacious exercise of believing. But what I hope I am really doing is urging student readers, first, to respect their doubts by acknowledging and articulating them at least for their heuristic value, and then to be sufficiently skeptical about their own doubting and sufficiently respectful of the stature of the poem they are studying to treat their doubts provisionally as an index of the degree to which they remain learners who may not yet have arrived at an entirely adequate understanding of the conceptual system they are obliged as students of Milton (and of mine) to try to understand. This is, in fact, largely in agreement with Elbow's observation that for those who practice what he refers to as a "more sophisticated methodological skepticism" (4), doubting is most productive as an instrument of learning when it serves as a tool for testing the truth claims of propositions, not in the interest of rejecting ideas, but of finding the basis for their rational belief.

Believing and Doubting in Practice: Addressing an Interpretive Problem

Let me now exemplify the exegetical and instructional method I have been describing in very general and abstract terms by pointing to a particular interpre-

⁴If this sounds embarrassingly like a reaffirmation of an old-fashioned principle of reading that we now associate with the much-maligned school of the old New Criticism, let us, as the patriot said, make the most of it. It seems to me possible and most productive, however, to resurrect the respectful critical stance of the New Critics without adopting the myopic aestheticism of their most orthodox and rigid practitioners whose critical discourse would exclude questions of value and representation as non-literary and therefore heretical or fallacious. See Blau "Transactions."

⁵See Blau, *Literature*, 21-22 and 46 for an account of the generative value of confusion.

tive problem in *Paradise Lost* that my students and I have found to be one of many generative openings for a richer and more illuminating understanding of Milton's poem through the respectful application of the hermeneutic process of methodological believing and doubting. The doubting in this case arises from the contradiction readers experience in the cruelty and tyranny of a Deity who punishes rebellious angels by condemning them to the unending torture of hell, yet claims that in their former state of obedience they were truly free. How free are angels to obey or not, however, if their choice of disobedience brings with it horrible punishment? How can they freely choose to obey their Lord, if they are threatened with death for choosing against the commandment of their ruler?

We can resolve this apparent contradiction, which is also a doubt about God's love and justice, either by asserting as some critics and many students do, that God's justice is sometimes beyond human comprehension or that obedience to God is absolutely required by virtue of God's role as the absolute good and absolute ruler, a resolution (either way) that evades the question by rendering it beyond the purview of reason and not subject to reasonable inquiry. This is the interpretive response I have described as a hermeneutic of condescension. Or we can assume, adopting a stance of belief or trust in the author and his vision, that our doubt represents some insufficiency in the current state of our understanding. I do not mean an insufficiency in our rational faculty of understanding or in our eventual capacity to understand, but in the degree to which we have already achieved sufficient illumination or insight to apprehend the reality of the truth represented by Milton's vision of the operation of deity and the role of angels and all other creatures in Milton's universe.

I am not talking about religious faith here, at least not about faith as distinct from reason, but about the richer and sharper operation of reason that we experience whenever our understanding becomes more comprehensive and more penetrating (like improved vision through a lens that allows us a broader and better focused field of vision so we can better apprehend a broader landscape and identify more accurately the objects within our scope) enabling us to better apprehend some concept or set of facts whose true meaning had previously eluded us. For example, many students think of knowledge as a condition of having answers to questions, and ignorance as a condition of having questions. Such students frequently seek to demonstrate their own intellectual achievements by doing whatever they can to evade their own questions as they display their answers. Yet there comes a point at which any student who develops into an enlightened adult or mature intellectual recognizes that questions or problems are (as John Dewey asserts) the route to critical thinking and to the kind of reflective thought that characteristically yields a more profound and wider understanding. Such a maturing student comes to see, in other words, that true knowledge is often better revealed and more surely advanced by questions than by answers, and that the person with the fewest questions and the most answers—especially insofar as those answers are held with certitude—is likely to be the least enlightened of all. This kind of advance in understanding, which the wisdom tradition usually calls an advance in wisdom or “enlightenment,” is both an example of what I mean when I speak of the movement from an insufficient understanding to insight and an explanation of why a hermeneutic of respect is more productive than a hermeneutic of condescension by virtue of the respectful and humble gesture, of the former that treats doubt as evidence not of failure in the text or in the vision of

the author, but as evidence of our own need for additional enlightenment, which our continued and focused attention to the text we are interrogating and to the problems we are encountering in comprehending it is likely to provide. If any faith is involved in making such a gesture, it is the reasonable faith we exemplify in trusting our own capacity for growth in understanding and in also trusting the wisdom of an author and text that are commended to us by what Michael Polanyi and legal theorists might have called the “fiduciary” authority granted to a tradition of canonicity and the testimony of trusted mentors, even though it must be acknowledged that literary history and some of the critical mentors who have shaped the narrative of that history have not always demonstrated their trustworthiness. Yet surely an attitude of believing is warranted in dialogue with a respected text as much as it is in dialogues with valued friends or colleagues who deserve our presumption of faith in their veracity and intelligence.⁶

What then do our humility and our doubting observations yield for us when we turn our doubts into questions and ask, in the spirit of believing, how we can make better sense of the paradox of obedience and freedom that has troubled my students and so many other modern readers of *Paradise Lost*? Sufficient attention to that question along with further reflection on the text itself may yield to the persistent reader—especially in dialogue with other readers—an advance in understanding based on what may seem the obvious but often overlooked fact that in Milton’s poem heaven and hell are spiritual places and the geography of *Paradise Lost* is a mental geography, where heaven is by definition a state of psychological bliss and God a source of endless love and grace. To turn away from love, to cut oneself off from the source of love is to cast oneself out of a state of bliss and down into an opposite state deprived of all love and any bliss. Such a state can only be experienced by beings with a human or human-like psyche as a state of mental misery and longing for what one has lost. Hence it is not God who casts the rebel angels into hell, but they themselves in rejecting heavenly bliss and the only source of true spiritual joy.

Nor is this merely a way of explaining the inner logic of a theological system that has no relevance to actual human experience in the modern world. Rather, what I have been describing as the free choice and just punishment of angels describes the truth of human psychological experience every day when human beings freely choose what is destructive to themselves and their own happiness. And what that characteristically entails in ordinary life as it does in Milton’s heaven (and in the Garden of Eden) is choosing against oneself, which is to say one’s nature, which in angels as in men is the rational soul, a soul that in Milton’s vision (as in most modern accounts of human mental health) includes the recognition of the emotions and feelings that belong by nature to human beings and cannot be discounted in any operation of reason that might be said to be rational.

Hence Satan, whose eminence in heaven had placed him at the top of the hierarchy of angels casts himself out of heaven and into a pit of endless misery through his obsessive envy and anger, his “sense of injured merit” (1.98) for

⁶I am thinking here of Grice’s cooperative principle and its “maxims of quality,” whereby it is conventional in conversation that participants trust that their interlocutors are telling the truth, not saying what they know to be false, and not making claims for which they lack evidence. I am also thinking of Mary Rose O’Reilly’s immensely useful observation (implying an ethical obligation to believe the texts of trusted authors) that the morphological root of “believe” is the same as the root of “belove.”

having to pay obeisance to the being identified by the Deity as one who by merit would be the son of God and man and the active expression of the will of God in heaven and on earth. Yet the hell of endless burning and misery that Satan experiences is clearly a mental or spiritual location that Satan creates and carries within himself as the free agent of his own damnation, not as the victim of God's ire—not any more than we could say that God, not ourselves, is responsible (in the ordinary sense of that term) for the fact that when we decide to jump from the roof of a tall building and fall to the ground, suffering great injury or death, our suffering derives from the will of God, though, of course, it does in the special sense that God is the author of nature, and Milton's poem asserts quite explicitly that "God and nature bid the same" (6.176).

Nor is Satan's pride—expressed in his anger and envy and psychological burning—the derivative of his being deprived by any external force of any honor or hierarchical place that he may be said to have merited. Indeed, it may be true that Satan aspires to rule in heaven—rule over the Father Himself—but, ironically, Satan doesn't actually want to be either the Father or the Son. The Father's principal characteristic in Milton's narrative is to serve as an active source of love, one who loves so selflessly that He creates beings with a freedom that resembles His own and grants them the possibility of opposing His own will. Similarly, the Son's principal characteristic is to love the Father's created beings and to love them so selflessly that he chooses to become a lower being (man) himself in order to raise fallen mankind to a higher state of union with the Father. But selfless love—which is the principal characteristic of the Father and Son—is not a characteristic that Satan wishes to emulate in any way. Satan rather asserts that he hates the love God granted to him, which made him so high and exalted in heaven that he could fall through envy of one higher, so that love and hate are to him equally hateful (4.69-70). Thus, in wanting to take the step that would put him equal to the highest, Satan has no true desire to be God or the Son, whose attributes he neither aspires to possess nor honors in their operation. Rather his ambition and burning desire is not to be Satan, not to be the one who is by nature what he is—all but greater than the source (in the Creator or in Nature itself) of his own being. His pain, then, is the pain of his hatred of the created being he is, which is to say, hatred of the self given to him by the very source of his being. What he rejects, in other words, is his own nature, the nature of the universe, the laws of nature, and in doing so condemns himself to endless misery by endlessly rebelling against himself. Hence God as an active agent is not responsible for Satan's punishment and misery; Satan is the author of his own hell, and what has often been called his sin of self-love (e.g., Fish, *Milton* 307) is actually the sin of self-hate.

I do not wish to present this reading of the punishment of the fallen angels as the only possible reading of *Paradise Lost* or even as the best or most authoritative reading, though it is the most comprehensive and intellectually satisfying reading I can produce and find warranted by the text at this moment. Nor have I answered all the questions that thoughtful readers might ask about the conceptual problems I have sought to solve or at least clarify. I am not able at this moment, for example, to offer what I would regard as an equally compelling explanation of how God's love and justice are expressed in the punishment of all of the unnamed angels who fell with Satan as his followers, though I suspect that further attention to the rebellion of Abdiel against Satan will reveal something

about the responsibility of Satan's followers for their punishment as well. Nor am I comfortable with having produced a reading in this essay that may appear to have been constructed all at once and as the independent product of my own personal practice of believing and doubting. It derived instead from questions and doubts expressed by my students and from years of classroom dialogue about these questions with my students (though my attempt to write it for this essay also constituted on my part a continuation of and an additional contribution to that dialogue—a dialogue that through my writing and thinking I engaged in with myself, with the voices of my absent students, with the text, and with some of its most distinguished explicators). My classroom contribution, aside from what I contributed to the dialogue, was in my insistence that we play the believing game as the surest route to enlarging our understanding, and in my refusal to allow our doubts either to be embraced as evidence of some failure in the poet or poem or to be resolved through the patronizing reference to the mystery of a faith that is less than reasonable. In that insistence I do not think I am expressing my own religious faith or attempting to bear witness to the truth of any particular religious faith. Rather what I hope I am exemplifying is a provisional faith in the wisdom of Milton, in the enduring truth and beauty of his great epic, and in the efficacy of methodological believing and doubting as an instrument for the advancement of learning. □

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Lessons from the Believing Game

Tim Doherty

“It’s a game,” I tell my students. Like many runners and swimmers, we’re trying to improve our last attempt, as opposed to winning against others. See how much more deeply we can enter into an idea or point of view. By emphasizing both playfulness and the challenge of deep engagement with other viewpoints in the believing game, I try to lower the cost of relinquishing long-held (and often unexamined) assumptions and values. It’s frightening to imagine that one’s stance could be limited, vague, or wrong. From a developmental point of view, students take up positions in order to shore up a sense of identity. Assuming a new or different position casts students into identity confusion. But the threat posed by this instability vexes adults as well, I think. This fear of uncertainty, of being wrong, and of losing status could be the root of many intractable political conflicts.

I’ll begin by sharing an anecdote from my early attempts at using the believing game in my teaching of college writing, a time when I think my use of it involved some missteps—causing me to reflect on the temporal dimension of the believing game and how the believing game connects, in particular, to play and learning through role. I will share some lessons I have learned, reflecting refinements in my approach to the believing game—those I have pursued and those I am eager to pursue. First, I have found that students need time to think about belief itself, and then to be offered ample time to play the believing game. If I rush the process, students don’t seem to range very widely beyond their initial perspectives. The believing game is an apt teaching strategy for those who want to teach argument in college writing but who sense that an immediate leap into argumentation itself may put pressure on students to take sides prematurely and superficially. Second, I want to emphasize the word “game” and the spirit of play that the doubting and believing games can entail; the ethos of play invites immersion in perspectives. Third, I have learned to pay initial attention to students’ stories, emotions, and sense of attachment to beliefs and to discuss beliefs and our relationship to them. Finally, it may help to distinguish different ways of believing—particularly, when believing involves exploring a perspective through role. Role experiences create playful involvement and distance, increasing the capacity to attach and detach from belief, and most importantly, to test out solidarity—one’s potential identification with others.

Believing that Capital Punishment is Just/Unjust

Over the years I have kept a folder of student responses generated during believing games, waiting for this moment: a time to step back and take stock. In

Tim Doherty is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Department of English and Communications at Rivier College where he also directs the campus writing program. He received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1996 and currently writes about conflict resolution and the role it can play in college teaching and learning.

the beginning, I used the believing game as an informal, pre-writing exercise when teaching argumentative writing, often focusing on capital punishment. My approach was to canvass all the students to find out where they stand on the issue. Even those who were undecided would have to make a tentative choice of sides. Then, I would ask these collaborative teams to explore the perspective of the other position—in other words, to try to make a persuasive case for the other side. The discussions that would follow seemed lively and useful, and often students would say things like “This is hard! This hurts my brain!”

The believing game seemed like a motivating, challenging introduction to a non-adversarial stance, an alternative to traditional argument. That is true, but what I found in using the game as only an introductory exercise was that I didn’t witness students writing extensively from an alternative point of view afterwards, despite assignments designed to elicit that attempt. Furthermore, student writing often reflected a minimal engagement with the experiences involved in particular perspectives (the pain of victims’ families) or with the deeper claims of different perspectives—that factors of race and income unjustly influence decisions about capital punishment—or that capital punishment might deter criminals. Here are two typical responses:

Matt: “Today’s class influenced my thoughts, however I stand strong by my views regardless the circumstances. I did learn that ‘eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.’ Revenge is not solving the case or bringing closure to it, but it is simply bringing minor relief to the family. However my views do not change.”

Danny: “Today’s class helped me to see both sides and even question what I stand for and believe. Many things factor in when sentencing someone, which I never thought about before. But I’m still in favor of the death penalty.”

The responses of these students revealed to me that the experience of the believing game they went through didn’t quite help them detach from their current beliefs and take the risk of lingering in a different view. One student, Pete, made this comment: “I thought the exercise was hard. It is hard to believe and think one way and then have to switch and try to support the opposite way. I feel as though I need much more practice.” Reflecting back on my initial attempts at the believing game with students, my basic misstep involved forgetting this statement by Peter Elbow: “The believing game is *constant practice* in getting the mind to see or think what is new, different, alien. . . . The believing game emphasizes a model of knowing as an act of constructing, an act of investment, an act of involvement” (*Writing Without Teachers* 173, emphasis added). I began to get very interested in the process of believing, each year developing a more extensive approach to the believing game. Below, I’ll sum up the lessons I’ve learned and some changes in my approach.

Lesson #1: Believing Takes Time

When I first started using the believing game in my teaching, I took too much for granted about the duration and depth of involvement one might need to

understand fully a given perspective. Believing takes time; there is a temporal, developmental dimension to empathy, a necessary practice in attempting to understand another point of view. While there can be some benefit in opting to do very short believing/doubting game exercises in order to warm up to issues, the brevity can exact a price: the superficial treatment of perspectives. I turn to the believing game precisely because of my frustration with superficiality in the arguments my students have written. Brief doubting and believing games also seem to reinforce the either/or, tit-for-tat, gladiatorial approach to argument, as well as promote an unhelpful relativism—there’s no time to weigh perspectives for their premises and supporting values, so all perspectives feel equal.

In general, my experience teaching written argument has pushed me more and more toward increasing students’ contact with different perspectives through the believing game rather than requiring them to toil from draft to revision in order to defend a thesis about a particular conflict. In “Moments of Argument: Agonistic Inquiry and Confrontational Cooperation,” Dennis A. Lynch, Diana George, and Marilyn M. Cooper make a similar point: we need to expand time to “engage students in a kind of writing that moves beyond the ‘opposing viewpoints,’ disputatious, display type of argumentation.” They argue against “rushing students to defend sides or to decide on a position.” Describing courses they have designed, they write:

we sought to give students more time to learn and think about the issues they were engaging, with the idea in mind that in the process they will recognize that the positions we take—especially the first, easy positions that we have “accepted”—usually have been socially, culturally, and historically determined and, not coincidentally, usually have unforeseen consequences for others, others whose positions are often not even represented by the manner in which the issues are handed down to us (“pro and con”). (69)

Over time, then, I have come to value the act of lingering in a view, to offer students a week to read, listen, and write their way into a perspective. While it would take elaborate coding of student samples to prove this assertion, my impression is that student writing has gotten better: I have witnessed progressively deeper engagement with alternative points of view the more time I devote to the believing game.

As I will describe below, the believing game works best if I . . .

- › take time to introduce students to the believing game and have them read about the believing game itself;
- › show students how the believing game is situated within an assignment;
- › carefully scaffold an assignment for extended experiences of believing;
- › and offer opportunities within written assignments for students to synthesize their experience and reflect upon the process involved in the believing game.¹

¹In developing this sequence, I have been guided by the work of Alan Shapiro, curriculum writer for The Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility.

Lesson #2: The Game of Believing

I have always been interested in how playfulness promotes learning, in Vygotsky's view that play fuels learning in childhood: "Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions, and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives—all appear in play. . . . The child moves forward essentially through play activity. . . . Play [can] be considered a leading activity that determines the child's development" (102-103). However, my own experience shows me the power of play for college writers as well, when they are encouraged to be less self-conscious, to find pleasure and motivation in an activity that creates just enough dissonance so that curiosity is aroused and challenge occurs. John Dewey pointed to the real (and neglected) benefits of play:

it is still usual to regard [play] as a specially marked-off stage of childish growth, and to overlook the fact that the difference between play and what is regarded as serious employment should be not a difference between the presence and absence of imagination, but a difference in the materials with which imagination is preoccupied. (236)

In "Conversation and Carrying-on: Play, Conflict, and Serio-Ludic Discourse in Synchronous Computer Conferencing," Albert Rouzie urges the field of composition to bridge the work/play split in western culture, arguing that play fuels personal growth, social connection, and disruptive critique. Like the online synchronous exchanges Rouzie studies, the believing game offers a space where risk and play are encouraged. Play blossoms when threat recedes. My current tendency is to delay using the believing game in large and small groups until the habits of the believing game are adequately introduced and developed, and there is a sense of confidence and safety. When I have moved too quickly to group-based experiences of the believing game, a competitive orientation to "game" seems to emerge, with the threat of somehow "losing" to the other side. The object of the believing game is to enter into a non-judgmental, unthreatening climate where we can believe as much as we can, to find in ourselves points of connection with a different view.

As in other experiences of play, the believing game can flag when fear, difficulty, or boredom are present. As Elbow points out, the believing game is often viewed with fear ("Methodological Doubting" 281 ff.), and the word "believing" arouses some anxiety because it carries the heavy freight of commitment:

Believing seems to entail commitment, where doubting does not. It commonly feels as though we can doubt something without committing ourselves to rejecting it—but that we cannot believe something without committing ourselves to accepting it and even living by it. Thus it feels as though we can doubt and remain unscathed, but believing will scathe us. Indeed believing can feel hopelessly bound up with religion. ("Do you BELIEVE? Yes, Lord, I BELIEVE!"). ("The Believing Game" 16)

To allay anxiety, I now try to warm-up students to the act of believing, to forge a link between the “game” of believing and the sort of theater games and improvisations actors pursue. Improvisation exercises encourage students to let down their guard, suspend disbelief, and take risks. This approach is common in the work of such theater and improvisation experts as Augusto Boal, Viola Spolin, Keith Johnstone, and Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow. Boal warms up large groups of non-actors about to engage in improvising roles in conflict scenarios by having them try to move their arms and legs in different rhythms simultaneously, emphasizing a need to break out of physical, sensory habits. He calls this process “de-specialisation” (62). He gives this advice: “The actor must never let himself become mechanised, or perform the same actions automatically whether or not his mind is on his role. In the theatrical experience, the actor must give himself utterly and completely over to his task” (51). As Frost and Yarrow claim, “being ‘innovative’ or ‘improvisatory’ may be something that is more necessary to all aspects of human relationship than is often acknowledged” (3).

It also helps to allay student anxiety about “what the teacher wants” by carefully explaining how the believing game fits into an entire project—the rules of the game, as it were. Once one is comfortable with a game, it’s easier to let go and play. My approach now involves overtly discussing the believing game after students read Elbow’s descriptions of it (“The Believing Game”). In assignment design, I try to scaffold or stage drafts into extended opportunities for believing. In the same way Ken Macrorie structures the I-Search paper in order to help students focus on changes in their own thinking as they research a subject, I have tried to create journal and essay assignments that involve reflections on the process itself, helping students track their learning as they go through a succession of believing games, immersing themselves in different points of view. The believing game goes well when care is taken to introduce it, contextualize it, experience it in phases, and reflect upon it. I have learned that it helps to take time constructing a process of learning about conflict, emotion, questions, and listening. How can a “shift” in perspective happen, how can one most deeply believe in an alternative perspective, without first preparing and becoming mindful of what the effort might involve?

Lesson #3: Work with Emotion and Attachment

In using the believing game during death penalty discussions, I noted that my approach really didn’t lead to much “detachment” from initial belief. It’s difficult to let go of our “baggage,” our position or initial belief in something. And when facing others, we can easily attach a position to a person, to fix them, to make them an “it” in Buber’s terms (13, 98). The enormous difficulty in opening up to alternative perspectives was captured recently by *Washington Post* columnist Shankar Vedantam, who describes a number of experiments by political scientists suggesting that, when faced with rebuttal, even irrefutable rebuttal, people simply dig in even more. The studies showed how people don’t let go of political misinformation after hearing a correction. The misinformation seems to spread, as people push back even harder when counter evidence is presented to their position. It doesn’t matter how evidence-based the refutation is; people just fight back. Indeed, it’s tempting to say that rebuttal itself (expressions born from the doubting impulse) triggers this response. Elbow writes, “No wonder people so

seldom change their minds when someone finds bad reasoning in their argument" ("The Believing Game" 14). The "argument culture," to use Deborah Tannen's term, is entrenched. It's difficult to expect anyone to detach from a current position when the cultural tendency is to associate threat and loss with argument.

When using the believing game now, I try to work directly with students' emotional attachments to particular beliefs or positions in a conflict. Through pre-discussion surveys, I often find students either are undecided or deeply attached to particular positions. With polarized issues such as the death penalty, whether undecided or entrenched, students know that the terrain they are entering is marked by division. I find that, in both cases, it helps to make time for students to establish initial thoughts and to be heard, to share the "story" behind their thinking, before they might detach enough to play the believing game and experimentally attach to new or threatening beliefs. I can't underscore enough the value of listening. As Carol Gilligan has remarked, "To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act" (178). Elbow repeatedly emphasizes listening in the believing game, usually as a mode of entering another view, to "dwell in, enter in, or experience" ("Bringing the Rhetoric of Assent" 394). The believing game goes better, however, not merely when students are asked to listen to others; they themselves need to be heard, and perhaps thereby notice the way that being heard may also relax "the letting-go muscle" (390).

The importance of listening to personal story and perspective in conflict is a basic thrust of narrative mediation, a recently developed method within the field of mediation (Winslade and Monk). Its parallel, perhaps, can be found in those approaches to conflict that "tend to assume a much broader notion of argument . . . one that includes narrative, attention to the particular, sensibility, and appeals to emotion (Roberts-Miller 5). Catherine Lamb has claimed that "monologic argument," that is, writing to lay out a point of view without attention to others, with only our own interests in mind, plays a crucial role for college writers: "We still need this kind of argument . . . at the early stages of resolving a conflict, where both parties need to be as clear as possible about what they think and feel. Our students need to learn it for their survival in other contexts, and, more fundamentally, as part of the process of becoming adults. It promotes differentiation, the sense of self" (17). Such instances of private writing are safe moments for testing beliefs. Elbow tells us that there are times when it helps to ignore audience, to take "vacations from readers to think in peace" ("Closing My Eyes" 111). Fiercely arguing from one's committed position can provide a crucial, preparatory stage for the believing game. The art of teaching with the believing game is to know when writers are ready to venture out and to ensure that the journey is long enough for immersion in other perspectives. I am finding it much more productive to offer the believing game in two different modes: 1) private journal writing, in which students are given the chance simply to believe a perspective, to believe something on their own terms and not in response to anyone, and 2) role-based believing, in which they work together in class to try out a perspective or role after the habits of the believing game are secure.

Attachment to other and different beliefs, whether privately or collaboratively, however, rests on an ability to listen and witness, to enter into an experience or story (Elbow, "The Believing Game" 20). Stories and documentaries offer stu-

dents a verbal record or guide into a point of view, enabling them to access a first-person account of someone on death row, for example, and then to attempt to role-play that individual, bringing that language to life. It is for that reason that I think the believing game can take the form of role-plays that are constructed from readings and student research. Texts provide what Judith and Geoffrey Summerfield call “funding” or the vital verbal material that allows for perspective-taking (53).²

Roles offer students a bit of distance, a way of provisionally detaching from their actual beliefs and trying on a new perspective with an attempt at connection and empathy. Lynch, George, and Cooper suggest that many students view their argumentative writing as a “pointless” contribution to a conflict among people who are presumably so entrenched that they couldn’t care less about the outcome (61). Structured role scenarios give students a stronger purchase on actual people and their lives.³ For example, with the death penalty issue, I tried to create roles from actual cases, using news coverage and documentaries, in order to “put a face” on perspectives and positions. In a recent college writing course, I constructed a role-play from the death penalty case of Michael Addison, convicted of killing a police officer (Sanger-Katz). To begin, students composed “Part I: My Initial Thoughts on the Death Penalty,” in effect establishing a place for first thoughts. These writings became the basis for in-class listening exercises; each writer read his or her piece aloud, getting a chance to be heard. Then came “Part II: The Believing Game,” a section of the essay in which they would be asked to enter a contrary view and try on its perspective and values. Finally, I asked them to compose “Part III: Reflections on the Believing Game,” a chance for them to write about what they learned, what it was like to suspend their own positions and to explore the values and interests of an opposing view, and what view of the death penalty culminated for them.

For Part II, students drafted private “believing game” responses either to Helen Prejean’s “Executions are Too Costly—Morally” or to former New York Governor George Pataki’s “Death Penalty is a Deterrent.” They also read and discussed various statements by people involved in the Michael Addison case. They were then asked to engage in small group role-plays involving different “voices” from their readings, writing in their journals directly after dialogue events involving roles. I encouraged students to return to “Part II” of their essays after these role experiences and to revise in any way that might help them enter the perspective more deeply. Many chose to write Part II in the voice of either Pataki or Prejean. One student, Meghan, who was initially against the death penalty, wrote Part II of the assignment in the voice of someone allied with George Pataki, commenting about “cop-killers”:

Why shouldn’t we kill the people who put our brave men at risk? If these murderers are killing the people we have protecting us, then what good are they doing to the world? When these men are killed, it is not because we want to, it’s because

²The Summerfields select “primary” texts for students to read which embody roles. Based on such model texts, the Summerfields’ students then write “reactive texts,” texts which “impersonate” these roles in the material they’ve read.

³For a very well-developed role-play on the death penalty issue, see Catron and Stein-Holmes’s *Death Penalty Resource Guide* (Amnesty International).

they need to be killed. We cannot give these men a second thought when they do not even think twice about who they are about to kill. The people they murder are mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles; they do not think twice, so why should the government?

In students' reflective writing for Part II, this greater attention to the process of believing yielded more fruitful, extensive engagement with other perspectives, often as a result of being in role or responding to someone in role. One student wrote in response to her peer's performance of a role in class: "It didn't really effect me when I tried to play the wife of Officer Briggs, but when he [her peer] started talking about Addison being his brother and actually getting into the role, I believed a lot more." A fellow student wrote, "I definitely feel like my thoughts have been thrown. I felt more into the situation when he told us it was his brother. It felt more realistic and it made me want to be against the death penalty." Because they create a kind of immediacy and exigency about the conflict, these role-play experiences jar students out of their habitual positions. Group role-plays also pave the way for writing in role. Meghan's reflection in Part III demonstrates how writing in role creates a kind of listening stance, an attempt to "hear" another voice by ventriloquizing it. Meghan describes a productive struggle:

Writing the second part of this project brought me great difficulty. I was not sure what to do, where to start or how to even make it sound believable, but in the end I managed to get into character. . . . While writing the paper, I would find myself typing my own views and having to go back and delete them, because it was not supposed to be from my point of view. My point of view has stayed the same, even though I have entered [Pataki's] point of view. Although Pataki makes good points, I still cannot see why a person would want to kill a person to show that killing is wrong. I can say that viewing this topic from different points of view has made me more understanding of how other people feel on the topic and has helped me be open and understanding. . . . The difficulty of writing in someone else's point of view can become easier when an open mind is present.

Students can detach from their beliefs and endure the anxiety of uncertainty when they take time to listen to others and to be heard, to practice the believing game before doing it in a group, and to experience alternative views through role-play. Another student, Katie, wrote a final reflection that captures the lesson which the believing game can offer about listening and openness:

I did a lot of thinking over the course of this project and am now very much on the fence about this issue. A big part of me is still for the death penalty, the part who lets a want for vengeance determine my views. On the other hand, I can no longer ignore the reasons against the death penalty. Is it really

torture? And if it isn't, then why is it kept in such secrecy? But the biggest reason for me to begin to be against the death penalty is because it does make "us" as bad as "them," and I don't know that that is something I am willing to accept. At the end of it all . . . I can say that I still lean slightly to the side favoring capital punishment, but I am now very much more inclined to listen to the people who are against it.

Lesson #4: "Questions in the Service of the Asked"

The final lesson I have learned about the believing game came out of training I received at the Public Conversations Project, an organization that "guides, trains, and inspires individuals, organizations, and communities to address constructively conflicts relating to values and worldviews." The training involved a three-day workshop on "the power of dialogue," in which a version of the believing game was central. It involved a structured way of listening to other perspectives and then asking only those questions that would "serve" the person who has shared a perspective (Roth and Stains). This was a version of "active listening" discussed by Elbow ("Believing Game" 20), though the techniques of questioning went well beyond Rogerian summary. An entire two-hour session was devoted to helping participants in small groups create different kinds of questions to pose to individuals in a specific conflict scenario:

- > questions that flesh out a story;
- > questions that explore language, thinking, and decision-making;
- > questions that focus on how perspectives have taken shape or shifted over time;
- > questions that ask for explanation of nuances or "gray" areas;
- > questions that explore connections and relationships to others involved.

Thus far in my use of the believing game, I have not focused enough on the value of questions, tending instead to choose private writing and role-oriented interactions in which the emphasis is on listening and expanding perspectives. Yet well-crafted questions can do two jobs in the believing game: reassure the individual that she has been heard, and demonstrate the listener's ability to seek even deeper access to a perspective, thus building trust. In my subsequent uses of the believing game, my aim is to use questioning activities in these dialogues to help students shift toward other perspectives.

The Believing Game and Democracy

More and more, I believe in the believing game as a vital experience for college writers, especially if we believe that the central goals of college writing should be to help students prepare for public deliberation, to practice active listening to others in the context of conflict, to investigate multiple perspectives beyond pro/con, and to seek common ground in conflict, when possible. The believing game foregrounds the value of inquiry and a resistance to binary thinking. It's tempting to see our culture moving toward the values implied in the believing game, to interpret the election of Barack Obama as a cultural shift.

David Brooks describes a dinner which Obama hosted for conservative columnists. He states:

With some people when you disagree with them, you get the sense that it's like a little status battle, that their side is a little better than your side. And [Obama] has absolutely none of that. In part because he is so self-confident. . . . And therefore disagreement doesn't carry a lot of the emotional baggage that it might otherwise.

Another columnist, Eugene Robinson, writes, "[Obama] said . . . American politics has seen enough 'either/or,'" calling Obama "the personification of 'both/and.'" Obama's election may signal that the time is ripe for the believing game, for the capacity to welcome every idea, with the confidence that the dialogue can only help. The great hope in using the believing game is that, by practicing it deeply and repeatedly, we help nurture a flexible, open stance that is crucial for democratic deliberation. ☐

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The Difficulty of Believing in Writing Across the Curriculum

Anne Ellen Geller

I do not know how our culture managed to drift so far from its human moorings, to a lost and lonely place where “tips, tricks and techniques” have become the commonest words in the literature about everything we do—from teaching to raising children to making love. But I do know that we must rescue teaching (and loving) from such gimmickry and manipulation, because teaching-and-learning at its best is one of the most ancient and elemental of all human exchanges.

(Parker J. Palmer. Foreward to Mary Rose O’Reilly’s Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice ix)

Every now and then, after a writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) event—a lunch or a workshop—a faculty colleague will take me aside as he or she leaves and say, “I am so sorry that so and so said x.”¹

The first time this happened to me, long ago, was after a lunch workshop designed to help faculty improve their writing assignments. In the final minutes of that workshop, before everyone rushed off to 1:20 pm classes, a very senior, almost retired, psychologist raised his hand. He read aloud from writing he had scribbled alone at a back table when he was supposed to have been working with a faculty colleague. His long passage brought together his thinking about Nabokov’s *Lolita* (main character described in vivid detail), the lessons for teaching which might be gleaned from the novel, and his disdain for the assignments being discussed. After he read, he stood up and limped out of the room. Glares and sighs followed him, just as they always did.

Later that afternoon, he emailed his writing to me, typed and attached. Sexist as I found his take, and difficult as that made it for me to try to hear what he was saying, there was also something interesting about his ideas, something that left me trying to listen to him and trying to consider the lens through which he wanted to view teaching and learning. And I wished others could have suspended their judgment of him long enough to hear what he was offering. I also wish he hadn’t included a critique of everyone else in the room in his tirade for that certainly didn’t leave them wanting to listen.

Anne Ellen Geller is Associate Professor in the English Department at St. John’s University. As Director of Writing Across the Curriculum in the Institute for Writing Studies, she works with faculty from all disciplines to support the teaching of writing at all levels of instruction in all departments along with teaching non-fiction and writing studies. She is co-author of The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice (Utah State UP, 2007).

¹In this essay I use “writing across the curriculum” as an umbrella term for writing-across-the-curriculum and writing-in-the-disciplines programs.

Exchanges such as these remind me that much as we may deeply respect our academic colleagues, we are also quite committed to doubting them. I might even use Peter Elbow's term to say we use our most well-honed academic skill and "methodologically doubt" our colleagues, especially those colleagues whose views or approaches seem most different from our own. I watch and listen as this plays out again and again in department meetings and university-wide committee meetings.

Though WAC directors claim to have evolved from the days of missionary work, we still reach out to our colleagues with a sense of doubt. I hear us group faculty into categories: those who "care only about content" or those who are "traditional" in the ways they teach writing. We even have words we use to (in)accurately describe these colleagues: the "unconverted" or the "resistant" or the "lazy" who won't assign and read drafts or informal writing. We hold workshops hopeful that sandwiches and stipends will efficiently coerce faculty into thinking about writing in ways we find acceptable.

So at the heart of this piece lies the following idea: It doesn't seem to me as if we've ever tried to consider explicitly WAC work through the lens of Elbow's "methodological believing" or the "believing game." What would it take to try to believe that every faculty member across campus knows a great deal about writing? What would happen if we were to try to believe that every faculty member does, in fact, teach writing?

Well, first, we might have to remind ourselves that nearly every faculty person wrote a dissertation to gain a PhD and writes day in and day out to gain tenure and sustain a presence within a field. We could try to believe that all of our faculty colleagues are writers.

We would also want to try to believe that all our faculty colleagues are teaching writing (and worry about parsing out exactly what that means or judging how well we think they're doing at it at some later point). We would want to try to believe that all our faculty colleagues are thinking about their teaching of writing. And, truthfully, how could they not be, when they, too, take home stacks and stacks of student writing.

"But, but, but . . .," I imagine readers thinking at this point. Those faculty are not assigning the type of writing we'd want them to be assigning. They are not responding to students' writing in the ways we'd hope. They do not even know why they write as they write. Or understand why they ask their students to write as they do. Some of those faculty are not even writing.

All are potentially true. And all based in doubting.

Elbow asks us to think of methodological believing as a tool and a lens: "If we systematically try to believe everything, we're not trying to accept everything; we're trying to find virtues we couldn't see before" (5). I'm struck by Elbow's reminder that we can separate the "*process of doubting*" something or someone from the "*decision to reject*" something or someone, but we "haven't learned to separate the *process of believing* from the *decision to accept*" (4, original emphasis).

If we were to believe that every faculty person in the university is a writer, thinks about writing, and teaches writing in his or her own way, what "virtues" would we find that doubting would lead us to "disqualify" (Elbow 7)? As WAC director, I am more and more interested in the practice of separating the process of believing from the decision to accept wholeheartedly—or reject. My role, as I

see it, is to keep faculty curious about writing and the teaching of writing, reflective about their own beliefs, and actively perplexed about the beliefs of others. Certainly there is a lot of research about writers and writing. But unless we are all prepared to agree on one best way to support writers, we should be able to inhabit the beliefs of all faculty for what they will add to our understanding of the teaching of writing.

* * *

In 2006-2007 I participated in a year-long faculty development project funded by the Ford Foundation. The Difficult Dialogues project at Clark University was a campus-wide initiative to foster dialogue about contentious and divisive issues such as power, race, religion, reproductive rights, when those in the dialogue hold very different and well established worldviews. Many of our workshops were facilitated by the Public Conversations Project, a non-profit in Watertown, Massachusetts, dedicated to work that “guides, trains, and inspires individuals, organizations, and communities to constructively address conflicts relating to values and worldviews” (Public Conversations Project).² Here is how William Isaacs describes “dialogue” in *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*:

dialogue is a conversation in which people think together in relationship. Thinking implies that you no longer take your position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to possibilities that result simply from being in relationship with others—possibilities that might not otherwise have occurred.
(19)

Dialogue, like methodological believing, “explores underlying causes, rules, and assumptions to get to deeper questions” and new “framing of problems”; it invites “unprecedented possibilities and new insights; produces a collective flow” (Isaacs 41). Dialogue also “implies learning how to make explicit the thinking that leads you to say what you say” when too many “of us learn to cover up this thinking for fear that it will embarrass someone” (189). Basic principles of dialogue are:

- * “Listening”—which “requires we not only hear the words, but also embrace,
- * accept and gradually let go of our own inner clamoring” (83);
- * “Respecting”—which “invites us to see others as *legitimate*” (111, original emphasis); and,
- * “Suspending”—which means we “simply acknowledge and observe our thoughts and feelings as they arise without being compelled to act on them.” (135)

²For me, the most striking of the Public Conversations Projects is a six-year dialogue of right to life and pro-choice leaders in Boston begun after the John Salvi abortion clinic murders. At a public talk at Clark University, these women were asked if they ever thought to change their views in dialogue with one another, and they said no, that their understandings of their own worldviews grew stronger and deeper; in dialogue they found their combined views were often welcome in contexts where their disparate views otherwise might not have been. See “Talking with the Enemy” by Anne Fowler, Nicki Nichols Gamble, Frances X. Hogan, Melissa Kogut, Madeline McComish, and Barbara Thorp, *The Boston Globe* 28 Jan. 2001: F1.

These principles resonate with the ideas at the foundation of the believing game. We should be “listening and entering into the words” of others, deciding to “enter into ideas—to invest or insert ourselves,” and trying “to understand points of view from the inside” (Elbow 8).

It is not easy for WAC directors to suspend our judgment of others. Most of us call English our disciplinary home, and our education as rhetoricians actually reinforces for us again and again how not to yield if we have strong beliefs. But that rhetorical strength also leads us to defensiveness, a lack of curiosity. Sometimes that strength of belief in ourselves and what we value about writing even leads us to resist the type of dialogue which would allow us to think beyond “already established positions, assumptions and beliefs” (Isaacs 59), the type of dialogue that would ask us to “suspend certainty,” “mine for the questions,” and “externalize thought” (155). I feel particularly drawn to Martha Patton’s description of her WAC “co-inquiry” with a physicist: “The dialogue I’ve had with him and others isn’t just one-way—we share lots of reading, lots of philosophical inquiry about our assumptions, as well as questions about my teaching and assignments. But my point here is that to embrace egalitarianism is not to deny expertise, much of which is *practiced* even if not *preached*” (5, original emphasis).

* * *

As I read the history of writing across the curriculum, I find that the earliest think tanks and retreats seem to have been filled with the most cross-disciplinary collegial exploration. Perhaps this is nostalgia for good old days that never truly existed? I don’t think so because disciplinary faculty at Clark University attended early NEH funded workshops like the one Toby Fulwiler describes attending at Rutgers, “Writing to Learn in the Humanities,” and, like Fulwiler, could speak in detail thirty years later about the experience. Perhaps the newness of WAC initiatives in those years meant there was much less at stake so everyone could be less territorial? With supportive NEH funding and the excitement of cross-disciplinary, cross-institutional retreats and without the specter of shrinking state budgets and mandated, strict assessment,³ early WAC initiatives may have allowed more space for questioning, believing, and playing among faculty.

With WAC programs formalized, as they now are on so many campuses, those who direct the programs need to claim expertise campus-wide about writing and the teaching of writing. Like the professor in Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* who “insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women” to gain power as a man, I wonder if we may sometimes be concerned with disciplinary faculty’s “inferiority” as teachers of writing because their inferiority allows us to sustain an image of our “own superiority” (34). Perhaps we feel some pressure to focus on what faculty across the disciplines don’t know about writing and the teaching of writing to make what we do know seem more legitimate? I think we do, and I have a feeling this evolves from our continuing worry about whether we have disciplinary status.

Like others, I read and re-read the set of exchanges that played out across the pages of *College English* twenty years ago. In April, 1988, Catherine Pastore

³I don’t believe assessment, state mandated or otherwise, need shut down opportunities for methodological believing or dialogue. See Michael Carter’s “Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines.”

Blair published a piece entitled “Only One of the Voices: Dialogic Writing Across the Curriculum.” In that essay, originally delivered as a talk at the 1986 MLA conference as part of a Council of Writing Program Administrators panel, Blair describes the WAC program at Bucknell University and argues “that the English department should have no special role in writing across the curriculum” (383). Instead, “true writing across the curriculum should be based on dialogue among all the departments, and, in this dialogue, the English department should be only one of the voices” (383). She continues (and you might feel the hair on the back of your own neck bristling a bit): “Entrusting the writing program to the English department is based on the belief that the English department has a special relationship to language and is, therefore, the department that knows the most about writing—in fact, the department that owns writing” (384).

And this is an ongoing belief. Listen to the title of Doug Hesse’s 2005 4Cs chair’s address: “Who Owns Writing?” I do believe that in his closing lines he means to bond us in a common endeavor, inspire us, and send us off hopeful. But I’d ask you to listen for the ways in which his admonitions may in fact lead us to remain, as ever, suspicious and distrustful of anyone else beyond our “we” who might also own writing. I’ve cut some phrases here, but I don’t believe Hesse’s meaning is changed:

These days all sorts of interests would organize writing. Let’s attribute good intentions to them all. But let’s remember that my good intentions are not likely yours, that intentions are always cropped and framed. . . . Make no mistake. We in 4Cs refract and frame no less than others. But we have something else—or if we don’t have it, we have no particular right to be in this place. . . . We have the lens of research and reflective practice, polished carefully. . . . Ours is the knowledge of what writing is and what it can be, the whole of it, in every sphere. Ours is the never-done knowledge of how writing develops, within a person or a populace. (354-55)

To be fair, Hesse suggests “we together must own and own up to writing, not as colonists, or profiteers, but as stewards” (355). I’m not convinced that imagining WAC directors as “stewards” is particularly dialogic, especially if we spend most of our time thinking and talking and working from what we “own.” But his suggestion that we “own up to writing” and confess or admit what we know—and don’t know—including all of our assumptions, is a more generative one especially when I think about all the writing about writing and the teaching of writing we don’t “own.”

In a presentation delivered at the 2009 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Michael Edwards, a West Point compositionist, recounted a conversation in which a colleague from history told him “yours is not the only discipline . . . with expertise and investment in the production of writing, and plenty of other stakeholders outside composition have valid perspectives on how writing should be taught.” Of himself in that conversation, Edwards said: “I did my best not to reveal my immediate, gut-felt resistance to his response.” A moment like that one, in which we have a gut-felt resistance to such a response, might be a good one to try methodological believing.

In the last year alone, I know of these pieces about writing published in disciplinary journals, but there are likely even more: “Enhancing Students’ Understanding In Calculus Through Writing” (*International Electronic Journal of Mathematics Education*, February 2009), “Using Popular Magazine Articles To Teach the Art of Writing for Nontechnical Audiences” (*Journal of Chemical Education*, January 2008) and “Using the ACS Journals Search To Validate Assumptions about Writing in Chemistry and Improve Chemistry Writing Instruction” (*Journal of Chemical Education*, May 2008). “Trafficking in Facts: Writing Practices in Social Work” (*Qualitative Social Work*, March 2008), “The History Learning Project: A Department ‘Decodes’ Its Students” (*The Journal of American History*, March 2008), and “Writing as Thinking” (*Review of General Psychology*, March 2008). Yet I seldom read WAC literature that cites this research or hear WAC directors discussing among ourselves the research about writing published in disciplinary journals. Is that, I wonder nervously (especially as someone currently untenured), because we in English doubt the value of these articles since we categorize them as scholarship of teaching and learning?⁴ If so, I wonder how we in writing studies, in writing across the curriculum, and in writing in the disciplines would explain the type of research about writing that we do value.

If we were, as recently as three years ago when we listened to Doug Hesse’s 4Cs chair’s address, concerned about who owns writing (and, now I see, potentially confused about just what type of scholarship about writing we are willing to own), it is easy to imagine the reception Blair faced when she suggested WAC should be shared more cross-disciplinarily. In the January, 1989 *College English* three comments on the piece were published, and Blair responded. In the April, 1989 issue a comment co-authored by three appeared, and Blair responded. In impassioned arguments, Blair critiqued those who wrote back to her for suggesting “on the one hand that English ‘composition experts’ can make available the full selection of teaching methods to prospective teachers of writing in other disciplines and in the next breath propose that they steer these teachers into choosing the right ones” (104). “This English-department knows best attitude will be the death of interdisciplinary dialogue,” she wrote (104). And Blair imagined even then how prevalent freestanding departments of writing would become, warning their creation would “simply risk creating another ‘department that owns writing’ and therefore dominates the interdisciplinary dialogue about writing” (435).

In a fall 2008 *Pedagogy* article Joan Mullin raised a similar, but slightly different, conception, noting that “rather than prescribing ways to teach, faculty developers can best effect change by listening, articulating faculty dialogues for further reflection, and facilitating internal change in faculty while modeling teaching practices they and others could adopt” (496). Mullin notes: “This requires of facilitators a certain disciplinary neutrality, a meta-awareness of their own frames. A WAC developer often claims a department of English, writing, or rhetoric as their home department; as a result, cross-disciplinary programs may become codi-

⁴A recent article surveying the acceptance of the scholarship of teaching and learning suggests “the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Humanities has been inconsistent and slow to develop. It may seem at first surprising that it has not been a central focus within the well-established disciplines, yet perhaps because of their long traditions of teaching and learning, they are slower to incorporate this contemporary meta-conceptual concentration” (Witman and Richman 13).

fied through the disciplinary lens of one person and the field or group to which he or she belongs" (496).

Those exchanges in the pages of *College English* are certainly discussions about the most appropriate administrative housing of WAC programs. Should the director be a faculty person from the English department? Should the budget for such a program belong to an English department or run through a different university line? But, as Joan Mullin points out, where the WAC program or director is housed may also have a great deal to do with the lenses through which entire programs are "codified." And in that codification certain assumptions about writing held by the program or the program director may be "particularly invisible to us because we are living as part of a community and culture" (Elbow 6). "It's hard to doubt what we live inside of: we can't see it and we unconsciously take it for granted" (6). But, as Elbow notes, "Here's where the believing game comes to the rescue" (6).

* * *

I understand what the act of "playing" the believing game might look like in WAC work because I equate the believing game with David Bohm's notion that we can *think* our differences, rather than just *thinking about* our differences. To "think" our differences means we "go through" our thoughts together to "let [them] produce whatever [they're] going to do, . . . let [them] stand in the body in consciousness without being suppressed and without being carried out" (88). We "*think together*" (30, original emphasis). By thinking together, "Everybody will be sharing all the assumptions in the group. . . . Whereas if we all have different assumptions and defend them, . . . we won't really take in the other person's assumptions. We'll be fighting them, or pushing them away—try to convince or persuade the other person" (31).

Thinking our differences together is slow work—the stuff of retreats, intensive weeklong workshops, and the very best collaborative assessment research (see Carter; Thaiss and Zawacki). The time requirement alone is why I think this work so seldom happens in WAC programs. Workshops that offer tips and techniques to faculty—how to respond to students' papers or how to integrate informal writing into courses or how to break the research paper into steps—seem efficient and are certainly more easily advertised than requests for faculty to spend time dwelling in ideas about writing and the teaching of writing that are different from their own, ideas they may never want to adopt and we might not suggest they adopt. And yet what one might come to learn about one's own ideas about writing and the teaching of writing by being willing to both doubt and believe the ideas of others would, I think, be valuable for all.

Here is an example of Bohm's thinking together and a description of how an act of thinking together has echoed out beyond the spaces where it was first experienced—by me, by faculty at St. John's University, within a professional organization's listserv, and then back into the faculty talk of at least two departments of psychology. In the Difficult Dialogues workshops at Clark University, the Public Conversations Project had us consider the restrictions we placed on talk in our classrooms by asking us to brainstorm what we "prohibited, allowed and preferred" in the talk in our classrooms. That exercise was powerful for me as someone who had not previously thought so explicitly about talk in my classrooms. I imagined the exercise would be similarly powerful if cross-disciplinary

faculty who had not thought individually about writing in their classes in these ways could be thinking together. So in a number of workshops, including two intensive summer workshops with St. John's faculty participants from across the disciplines, I've adapted the exercise to writing and asked those assembled to individually fill three columns in answer to these three questions: What do you prefer in the writing for your courses? What do you allow in the writing for your courses? What do you prohibit in the writing in your courses?

I added one more step to the exercise when I read Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki's *Engaged Writers/Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*. After faculty filled their columns, I asked them to go back and try to note "why" they wrote down what they wrote down on each list. Before faculty began to dialogue from their lists, I shared with them the "five contexts" Thaiss and Zawacki see at work in any writing assignment: the academic, the disciplinary, the subdisciplinary, the local or institutional (local policies and practices), and the idiosyncratic (138). I asked faculty to consider their "whys." Is what you prefer informed by these contexts? Is what you prohibit informed by these contexts? Then, we had open dialogue about what faculty included in their "prefer" and "prohibit" columns.

It is difficult to recreate what these dialogues sounded like (and I haven't yet recorded any of them), but I am reminded when I am in them that "discussion seeks closure and completion" while "dialogue is about evoking insight" (Isaacs 45). There has been a tremendous amount of new understanding about disciplinary beliefs and how they are reified ("Oh, that's why you chemists/literature people always X") as well as an ownership and acceptance of idiosyncratic beliefs and investigation of how those come to be formed ("well, when my dog was young, she would run off with the loose pages, so I started to require my students to use staples, and then I liked it" or "when I began to include narrative into my own scholarship and got comfortable with it, I began to ask my students to write more narrative").

Resistance to local or institutional policies has been questioned and commitments to disciplinary and subdisciplinary beliefs have been stretched and strengthened and carried out into new dialogues. For example, two summers ago the chair of the St. John's University psychology department, Ray DiGiuseppe, was a participant in this dialogue and began to interrogate his own beliefs about the use of the active and passive in psychology writing. Recently he emailed to say that the listserv of the Council of Chairs of Graduate Programs in Psychology (COGDOP) was in the midst of an online discussion of the use of active and passive prompted by a chair who wrote:

I am aware that it is trendy to use first person voice in submission to many psychology journals, and last I knew this was the position of the APA style manual. However I also know first hand that many journals will reject articles that are written in the first person voice. Given this inconsistency, how do you teach journal article writing in your graduate research methods courses? Do you teach both styles?

Here is what Ray wrote about his engagement in this online, nationwide chairs dialogue about the use of the first person:

This question came up on the psychology chairs listserv concerning teaching writing. In the past I would have ignored it. But I have a stronger interest now and an opinion. I will collect the responses and bring them to my faculty.

When I asked Ray if I could include his email in this essay, he wrote “Please feel free. It was a great discussion.” What I think, however, is that he meant it was a great dialogue, a great disciplinary dialogue among colleagues who didn’t agree and didn’t need to seek “closure and completion.” It was a dialogue he wanted to enter because he had already explored what he preferred and prohibited in dialogue with cross-disciplinary colleagues. And notice that he does not say he will tell the faculty in his department what he thinks about this issue. He writes that he will bring the varied responses from the listserv to the faculty in his department, creating once again the possibility for differences to co-exist, creating once again another opportunity for dialogue and believing, and perhaps some doubting too.

When I emailed the poster of the original question, Wallace Dixon, chair of the psychology department at East Tennessee State University, to ask if I could include his question in this essay, he wrote to say it was a colleague of his, Andrea Clements, who “implored” him to ask the question on the chairs’ listserv. And he also wrote:

You may find it interesting to know that I took the COGDOP listserv responses to a department meeting to get a dialog going within my department, and we found that not only was there no consensus about how to teach writing, but some of my faculty did not even know that first person active voice was the preferred mode of the APA manual 5th edition. Andi’s question was the first question my faculty had ever pondered with regard to writing standards in the discipline.

Exchanges like these—face to face and asynchronous listserv communication—are the necessary and “elemental human exchanges” Parker J. Palmer writes about in my epigraph. We could all be deliberately creating, or better yet, co-creating moments and situations in which we would set aside our reliance on, even our inclination toward, persuasion and participate fully in dialogue and methodological believing. Promoting everyone’s engagement with writing—recognizing all our assumptions, articulating all our beliefs and listening deeply and respectfully to divergent values with suspension of judgment—will not reduce a WAC director’s expertise. As only one of the voices—just as valuable to and just as limited as other voices within or beyond English—in any deep dialogue about the teaching and learning of writing, we may not only encourage our cross-disciplinary colleagues to come to what they had not yet fully articulated about writing. We may, ourselves, also come to know what we could not even imagined on our own about writing.⁵ 

⁵Portions of this essay were delivered April 4, 2008, at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in New Orleans, LA. The panel—with Lauren Fitzgerald and Lisa Lebduska—was Changing Collaborative Realities: Dissensus and Dialogue. Thanks to Lauren and Lisa for encouraging me to continue thinking about these ideas. Thanks, too, to those who read and responded to drafts of this essay —Peter Elbow, Michele Eodice, Harry Denny, Neal Lerner, and Gino DiIorio.

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The Believing Game in Mathematics: Stories in a Discipline of Doubt

Shelly Sheats Harkness
University of Cincinnati

Catherine Pullin Lane
Clermont College

Sue Mau
Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne

Amber Brass
University of Cincinnati

Introduction

Peter Elbow argues that we can improve our practice of understanding by two conflicting processes: methodological belief and methodological doubt. Both are systematic, disciplined, and conscious efforts. However, believing is an endeavor to find virtues and strengths, no matter how unlikely an idea might seem to the listener or reader, and doubting is an attempt to find flaws or contradictions. The problem, Elbow argues, occurs when methodological doubt “hogs the whole bed.” “Judgment”—making up our mind—should occur only after considering the results of both believing and doubting (*Embracing Contraries* 258): “This [believing] may be our only hope of seeing something faint that is actually

Shelly Sheats Harkness, Associate Professor, Secondary Education Mathematics, at the University of Cincinnati, was a classroom teacher for 12 years prior to earning her PhD at Indiana University. Her research interests include ethnomathematics, mathematics and social justice, and teachers’ “believing” and listening in mathematics classrooms.

Sue Mau is Associate Professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences, Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne. Her research interests include prospective teachers’ understanding of mathematics and their beliefs about teaching.

Catherine Pullin Lane is Mathematics Instructor in the Science, Mathematics and Engineering Division at Clermont College and is a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Cincinnati. Her research interests include how students develop mathematical thinking skills and how they interact with the concept of proof.

Amber Brass is Assistant Director Academic in Middle Childhood Education at the University of Cincinnati. Prior to coming to Cincinnati, she was a middle school mathematics teacher in Iowa and Michigan. Her academic interests include the use of literature in the mathematics classroom and the content and pedagogical knowledge of preservice teachers.

there which she [the student] is particularly good at seeing but the rest of us are ill suited to see” (259).

In mathematics, doubting appears to dominate when student answers do not match our own. As teachers, we habitually criticize and find flaws with students’ understanding or reasoning, and we take this practice for granted as right and natural. We attach importance to finding errors and misconceptions in students’ computation. When we find only one counterexample, we assume (as logic and the doubting game tell us) that the conjecture cannot be true. In order to play the believing game, we must suspend our own logic, assumptions, and interpretations at least until we attempt first to understand and honor our students’ logic, assumptions, and interpretations. Perhaps because doubting caters to our own understanding or weak understanding of mathematics, it is easier to doubt. When students’ answers or methods do not match our own, it is much harder to attempt to believe.

Most people, as a result of their school mathematics experience, view mathematics as “the discipline of certainty par excellence”; however, mathematicians and mathematics educators have noted that this is not the reality of the nature of mathematics (Borasi 158). Ambiguity, doubt, and uncertainty pervade the discipline but not in the ways in which it is presented in schools and perceived by students. Typically, school mathematics is presented as a set of rules and formulae which must be memorized. Students practice using the rules and formulae to complete worksheet or textbook exercises which are evaluated by the teacher as either right or wrong. However, when mathematics is presented as problems which can be solved logically and creatively, then ambiguity, doubt, and uncertainty may surface. This is because problems can be solved using different methods and can have more than one correct answer depending on the students’ logic, assumptions, and interpretations.

If we conceive mathematical knowledge as certain or absolute, then perhaps it is easier to doubt. If we conceive mathematical knowledge as a cyclical process of “proofs and refutations” which produces increasingly refined results (Lakotos), then believing becomes more plausible. According to Marjorie Siegel and Robert F. Carey’s summary of philosopher C. S. Peirce, “truth” is not the goal of knowledge:

Peirce understands that we have to abandon any hope of knowing something is true once and for all and be satisfied with the idea that we can only be certain about something for the time being. . . . *it is this uncertainty that sets the process of knowledge-making in process.* (21-22, original emphasis)

Non-Euclidean geometries (hyperbolic and elliptic), not widely accepted until the 1900s, called on mathematicians to recognize that mathematics can accommodate logical, yet conflicting, axiomatic systems. The traditional Euclidean geometry which is still the framework for high school geometry today must be taught as only one system of geometry. For example, when students learn that all triangles have angle sums of 180 degrees in their high school geometry classes, this “truth” becomes untrue if they later consider triangles on a spherical surface within the non-Euclidean geometries’ axiomatic system. For example, imagine a triangle connecting the cities of Denver to Cincinnati to Sao Paulo on a flat map and a triangle connecting these cities on a globe. The sums of the angles of these two triangles are not equal.

Offering suggestions which will reform school mathematics, Rafaella Borasi, and additionally Borasi and Siegel, propose the following four pedagogical assumptions:

1. *mathematics* as a *humanistic* discipline in which results are not absolute and immutable but are socially constructed and fallible;
2. *knowledge* as a dynamic process of inquiry, characterized by uncertainty and conflict, which leads to a continuous search for a more refined understanding of the world;
3. *learning* as a generative process of meaning making, enhanced by social interactions;
4. and, *teaching* as providing support for students as they search for their own understanding and as organizing the classroom as a community of learners engaged in creating mathematical knowledge. (2-3, original emphasis)

The practice of methodological belief supports these assumptions. But how might methodological belief play out in everyday mathematics classrooms?

Elbow elucidated strategies for “Learning How to Play the Believing Game” within writing classrooms. To paraphrase:

- * Begin with: The five-minute rule—no criticism is permitted and everyone should try to believe
- * The best place: With a small group of people who trust each other
- * The most natural occasion: During discussions where the issue is in some sense an interpretation
- * How to demonstrate its power: Use it in response to people by simply showing them quietly that you can conditionally believe what they are saying. (*Embracing Contraries* 273-75)

We contend these strategies are certainly possible to adopt in a mathematics class, particularly if we embrace a view of mathematics answers as interpretations and if we do not hold an absolutist view of mathematics. When we view mathematics as a human endeavor, a discipline that is socially constructed and fallible, the believing game becomes more possible.

Our Stories

This section consists of four stories. We open ourselves and the doors to our classrooms in order to show how playing the believing game might play out in the discipline of doubt. According to D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, “Narrative inquiries are shared ways that help readers [teachers] question their own stories, raise their own questions about practice, and see in the narrative accounts stories of their own stories. The intent is to foster reflection, storying, and restorying” (20). We hope to do just that.

Amber reminisces about wishing she had played the believing game when she taught middle school mathematics. Sue tells a story about attempting to un-

derstand the thinking behind wrong answers when she worked with preservice elementary teachers. Catherine's narrative is about attempting to believe her college-level students. And, finally, Shelly tells two stories. In her first story she chronicles the use of believing as a framework for her research, and in her second story she describes her own attempt to believe while observing a student teacher in a high school classroom.

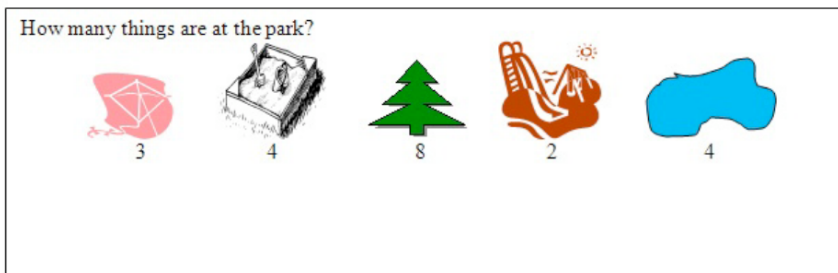
Amber's Story

There were many times, especially in my first years of teaching, when looking back I wish I had used the believing game. Here is an example of one of those times. It shows how the believing game can be used to encourage rich mathematical discourse in the classroom and for teacher reflection.

Mean, median, and mode are concepts that create confusion for students of all ages, both children and adults. Mathematicians consider each of these concepts (mean, median, and mode) to be an average, but the concepts are used in different situations depending on the information being communicated. To help me see my students' understandings of these concepts, I asked my students to create books about mean, median, and mode. Students were asked to define each type of average, highlight important features, and provide an example from everyday life.

In Debbie's description of mode she explained that mode is "the number used the most," and she used this strategy to determine the answer of 4 in her example (see Figure 1). Debbie drew pictures of things she would see at a park and put the number of these items at the park under each picture. Debbie then listed these numbers from smallest to biggest to help her see which number was used the most.

Figure 1: Debbie's Example for Mode



The mathematical definition of mode is the number or item that occurs most frequently in a set of data. I was using this definition, and a doubting lens, as I graded Debbie's example for mode. I am sure that at the time I graded this project I thought, "This is incorrect. The mode of this situation is actually the trees, because there were 8 of them at the park. That is the item that occurs most frequently."

Actually, my thinking was limited and absolute. I needed to remember that numbers and items reside within the definition of mode depending on how the situation is interpreted. Suppose I collected data on how many trees were in five students' yards, and they reported the number of trees in their yards to be 2, 3, 4,

4, and 8. It is most common for there to be 4 trees in a yard (according to this data), and the mode would be numerical, 4. However, I could also collect data on the types of trees in each yard. For example, there could be 2 elm trees, 3 maple trees, 4 apple trees, 4 dogwood trees, and 8 oak trees in a yard. In that case, oak trees occur most frequently, so the mode would be categorical, oak trees.

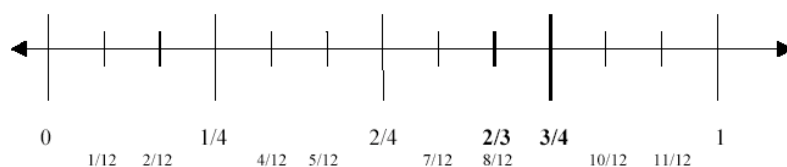
If I had been looking through a believing lens, I would have seen the strength of Debbie's numerical answer of mode since 4 was the number that occurred most frequently. I would have spent more time on this example with my class, and I am left wondering about the rich conversation that could have taken place had we examined Debbie's answer. Perhaps students could have come to a greater understanding of mode and its different appearances, both numerical and categorical. Debbie saw the numerals, and she understood 4 to be the mode since it was the number that was used most frequently which fits the mathematical definition. Looking at the "things in the park" as a list (kite, kite, kite, sandbox, sandbox, sandbox, tree, tree, tree, tree, tree, tree, tree, lake, lake, slide, slide, slide, slide) Debbie might have had a different interpretation of mode, tree, since it is the category that was used most frequently in this example. Perhaps students could have defended the rightness of 4 as the answer or defended the rightness of trees as the answer gaining an appreciation for the ways we can use statistics to show different points of view. Perhaps I could have learned more about the use of mode and more about the thinking of my students had I asked Debbie to share her example with the class.

Sue's Story

Attempting to believe reminded me of a conversation with one of my former colleagues at Purdue Calumet, Erna Yackel. Following a social constructivist perspective (Cobb, Wood, and Yackel), she said that students' answers are typically sensible to them, that students did not purposely give wrong answers or what some might call "stupid answers." Although I doubted her, I became committed to finding out what sense students' answers made to them, on the off chance that she might be right. I became devoted to teasing out their reasoning, even if it was incorrect, or perhaps incomplete, reasoning.

I have been teaching prospective elementary school teachers. Recently some of these students were working on division of fractions. I reminded them that division asks the question "how many of this in that?". Believing that students must make sense for themselves and that a drawing often helps with that process, I asked them to draw a picture for $3/4 \div 2/3$. In other words, they needed to draw a picture that would show how many $2/3$ s are in $3/4$. Before I allowed them to begin their drawings, I asked if the answer should be more than, equal to, or less than one. All agreed that the answer should be greater than one because the divisor ($2/3$) is less than the dividend ($3/4$) (see Figure 2).

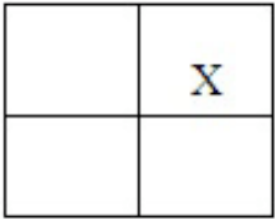
Figure 2: Number Line Illustration of Dividend ($3/4$) and Divisor ($2/3$)



Also before they began working in groups to determine an answer, I made it clear that using the “invert and multiply” rule to get the answer (1 and 1/8) would be insufficient.

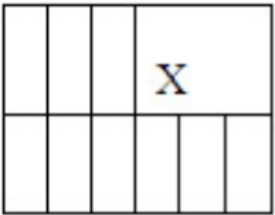
Consequently, when a group gave the answer as 4 and 1/3, I knew that I would have to tease this out carefully. In my best reasoning, I could never have produced that answer, and I certainly could not anticipate how they got it. I asked students to come to the board and “draw their answer.” Since their answer was so different than other answers, they declined my invitation. However, I would not let that rest. How did they begin the problem? How did they arrive at their answer? One of the students from the group sketched a square box, divided it horizontally and vertically into fourths, crossed out one of the fourths and worked with the other three fourths (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Students Sketch Fourths and Cross Out 1/4.

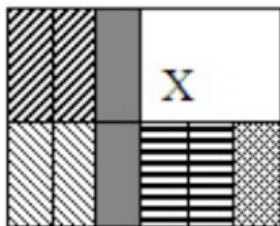


She then divided each of the remaining fourths into thirds, creating 9 twelfths (see Figure 4), although she thought of these twelfths as thirds.

Figure 4: Students Cut Each Fourth Into “Thirds” To Make 9 Twelfths



Then she shaded two of the pieces (thirds in her mind) at a time and counted how many groups of two she had shaded (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Students Shade “Thirds,” Two At a Time, Counting Up To 4 and $\frac{1}{3}$ 

She could color four groups of two pieces with one piece left over, prompting the answer of 4 and $\frac{1}{3}$.

Their answer was wrong, but their technique had merit, even if they had incomplete understanding. What was less clear to me were the questions I should ask to help them make better sense of this work. How do I help future teachers see the value in wrong answers? How do I help them know why this is numerically wrong and still validate the group's thinking, which has merit? I certainly did not want to leave anyone thinking the answer actually was 4 and $\frac{1}{3}$, but I did want these future teachers to consider believing students' thinking before making pronouncements about right and wrong. All of this happened just minutes before the end of class, making my dilemma seemingly more urgent.

We picked up the discussion again in the next class. The group came to understand how they had misinterpreted the “chunks” of $\frac{2}{3}$ in the problem. The students' solution strategy of splitting the unit, in this case 1, into fourths and then splitting the fourths into thirds caused them to use a divisor smaller than stated in the problem. They created a divisor of $\frac{2}{12}$ (or $\frac{1}{6}$) rather than $\frac{2}{3}$. In the problem, as stated, the divisor was $\frac{2}{3}$, which is the same as $\frac{8}{12}$. Looking at Figure 1 may help the reader literally to see the difference in magnitude and how that affects the numerical solution. When something is cut into one large piece, the answer is less than when that same thing is cut into many smaller pieces. When the students changed the divisor to $\frac{2}{3}$ of $\frac{1}{4}$, they inadvertently changed the size of the divisor to $\frac{2}{12}$ (or $\frac{1}{6}$) which was one-fourth of its original size (see Figures 4 and 5). Consequently when I asked the question “how many of the divisor fit into the dividend?”, they got the wrong numerical answer of 4 and something (the students said $\frac{1}{3}$) rather than 1 and something. Again, their strategy had merit and needed revision.

If this seems confusing, it is. Following the “swirling and colorful incompleteness of [students'] talk” (Ball 733) is never easy, but it is necessary if we believe something is there. As Deborah Loewenberg Ball reminds us, students' thinking and articulation can be clumsy, and “clumsy articulation may not be clumsy or inarticulate at all, but rather it may reflect how the speaker actually understands what he or she is talking about” (735). In this case, the problem with the solution becomes “clumsy” because the unit keeps shifting. In order to understand this solution, the teacher must be able to think from the student's point of view and realize the subtle change in unit size from $\frac{2}{3}$ of one to $\frac{2}{3}$ of one-fourth.

Their strategy, numerically incorrect as it was, allowed us to have a good conversation about the meaning of division and how we compare what is left

over to the divisor in order to get the remainder. Our discussion allowed us to think about the difference in the quality of a strategy and in a numerically correct answer. In effect, my attempts to find the logic in the wrong answer allowed students to rethink their understanding of division of fractions, and it allowed me to rethink how students make sense of division in general. As I have thought about this episode during the last two years, I have also come to realize that I have re-thought my division process. I believe I now have an enhanced relational understanding (Skemp) of the meaning of division. Thanks to the students' thinking and my determination to begin believing, I can better visualize a geometric interpretation of division. What emerging understandings, students' and mine, might be quashed if we do not look at the thinking rather than just the answer?

Catherine's Story

I teach at an open access community college, and most of my students come with a background of struggles with mathematics. This is most definitely the case with the students who take Preparatory Mathematics, a basic review of the fundamental of mathematics. The students who test into this class usually say that they "hate mathematics" and "were never good at it." It was easy to play the doubting game because I could so easily assume that their incorrect answers came from a lack of knowledge.

After reading Shelley Harkness and discussing with her how the believing game could be played out in the mathematics classroom, I decided to take a chance. For the next quarter I was going to try to believe that when the students spoke there would be some kernel of truth in what they said. I had my doubts, but I was intrigued by the idea. I hoped that as a result of my believing the students would become more involved in the class and build some self-confidence. What I didn't expect to happen was that they would show me a new way to think about mathematics.

On the third day of the course, my lesson goal was that students would understand integer (i.e., . . . -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3) computation. While I had a few ways of personally understanding this, none felt completely satisfying to me and I did not expect, or I doubted, that my students would be able to create their own understanding of this concept.

We began the class by making sure we all understood why a positive integer times a positive integer is another positive integer. One way to see this is to view multiplication as repeated addition. That is, $3 \times 4 = 4 + 4 + 4 = 12$. The class agreed that repeatedly adding positive integers would result in a positive integer. From there we moved to understanding why a positive integer times a negative integer is a negative integer. The class was quick to accept this makes sense since $3 \times (-4)$ could be written as $(-4) + (-4) + (-4) = (-12)$ and repeatedly adding a negative integer would result in another negative integer.

Then I gave them the challenge: How can we make sense of $(-3) \times (-4)$? After giving them some time to tinker with this idea, I asked for any suggestions. A student in the back of the class offered an explanation, and I prepared myself for trying to believe. The problem was that I could not understand his explanation enough to ask a clarifying question. I knew he said something about subtraction, but that it "didn't work." Determined not to slip into doubting and wanting to understand what this student was trying to say, I asked the class to clarify what

the student had said. To my surprise a student spoke up quickly. In fact, she had the same idea that the other student had. Instead of looking at multiplication strictly as repeated addition, when there are two negatives, they were changing it to repeatedly subtracting a negative integer. They were viewing $(-3) \times (-4)$ as subtracting the integer (-4) three times, that is, they saw it as $(-4) - (-4) - (-4)$. However, because some students had memorized the rules for integer operations (“a negative times a negative equals a positive”) they knew that the answer should be $(+12)$. But calculating the answer to $(-4) - (-4) - (-4)$ one must work left to right: $(-4) - (-4)$ equals (0) and $(0) - (-4)$ equals $(+4)$. After making sure the rest of the class understood what was happening, I asked them to take more time to think about this method and see if the problem could be resolved. Was there a way they could view the product of two negative integers as repeated subtraction of a negative integer?

While I was still pondering this, a lively discussion broke out and the class became convinced they had the answer. Start with zero! That is, $(-3) \times (-4) = 0 - (-4) - (-4) - (-4) = 12$. They then assured me that they could do this with “normal” multiplication, too. $3 \times 4 = 0 + 4 + 4 + 4$. Another student spoke up and said we could view $(-3) \times 4$ as $0 - 4 - 4 - 4 = -12$! They were on to something.

The results from this single day of believing have been far reaching. I now enjoy listening to energetic mathematical conversations and debates on a regular basis. The students are quick to offer suggestions and listen to their peers. And the biggest surprise of all, I learned a new, a more satisfying way of understanding why a negative integer times a negative integer is a positive integer.

Shelly's First Story

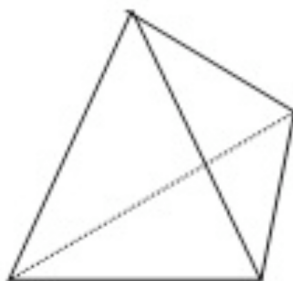
I was a doctoral student, transcribing and analyzing data from videotaped episodes in Sheila's classroom. Sheila (pseudonym) taught a mathematics course, Problem Solving, at a large urban university. My co-researchers and I authored two papers about Sheila's teaching practice. For these papers we used a theoretical framework grounded in motivation goal theory. The students in Problem Solving reported that they were motivated and that Sheila used practices which emphasized learning goals, rather than performance goals (Harkness, D'Ambrosio, and Morrone; Morrone, Harkness, D'Ambrosio, et al.). When students have learning goals, they focus primarily on mastering tasks and learning for learning's sake, they see a direct relationship between effort and learning, and they are willing to put forth more effort to complete challenging tasks (Ames; Dweck; Dweck and Leggett).

Unfortunately, I was not satisfied. I felt that the motivation goal theory framework did not adequately describe Sheila's teaching practice. I wanted to portray the ways that she honored students' mathematical thinking. In a third paper (Harkness), I described one aspect of Sheila's practice: attempting to believe. In fact, although Sheila had no knowledge of methodological belief or methodological doubt, in interviews with me she described her own attempts to believe. One particularly interesting attempt to believe occurred when Sheila was visiting a middle school classroom. Sheila said the teacher asked students for the answer to one of five true-false warm-up exercises: All triangles have three sides. Sheila said,

Kayla raised her hand to say the answer was false, and the teacher responded, “We all know that every triangle has three

sides.” Because the teacher valued my input, I felt comfortable attempting to open the conversation by asking Kayla to tell the class why it was false. “How do you see it? Can you draw it on the board so that we can see what you see?” In response to my questions, Kayla drew a shape which resembled a tetrahedron (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Tetrahedron



The teacher said, “No. That’s not a triangle. It’s not flat. The answer must be true.” The conversation stopped. However, I wondered if Kayla was looking at, picturing, each side individually, and thinking that there were four sides to this “triangle” and that the sides were flat. Because the teacher made it clear that it was time to move on with the lesson, as the visitor, I kept further questions to myself. I thought about how a rich opportunity to explore three-dimensional space or talk about the geometric language of sides and faces was dismissed by the teacher. (Interview, May 22, 2002)

In her own practice, Sheila looked for sparks of rightness about her students’ mathematics, their solutions, and the thinking behind those solutions. She practiced “unpacking” (Sheila’s language) their mathematical thinking and asking them to clarify their assumptions and interpretations. And, recalling Kayla’s diagram of a “4-sided triangle,” Sheila said that she “rethought” her own mathematics.

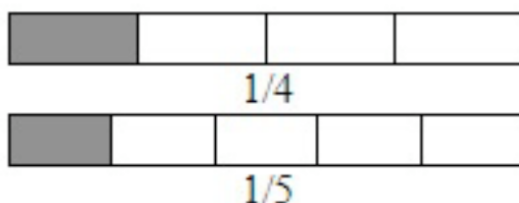
Shelly’s Second Story

During the same period of time that I was writing the third paper about Sheila’s practice in Problem Solving, I visited a mathematics classroom. I was observing a student teacher, and high school students were sitting in pairs playing a game called “Capture.” After each pair of students flipped two playing cards over, the pairs decided which person’s cards named the greatest fraction and that person collected all four cards. For example, if one student flipped over 3 and 4 ($3/4$) and the other flipped over 4 and 5 ($4/5$), the student with $4/5$ took all four cards because $4/5$ is greater than $3/4$. The object of the game was to capture more cards than your opponent. The students were allowed to play the game for about 10 minutes before a large group discussion ensued. As the large group discussion began, the student teacher asked students how they knew which fraction pair was greatest:

Two student pairs shared the two methods that they used: finding common denominators (for example, $3/4 = 15/20$ and $4/5 = 16/20$); using calculators to change the fractions to decimals ($3/4 = 0.75$ and $4/5 = 0.80$). The student teacher acknowledged that both of these were “good” ways to compare the fractions. However, when Sam raised his hand and said that he looked at the “bottom number” and “the one with the lowest bottom number was the greatest,” the student teacher corrected Sam, “Be careful. We know that method will not work.”

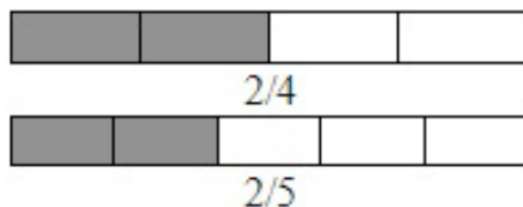
As I sat there, I played the believing game. I thought about unit fractions, fractions with numerators of one, such as $1/4$ and $1/5$ (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Comparison of Unit Fraction $1/4$ and $1/5$



Sam’s method is always true if he was describing how you know which fraction is largest when both are unit fractions. After thinking about Sam’s method, I later (days later, in fact) realized that his method is also true when fractions with the same area have any common numerators (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Comparison of Fractions with Common Numerators



However, finding common numerators rather than common denominators is not a customary method for comparing fractions, at least not in most U.S. classrooms. In fact, Sam’s method works if the numerators happen to be the same or if we manipulate fractions to have the same or “common numerators.”

This episode made me wonder. What kind of conversation might have occurred if the student teacher had believed (rather than doubted) and noticed a spark of rightness in Sam’s method? What would have happened if the student teacher had said, “Tell us more. Please give us an example of what you mean.” Would Sam and other students have been more willing to share their thoughts in future conversations? Would Sam have felt empowered? Would the student teacher’s own subject matter knowledge have been impacted?

Elbow says that to learn to play the believing game we should begin with the five-minute rule. No criticism is permitted, and everyone should try to believe. However, for me, the five-minute rule was not the starting point. Both Sheila and I were observers while other teachers taught. We had the opportunity to think deeply about students' understanding because we did not have to "think on our feet." Perhaps learning to play the believing game in everyday mathematics classrooms may be fostered by attempting to believe while observing other teachers, staying out of the conversation, listening to students, and considering how an answer deemed wrong might actually have some kernel of truth. The comfort of observation—watching others play the doubting game while trying to believe—may be how to begin learning to play the believing game in mathematics classrooms.

Conclusion

Mathematics is not "the discipline of certainty par excellence": ambiguity, doubt, and uncertainty filter through. Because of this, we must attempt to make believing a prerequisite for doubting in our mathematics classes. We should endeavor to suspend our own logic, assumptions, and interpretations in order to first try to understand and honor our students' logic, assumptions, and interpretations. When we attempt to believe, we create opportunities for rich conversations about the mathematical content. We also improve the potential for "unpacking" students' logic, assumptions, and interpretations. This "unpacking" may honor students' thinking, and perhaps our students will be motivated to do mathematics. Additionally, we may learn the content that we love in deeper ways.

The aim of interpretive or hermeneutic inquiry is not to write the end of an existing story but to write more hopeful beginnings for new stories (Ellis). We are hopeful that our stories are only the beginnings for us. Perhaps our stories are also beginnings for other mathematics teachers who read them and then envision their own practice as one of attempting to believe in a discipline of doubt. ☐

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Saying Yes to Freestyle Volunteering: Doubting and Believing

Judy Lightfoot

In *The Sun* magazine, a volunteer at a Catholic Worker house dedicated to serving people who struggle with poverty reflects on the idea of “Saying Yes”:

Our community includes homeless adults who drop by for food, clothing, and human contact. It’s our policy to say yes to their requests:

Yes, you can look through the clothes closet for some pants.

Yes, I’ll get you some groceries.

Yes, we can talk. What’s up?

I’ve also ended up tacitly saying yes in many situations that no one had prepared me for:

Yes, you can talk to me nonstop for three hours about your sexual liaisons.

Yes, you can get high in our bathroom.

Yes, I’ll get up at 3 A.M. to answer the door because you called 911 when you thought the crumpled banner on the floor was a dead body.

Yes, you can smoke the Frosted Mini-Wheats.

I’m learning how to remain hospitable in such situations and how to say yes to tolerance, patience, and forgiveness. (38)

The writer’s discipline reminded me of Peter Elbow’s believing game, the converse of his doubting game.

Both help us know our world. Playing the doubting game we’re hot on the trail of error, using the skeptic’s tools—logic, reason, empirical experiment—to detect what might be wrong with something we encounter. The doubting game helps us identify harmful or mistaken notions, but unhinged skepticism can lead to paralysis of the will. Even if we don’t freeze up, skepticism reinforces our natural tendency to think No instead of Yes when we encounter possible benefits that don’t fit our existing mental frameworks. The believing game lets us “Say Yes” to something new and seeks whatever could be right, good, or useful in it. We embrace it, enter into it, imagine ways in which it might be true. Often a quiet, open-hearted humor (as in the passage quoted above) leavens the game.

Among other kinds of overlap, humorous moments in the believing game, implying doubt that the thing believed really makes sense, show that no bright line divides believing and doubting. Believing doesn’t require being a true believer, and doubters don’t have to live on the Dark Side.

Judy Lightfoot, formerly an English teacher, curriculum specialist, and Founding Head of Eastside Preparatory School in Kirkland, WA, is a Seattle writer. Recently she founded Freestyle Volunteer, a project that encourages Americans to make the simple neighborly gesture of having a weekly coffee with one individual sharing our public spaces who is socially isolated by homelessness or mental illness.

My formerly academic interest in Elbow's work revived in a new context several years ago after a member of my family was diagnosed with schizophrenia and decided, as do many with this illness, that homelessness was a consummation devoutly to be wished. Eventually he moved into an apartment, but he remains untreated and in miserable isolation today, refusing medications as well as psychiatric help and struggling, with heroic, futile independence, to build a life. Now he's on my mind when in Seattle's public spaces I see individuals cut off from mainstream society—in cases of chronic mental illness, virtually always through no fault of their own. I used to walk past them as if they were invisible, but now I smile and greet them, stopping to chat if I have a minute. Through the practice of believing that they're people very much like me and the family member I love, I discovered that besides numbering among my more accessible neighbors they're generally articulate, often enjoyable company, capable of a wider social life. I wondered why no humanitarian project existed that provided ordinary personal companionship to individuals sharing our public spaces who are socially isolated by homelessness or mental illness: "Yes, we can talk. What's up?"

Then one day when I was volunteering at an agency for people with mental illnesses, an elderly man got banned from a support group there. The facilitator had often told "Hiro" that his bitter remarks hurt group members, a vulnerable and needy bunch of people. That day, as a woman in the group wept about her daughter's recently diagnosed mental illness, he growled that the daughter sounded "like a real loser" and added that her family was "going down like the Titanic." Curious, I asked Hiro as he packed up to go catch his bus why he attended a support group when support didn't interest him. He replied, "Telling a hard truth supports me."

"But there's a rule here against telling hard truths to people," I said gently, and read it aloud: " 'Speak softly and kindly to others at the table.' Why do you keep coming to a place where the rules don't give what you want, and you get in trouble?"

"Well, I need to be someplace," he replied. I looked at him and finally began to embrace his presence. Heavy bags hung from his frail shoulders. The thick overcoat he wore on this hot afternoon was pinned with a homemade button saying NO MORE LIES. "Do you live with someone, Hiro?" He shook his head, wisps of gray hair floating at the edges of his battered Mariners cap, and said, "I have PTSD and a couple other things." As he stood there swathed in baggage, I thought, well, I'm a volunteer with a few hours to spare, and all of us (including me) "need to be someplace." Doubting gambits faded, and the following week, at the time when the support group usually convened, Hiro and I met over coffee at a cafe. It took several months before he told me that when he was six his whole family had been sent to an internment camp for Japanese-Americans during World War II—not that this explains the person he is today.

My initial weekly conversations with Hiro planted a notion that was fertilized by brief exchanges with isolated individuals I met on Seattle's streets. Why not provide, and encourage other volunteers to provide, casual companionship for some of these folks? Why not develop a model of volunteering that consists of making a small individual commitment to one person, getting interested in this person, and trying to form a durable attachment? Writing about this now, I don't want to cloak what had been a messy organic thought process in a more deliberate method than it actually wore. But it's not untrue to say that I spent

time believing the idea, asking myself, “How can this kind of volunteering benefit the people I’d like to help? Is there an important human truth somewhere in the notion?”

Reports of new scientific research on the emotional benefits of friendship were points of departure in my believing process. For example, Harvard scientists recently showed that “strong social ties could promote brain health as we age,” and a 10-year Australian study indicated that people with friends have a lower risk of mortality (Parker-Pope). Another point was the comment that psychosocial psychiatrist Dr. Mark Ragins made to *Los Angeles Times* columnist Steve Lopez about his having befriended a homeless classical musician suffering from schizophrenia. In Lopez’s book *The Soloist*, which tells the story of how he and Nathaniel Anthony Ayes developed a remarkable long-term friendship, Ragins observes, “It is possible to cause seemingly biochemical changes through human emotional involvement. You literally have changed his [Ayers’] chemistry by being his friend” (210). So my believing self asked,

Why wouldn’t the chemistry of friendship be a healthful addition to anti-psychotic meds prescribed to adjust the brain chemistry of, say, schizophrenia? Good companionship certainly sounds like a universal good. And wouldn’t the regular company of someone living a stable, connected life help stabilize individuals deprived of the sense of structure that comes with felt membership in the wider human community? Friends and neighbors sure strengthen my sense of personal balance and integrity. Nonprofits and public agencies (even if there were enough of them) by definition can’t offer the benefits provided by warm companionship. Who wants to be just a name on a case manager’s client list? We all want to be chosen.

The idea of choosing an individual who is socially isolated by mental illness or homelessness to chat with over weekly coffee (I started calling it Freestyle Volunteering) grew increasingly attractive.

Still, I needed the doubting game to make full sense of the idea. Like most Americans I learned early to fear people with mental illnesses even though, statistically speaking, they’re no more dangerous than people blessed with mental health. Psychiatric disorders make people unpredictable, and we’re wired to feel afraid and guarded around anyone who behaves erratically. I can detach from such feelings, maybe because someone in my family lives amid imaginary voices and delusions, but even so my encounters with others afflicted by these symptoms have included disconcerting moments. The doubting game helped me develop practical structures and limits for coffee meetings that allayed my worries about safety while easing anxieties that the needs of a “coffee companion” could come to feel overwhelming:

Each Freestyle meeting must be in a public place and last just one hour a week. Coffee companions should probably be diverted from sexual topics (“I feel uncomfortable. Let’s talk about something else.”)—pace the inspiring *Sun* writer quoted at the start of this essay, who operates within an organized

institution's walls. Freestyle Volunteers should avoid saddling themselves with ancillary responsibilities such as becoming experts on mental illness and homelessness or founts of information about available resources because their job isn't to solve someone's problems; it's just to listen and talk in a neighborly way over coffee. Volunteers should remember that they're not therapists. They should accept that they'll occasionally misinterpret gestures, blunder verbally, sit there stumped, or get rejected. Finally, they won't be able to "Say Yes" to everyone seeming in need of companionship.

Still, when I say Yes to one, I can hope somebody else is saying Yes to one I don't have time for. So I recruit volunteers through my blog (<http://freestylevolunteer.wordpress.com>) and at Seattle's affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). In conjunction with these believer efforts, healthy stints of doubting help me accept the possibility that Freestyle Volunteering may never become a movement. It may just be my life. ☺

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Believing, Doubting, Deciding, Acting

Clyde Moneyhun

As director of a composition program at a small regional university, I had the habit of piloting first-year writing curricula that addressed new problems we saw with existing courses, new needs we perceived among students, or new conditions in the program or at the school. For example, when we received five computer classrooms for our exclusive use and decided to schedule all our sections to spend half their days in the classrooms, I created a computer-based curriculum and taught it for several quarters before passing the syllabus on to the rest of the teaching staff. When we decided that special sections for prospective education majors weren't helping them produce better writing, I partnered with several local schools and created a curriculum of readings and writing assignments that required students to engage with the real problems faced by teachers and administrators in the area, then gave the syllabus to the teachers who took over the course.

When we wanted to find ways to encourage our students to do better critical reading and critical thinking, I considered and rejected many approaches before I reread several of Peter Elbow's classic pieces on the doubting and believing games. I decided that his theory gave our students what they needed to become not only better readers, thinkers, and writers, but also better participants in conversations that mattered both in and out of college—in short, better citizens. I set about creating a curriculum based on playing the believing and doubting games with difficult and problematic texts, as well as the additional games of “deciding” and “acting”; that is, the game of extending insights gained from reading texts into “real life” to help us make a decision, and the game of planning action based on those insights. Teaching the curriculum several times taught me the difficulty of changing my students ingrained ways of thinking within the doubting culture we inhabit.

As Elbow says in the earliest published iteration of his idea in 1973, “the doubting game has gained a monopoly on legitimacy in our culture” (“Appendix”). We are, generally in our public discourse and specifically in academic discourse, too quick to leap to critical judgments that may be poorly informed, poorly reasoned, poorly constructed—that are, basically, knee-jerk negativity. Such negativity invites not real argument in the intellectual sense, but mere contradicting, as in the old Monty Python comedy routine where a man goes to an “argument clinic” and pays to have an argument with a professional arguer. He is directed to a door down the hall, and the following conversation ensues:

MAN: Ah, Is this the right room for an argument?

ARGUER: I told you once.

Clyde Moneyhun is Director of the Hume Writing Center and Assistant Director of Stanford Introductory Studies at Stanford University. He has published research in journals including CCC, JAC, Rhetoric Review, and the Journal of Teaching Writing; has spoken widely at conferences including CCCC, MLA, RSA, WPA and NCTE; and has served on the executive boards of WPA and CCCC.

MAN: No you haven't.

ARGUER: Yes I have.

MAN: When?

ARGUER: Just now.

MAN: No you didn't.

ARGUER: Yes I did.

MAN: You didn't

ARGUER: I did!

MAN: You didn't! (150)

We might be tempted to think of this comedy routine when we hear what passes for debate on many television and radio talk shows. Particularly on partisan commentary programs, we may see spokespeople from opposing parties shouting slogans and talking points at each other and, far from listening to each other, actually talking over each other. This is fighting, but it isn't arguing, and it is a poor way to make responsible decisions that govern our actions in both public and private life.

How, then, can playing Elbow's believing and doubting games, supplemented by games that challenge students to make decisions and plan actions based on them, be turned into a curriculum for a writing course that teaches students to reason well?

My syllabus told students that, to read a complicated or difficult text aimed at an educated audience, they would first learn to understand what the author intends, see things the way the author sees them, before jumping to conclusions based on a superficial skimming of the text and a stock of preconceived opinions. This step is important particularly if the reader already disagrees with the author's message. Next, and only after that first step, the students would adopt a skeptical frame of mind, calling into question the author's main points in various ways, and this step is important particularly if the reader already agrees with the author's message.

To help get across these ideas, I asked the students to read excerpts from Elbow's later (1986) "Methodological Doubting and Believing." Elbow asserts there that "methodological doubt is only half of what we need" because "thinking is not trustworthy unless it also includes methodological belief: the equally systematic, disciplined, and conscious attempt to believe everything no matter how unlikely or repellent it might seem" (256). In short, as I emphasized to my students, "you may not reject a reading till you have succeeded in believing it" (257).

I went on to explain that we would not stop with the believing and doubting games. After first believing and then doubting, they would be asked to make their own decisions, consciously choosing what elements to accept, reject, qualify, and transform in the creation of their own point of view. We called this "the deciding game." Elbow acknowledges elsewhere, though he is "reticent" to suggest a specific method himself, that this step of "making up our minds—the act of genuine deciding," is the next logical step after the believing and doubting games—especially, of course, if we decide that "the other person is right and that we need to change our minds" ("Bringing the Rhetoric of Assent" 392). That decision would be a kind of ultimate test of the sincerity of the mental work that precedes it. While the doubting game can help us find flaws in the thinking of others, it is poor at "finding flaws in our own thinking" ("The Believing Game" 23). Only by

exercising both believing and doubting together can we actually change our minds and make a sound decision.

The ultimate purpose of all this mental work, I told the students, was to extend their thinking into the world they actually lived in, to teach themselves how to act and why they should act that way. This game I called “the acting game,” but the first class in which I used this curriculum started calling it “the living game,” and in subsequent classes I continued to use that phrase too. I wanted them to see the process of playing believing, doubting, and deciding games as more than an intellectual exercise, but rather as a way to help them choose a major, accept or reject a job offer, buy the right tires, or vote for a candidate and to perform such actions in the confidence that they had considered all sides without bias. Elbow might object to the closure implied in asking students to finally decide and act as the culmination of the open-ended believing and doubting games. I did emphasize that decisions reached and actions taken this way are always provisional, open to rethinking that takes us back to the beginning of the process and challenges all preconceived notions: What if I reconsider and believe my advisor’s advice about the major? What if I hesitate before I pull the lever and reject my candidate’s claim that I should vote with my political party at all times? As long as life endures, living is, after all, a game that never stops.

I gave the students a number of handouts to collect the four games into a single process. One handout described the process as “steps to reasoned inquiry” and provided action verbs to help them conceptualize each step; they could follow a process of accepting an idea wholeheartedly, then rejecting it no matter how attractive, then choosing what to believe (especially if it wasn’t simple acceptance or rejection), and finally applying their clarified belief to a situation requiring action (see Table 1).¹

Table 1: Steps to Reasoned Inquiry

Credulity	Skepticism	Reason	Action
Believe	Doubt	Decide	Extend
Accept	Reject	Choose	Apply
Summarize/paraphrase	State objections	Weigh ideas	Use ideas
Find strengths	Find weaknesses	Draw conclusions	Act
Understand	Criticize	Theorize	Practice
Tell “what it does”	Tell “what it fails to do”	Tell “what I think”	Tell “how it matters”

Another handout tried to give them methods to use, operations to perform, as they read texts and analyzed ideas. To believe an idea, for example, they could show how it confirmed their personal experience; to doubt it, they could show how it conflicted with their personal experience; to make a decision, they could

¹Peter has pointed out to me that the words I chose to characterize the believing and doubting games in Table 1’s handout, “credulity” and “skepticism,” were precisely the ones he’s used for “a naïve, unthoughtful, unreflective habit of mind” (Elbow, personal communication). I meant “credulity” to connote not mere gullibility but a certain openness, and I associated “skepticism” in my mind not with kneejerk cynicism but the philosophical method of systematic doubt in the pursuit of knowledge. At the same time, the words really are freighted with the baggage Peter sees in them, and I will think about substitutes for them when I revise the handout for a future class.

show how it clarified a broader question from their personal experience; to extend into life, they could show how the process led them to take action in some way (see Table 2).

Table 2: Ways of Reasoning

Ways of believing	Ways of doubting	Ways of deciding	Ways of acting
Idea can be made to fit into a coherent, broader system of ideas	Idea can't be made to fit into a coherent, broader system of ideas	Idea is useful to creating a system of ideas important to the reader	Idea can be made to fit into real-life contexts not considered by the author
Idea confirms reader's personal experiences	Idea conflicts with reader's personal experience	Idea clarifies reader's personal experiences	Idea tells reader how to act, treat others, live
Idea is supported by proof that is convincing to the reader	Idea is not supported by proof that is convincing to the reader	Idea changes, is refined, as reader provides new support	Idea is given new life by its use in the world

All these mental operations and habits were good, I told the students, not only for reading texts but also for writing them. To write a text aimed at a thoughtful and reasonable audience, they needed to envision readers also capable of playing the believing game and the doubting game. First, understanding how hard it is in our culture to play the believing game, they needed to give readers as much help as possible. That is, first they needed to provide readers with everything they needed to understand the writer's intentions, leaving nothing unstated that couldn't be guessed by an attentive reader, making ideas crystal clear, providing helpful supporting details, connecting it all to a main overall message. Second, they needed to anticipate their readers' skepticism, doubt, even mistrust. They needed to put themselves in their readers' shoes and address the ways in which a reader might not understand or accept the message. This step, sometimes conceived of as "meeting objections" in order to disarm an opponent, should be more than a persuasive ploy. Effective writers must, with complete sincerity, occupy the position of a reader who is right to disagree with them. On the deepest level, I asked my students to use the two additional games to envision their real purpose as a writer: not merely to persuade, but to invite readers to believe, to honor readers' doubts, and ultimately to help readers decide for themselves what they think and how to act in the world and why.

To enact a pedagogy based on the all these mental operations, I designed reading journal assignments that asked students to read in a series of steps, to play the believing, doubting, and deciding games one after the other several times in several different ways. First, all the students read the same three unrelated essays; then they all read a group of three essays that "spoke" to each other (literally, with authors referring to each other by name); then they formed small groups and chose another essay to read together. At each stage, I asked them to believe, doubt, and decide in separate journal entries. In a final paper, they drew on their journal work to extend their thinking into a real-life decision about how to proceed with a vital question requiring action.

For example, before reading Kit Yuen Quan's "The Girl Who Wouldn't Sing," I asked them to play the believing game on a question that caused many of them to have profound doubts—the possible usefulness of academic discourse:

Reading Journal #1: A lot of people hate academic discourse; they find it boring, confusing, and needlessly wordy. If this is your opinion, take a moment to consider why academic discourse is still being produced. If it is so difficult to read and write, what good is it? (And that's not a rhetorical question!) What would the people who want you to learn it say in its defense? What can it do that other kinds of language cannot?

After reading the essay, I asked them to continue the believing game by trying to see things the way Quan did with several questions like this:

Reading Journal #2: Quan lacks confidence in her ability to speak and write English, and she says she also has "limited Chinese." Both these conditions restrain or limit her life in various ways. What does she find herself unable to do? What does she learn to do about the situation? In what ways are her feelings and reactions true to you in any way?

After a second reading, I asked the students to doubt some of Quan's assertions:

Reading Journal #3: Look for statements that Quan makes that might not be true for all readers. Make a list of at least five of those statements and say why some readers might not believe or accept each one.

For a final journal entry, students had to make up their minds about one of Quan's main ideas by weighing their beliefs and doubts, then coming to a conclusion:

Reading Journal #4: Language is something that both separates Quan from her parents and connects her to them. For this and other reasons, many people experience a similar kind of separation from and connection to parents. Is such anxiety inevitable between children and parents? Why or why not?

When the class read a group of three related essays (Richard Rodriguez's "Aria," Victor Villanueva's "Whose Voice Is It Anyway?", and bell hooks' "Keeping Close to Home"), their journal entries again asked them to play, in succession, the believing, doubting, and deciding games:

Reading Journal #5: What does each writer have to say about the possibility of "keeping close to home"? What does each writer say about the problems people from minority backgrounds encounter when they enter the broader culture,

especially school? What does each writer offer as a solution, if anything?

Reading Journal #6: Two of the writers (Villanueva and hooks) criticize the other writer by name (Rodriguez). What are their criticisms? Can you disagree with Rodriguez in any other ways? How can you defend Rodriguez against the criticisms? How might he be right, and how might Villanueva and hooks be wrong?

Reading Journal #7: What is "assimilation" for each writer? What are its advantages and disadvantages? Is it possible, do you think, for minorities to assimilate in any of the ways defined by the writers? Is it desirable?

Journal assignments were similar when students formed groups of three and selected a reading to work on together, choosing from among essays such as June Jordan's "Nobody Mean More to Me than You," Emily Martin's "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles," Susan Sontag's "On AIDS," Deborah Tannen's "Men and Women Talking on the Job," and Patricia Williams's "Hate Radio."

At the end of the process, which took about half of our ten-week quarter, students had a vast store of thinking on which to draw for the essay assignment that occupied the second half of the quarter. First, students drafted a version that essentially summarized, in more detail and with more formality than the journal entries, their work on believing, doubting, and deciding about the issues presented by one essay or one set of essays. This set them up to make a final step common to professional essays with a similar logic: describe a course of action actually taken or recommend a course of action to be taken.

How did the students respond to this curriculum?

As might be anticipated by Elbow, they were better at doubting than believing. In general, when asked to "believe," they were able to answer what they construed as "reading comprehension" questions by citing bits and pieces from the text. Only in the rare "believing" reading journal was a reader's "doubting" guard dropped, an unfamiliar or distasteful point of view suddenly seen as valid, even for a moment. One student, a strong believer (she said) in the power of education to create a level playing field "if a student worked hard enough," was able to say about Quan's view of her school: "The teachers, probably knowing they were immigrants, did nothing extra to help them. The teacher never noticed when someone else filled in her spelling book and how she never raised her hand to sing. Nobody realizes the way immigrants are treated differently by their classmates in school, which ends up affecting them."

My students were much quicker to criticize, to doubt, and because doubting was stronger, almost more natural to them, than believing, it was poorly informed by the understanding that was supposed to be created by the believing exercises. It called for the most part on unquestioned opinions the students brought with them to the course: Quan was wrong to complain that the United States was a difficult place for immigrants, since it was the land of opportunity; hooks was wrong to resist assimilation since "keeping close to home" would also keep her

out of the mainstream; Martin was wrong to identify sexism in science because science was, after all, just facts, and facts don't lie. This same pattern applied to the reading journals that asked students to decide how they themselves felt about the central theme of a reading or group of readings; for the most part, they quoted bits and pieces they came into the class already believing and squared off against opinions they came in opposing. Here too, however, the rare reader was able to come to a thoughtful decision about an issue that may have surprised him even as he wrote it:

It is possible for minorities to assimilate, although they should not have to do it on the scale that Rodriguez did it. Minorities should keep their native culture and also learn to speak the mainstream language. As I have said before, it may take longer, but it will be worth it, because they will have the most important gift of all, their family. I'm not a minority, but I am a country boy, so I guess I can say that I am partially assimilated. By coming to college every day, I learn a little more each day about the world. As for feeling happy or unhappy about it, I really feel neutral about it. I don't know how I'll feel if I see I've changed a lot.

Students did much better when asked to define a course of action based on the thinking they'd done, by way of the reading journals, about a topic common to one or more of the readings. I think, however, that the setting in which they presented their ideas in final form probably had more to do with the quality of their ideas than the reading journal preparation. Possibly some stray lessons from the believing, doubting, and deciding games made their way into the process. More important, however, may have been the fact that they prepared short oral versions of their papers and delivered them at an in-class academic conference. I asked them to collaborate on descriptions of their panels, and from their discussions emerged thinking that acknowledged the several legitimate opinions that might be had about a topic—evidenced, in other words, the operations of believing, doubting, and deciding:

The panelists disagree with the guidelines for language set down by June Jordan in "Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan." However, we want the audience to realize how important it is to have a connection between home life and school life.

I'm guessing that these more reasoned, and reasonable, formulations of ideas resulted from the give and take of opinion involved in writing a short collaborative text representing the group.

As for the actions their final essays were supposed to describe or propose, most of the panelists were aware of the need to extend their presentations into life and to play what they continued to call "the living game." Many descriptions ended with specific calls to action: "We will describe how each of us has taken steps to reduce miscommunication between men and women and we will describe how our audience can do it too," "We will show how we unknowingly label epi-

demics like AIDS as plagues and we will show how people can let go of their ignorance,” and “We will ask how Black English can be considered a language, whether Ebonics should be taught, and why an audience of future teachers should make up their minds.”

These were small victories, but I learned two hard lessons from the mixed results of the curriculum in encouraging students to think in more complex, less knee-jerk critical ways.

First, I experienced first-hand, as Elbow might have predicted, the virulence and persistence of the doubting gestalt in our culture and in the habits of mind we encourage in our schools. It can be a habit of mind that fairly well defeats reason, in that it can function to prevent us from open-mindedly weighing the truth, value, and real-world implications of our beliefs. In Elbow’s words, “critical doubting tends to function as a way to help people fend off criticism of their own ideas or ways of seeing” (“Bringing the Rhetoric of Assent” 390). Most of my students made gestures toward believing, but, when invited to doubt, they mainly returned to the same reasons for rejecting ideas they had in the first place.

Second, I learned that my well-intentioned curriculum was probably not the best way to make inroads into the culture of doubt we live in. Possibly each step looked too much like tasks they had been given in previous writing classes, so that the believing game sounded like “summarize the writer’s argument” (as in “reading comprehension” exercises), and the doubting game looked like “take a stand on a controversial topic” (as in countless “persuasive essay” assignments that invited, even required, agonistic either/or reasoning). Possibly there were ways to play these games better, in ways that were more disarming and didn’t resemble the very habits of mind they were operating to short-circuit.

At the same time, I saw hope in their ability and willingness to complicate their thinking when confronted with real-world dilemmas, especially when they were asked to explore answers and solutions in a collaborative setting. In future versions of the course, I may experiment with texts drawn not from a college reader, but from the everyday flow of their lives. Rather than frontload issues I find compelling and difficult, I might collect ideas from them about important decisions and exigencies confronting them. And I wonder if I can find ways to introduce more collaboration at every stage. This is important if we conceive of our mental games not as acts of individual cognition but as essentially social acts. Though Elbow has been criticized (notably by James Berlin, 484-87) for lacking a sense of the social construction of knowledge, he asserts that the believing game in particular, if played as he envisions it, is intensively collaborative. Though playing the believing game can, ironically, lead to “disagreement and dissonant views” by making individual players doubt their cherished notions,

Nevertheless, I insist that the process by which the believing game works for this goal is highly communal rather than individualistic—and certainly more communal than the typical process in critical thinking. The believing game asks for maximum cooperation in order to achieve maximum differentiation. We can only play the believing game well if we do it collectively or cooperatively. (“Bringing the Rhetoric of Assent” 393)

Most of all, as I often am, I was awed by my students' patience and good will and grateful for their trust in my methods, though I wondered from time to time whether it was misplaced. I'm sometimes struck by the reflection that we get better work from our students than we actually deserve. Their openness, willingness, and generosity give me the will to believe rather than doubt and to continuing exploring ways to tap into the same capacity in them. ☐

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A Reflection on Habitual Belief and Habitual Doubt

Irene Papoulis

My friend Pat and I once discussed how we each behave in academic discussions, and the conversation has stayed with me ever since. Pat said, “I just don’t feel like I’ve connected with people unless I’ve disagreed with them, and argued!”

“Really?” I asked, marveling, “I can’t even imagine that! I feel more comfortable by far if I am agreeing with people!” It’s true; in spite of the fact that I like to see myself as an independent thinker, I have a habitual response in conversation to go along automatically with the other person’s views. If the person thought a book was good, I will sometimes say I liked it too, and actually feel that I liked it, even if, later, I think, “I actually had some real criticisms of that book; why didn’t I say so?” The answer is that I’m a habitual player of the believing game: shifting my own perspective in the name of someone else’s is my knee-jerk way of connecting.

And Pat is the opposite, a habitual doubter; she always brings up objections and counterpoints. Her insistence on arguing used to make me cringe sometimes when we were among colleagues. I would see that she could make people uncomfortable when she insisted on bringing up arguments that contradicted theirs, and inwardly I’d think, “can’t you just let it go, as I would, in the name of diplomacy?” I secretly felt that my own overly conciliatory people-skills were superior to Pat’s, because, I believed, they made social interactions smoother.

Hearing that Pat saw doubting as a way of connecting, though, caused a shift in my thinking about what constituted good people-skills. Her approach, I suddenly realized, was based on a willingness to grapple with the other person’s thoughts, and thus it might result in a deeper and more nuanced connection than the pseudo-compatibility I sometimes fostered by agreeing too much. Furthermore, to disagree with someone, as Pat did, meant that one had to honor one’s own thinking. My approach, I realized, required that I was always more than willing to dismiss my own ideas.

So Pat and I are mirror-opposites of each other when it comes to the believing and doubting games—she’s a habitual doubter, and I’m a habitual believer. That thought led me to reflect on other people I knew. Yes, some were clearly doubters, others definitely believers, still others more difficult to classify. We each tend to do both in varying degrees and in different contexts: I might be more of a believer in a professional setting, and more of a doubter at home. Another person could be the opposite. The stances are changeable depending on situations and personalities.

This fluid view of believing and doubting stances is perfectly in keeping

Irene Papoulis is Principal Lecturer in the Allan K. Smith Center for Writing and Rhetoric at Trinity College, Hartford, CT. She also currently serves as co-chair with Stan Scott, of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning.

with the way Peter Elbow conceived of the two habits of mind. His point has always been that they exist together in all of us: we can make use of each depending on what we want and need in particular circumstances; he never claimed that either of them was sufficient on its own. He takes a strong position—that the academic world tends to valorize doubting at the expense of believing and would do well to embrace believing more—but he never says that doubting should be abandoned; on the contrary, he takes pains to acknowledge that at times it can be invaluable.

That should seem quite clear to anyone reading Elbow, and yet some of the reaction to his work on the believing game has been to respond as though he is advocating that everyone throw doubt out the window and become doctrinaire believers, looking only for agreement. For example, Susan Jarratt in “Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict,” says, “Elbow encourages participants in the ‘believing game’ to give up the aggressive, combative, argumentative rigidity required for the ‘doubting game’” (110). But Jarratt’s doubting stance toward Elbow makes her look for disagreement, and she thereby deeply misreads Elbow. He never says that we should give up the rigidity of doubting for all time, just that we should do so while we are playing the believing game.

Habitual doubters miss out on connecting with people when the act of looking to reject beliefs other than their own makes their ideas, and sometimes their very being, sterile and unyielding. In the face of new ideas, they can get angry or disdainful and dedicate themselves to proving that those new ideas are wrong. They reject the possible vulnerability that using their “believing” muscle might cause although that is the muscle they could most benefit from exercising.

The antidote for them is more believing, which is Elbow’s point. If Jarratt had played the believing game with Elbow’s believing game, she would have understood that he was advocating “believing” not as an alternative to the traditional habits of academic argument, but as a complement, a stance that people could take in order to think more deeply and broadly about each other’s views. Much of the doubt in the academic world is aimed not at connection, or the pursuit of truth, but simply at winning. The habit of believing, in contrast, requires that we turn our attention away from triumphing over people who disagree and toward pursuing a fuller and more nuanced perspective by understanding positions other than our own.

In order to move out of the rigidity caused by doubting, then, doubters would paradoxically do well to do a little more doubting, but of their own ideas. Self-doubting could feel uncomfortable and strange to them, but questioning oneself is the route toward softening the rigid boundaries, and the lack of openness to other views, that habitual doubting fosters.

Habitual believers don’t have to worry about having too-rigid boundaries. We have a different problem. Sometimes, when I am playing the believing game to a fault, I have an almost physical sensation that the very boundaries of my body melt, and I take on an amoeba-form that oozes in any direction. I am the opposite of a habitual doubter who can’t get beyond his own idea: whatever I personally might have to say turns liquid and seeps or evaporates away from the edifice of whatever the other person is saying.

I see it happening in some of my students, too: they have a fledgling idea, but then someone contradicts it, and the idea gets stuffed away, surreptitiously, like an olive pit that escapes from one’s mouth at a cocktail party. One slips it

into one's hand, eyes darting around for a civilized, private way to dispose of it. Other people's ideas, for knee-jerk believers, can immediately overpower the tiny olive pits of our own. We say, as shy students do, "the conversation moved away from the thing I was going to say so I kept quiet; my idea was no longer relevant; it didn't matter," to explain away the fact that we have stifled our own views in the name of honoring others'.

I like to think I do that less these days, but believing used to be more of a habitual state for me. I was not aware of it as a "state"; it was just the way I most often approached the world, at least in social settings—I let other people's ideas lead the way. As I emerged from that state of unquestioned belief, though, I became resistant to the idea of the believing game. When I heard Elbow give a lecture on believing in a crowded ballroom at a recent meeting of the Conference for College Composition and Communication, for example, I noticed that I was listening with a sinking feeling, of "no, please don't make me do this more! I don't want to believe! I need doubt, only doubt can save me from this sea of boundlessness. I want clarity and doubt!"

I now see that that reaction is a function of the fact that being steeped far too deeply in believing makes us habitual believers lose sight of our own power and self-definition. Saying, all too often, "yes, you have a point. I see what you mean. Your point makes excellent sense. I hear what you're saying," has made our doubting muscle flaccid from under-use.

To counteract that, I have been working on believing less and on cultivating doubt. Lately, then, I sometimes pretend to be my friend Pat when I'm in a discussion, and I focus on plumbing myself to discover the ways in which I disagree with the person I'm talking to. That forces me to articulate my own positions more clearly and to refuse to rest in the relative ease and thoughtlessness of abandoning my own firmly held views in the name of getting along better with the other person.

So, if habitual doubters need to doubt themselves more in order to develop their "believer" side, habitual believers need to believe themselves more. The more believers turn the believing spotlight inward, just as habitual doubters can turn the doubting spotlight inward, the more we can access our own views. Doubting others, at its best, requires that a habitual believer refuses to brush her own ideas away like annoyances: she must strive to believe them. That can be difficult because it's not habitual, but in a way it is such a relief. Believing my own ideas wakes me up; it means I have to sit up and take myself seriously, not just lie at the feet of others, patiently honoring their ideas. So doubting is exciting and energizing. It seems to give clear boundaries to my body, to create barriers that sternly work to contain any tendency I might have to merge, liquid-like, into other points of view. Those barriers temporarily shut off my empathy with other people or viewpoints, thereby forcing me to focus in on my own sense of what I think is right or true. This feels unfamiliar and a bit strange or wrong; I have to work to resist the impulse to tear down the barriers so I can focus on the other, not myself.

In spite of how exhilarating it can be to play the doubting game, then, it's quite difficult for me, partly because I like my own ability to believe, to shift away from my own perspective. I think it's a good thing not to be "selfish," and playing the believing game means resisting one's selfishness. However, criticizing myself for potentially being selfish can prevent me from getting the benefits

I need from doubt. I need to keep in mind instead that too much believing will keep me away from my own best ideas.

After all, without doubt I wouldn't be able to write anything, including this essay. Overbelievers often have writer's block because we continually imagine other perspectives than our own and we try to incorporate them into our own thinking. Without access to doubt we could rewrite forever because our work would never conform perfectly to what others want and expect. So ultimately I have to turn away from my imagined sense of a reader's needs in order to doubt and to assert my own position.

Paradoxically, my turning away from my readers' needs can be my way of connecting with them more deeply. Doubt is complex. It can say, "you are wrong. I reject what you're saying, and I don't care what you want to say in response." But it can also say, "I want you to be changed by what I have to say; I insist that you listen to my perspective and consider it deeply as part of your thinking." So in a sense a habitual believer will best be able to care about someone if she doubts that person because doubting leads to herself, which leads her to be able to connect with that person as an equal and not as a handmaiden.

The doubting game at its best is motivated not so much by a desire to demolish, but by a loving desire to look closely at the other's argument and respond to it. We all want to be responded to in detail, and doubting is certainly capable of that as much as believing is. In fact, sometimes the connections that doubt brings are deeper than those brought by belief because, as people argue and struggle together, they can arrive at a mutually held truth while people who are overly generous with each other might avoid examining any underlying conflicts that insidiously keep them, or their perspectives, apart.

Doubt is powerfully effective for people like me who have spent our lives believing to a fault. We can imagine a more grounded and self-aware form of doubt, one that insists that the only way to be effective in any conflict is to respect one's own ideas as well as one's opponent's, one that, in fact, requires that, while we practice the doubting game, we keep "belief" tucked away somewhere close so that we can access it as needed.

What I am advocating here then is something that Elbow has always spoken of in his discussions of the believing game: the importance of cultivating both habits of mind. For people like my friend Pat, believing others' perspectives can be an exotic and intriguing new way to connect, and for people like me the act of doubting others' views can help me break through my fear of asserting my own perspective.

In either case, getting outside of the habit that we are most comfortable with can make us see that believing and doubting could have the same ultimate goals. While they seem so different, they both, at their best, aim for connection and the growth of our thinking as a result of interactions with others. They each need the other to be whole because at the extreme of one is a boundless amoeba and at the extreme of the other is an iron wall.

So the way to benefit most from believing and doubting is to balance them. Habitual doubters need to believe more, and habitual believers need to doubt more. The best way to do that, paradoxically, can be to turn one's habitual practice on oneself: habitual doubters need to doubt themselves; habitual believers need to believe themselves. Self-doubt pushes a habitual doubter out of the rigid trenches dug by unwavering positions, and self-belief allows a habitual believer to be more grounded in her or his own views.

When believing and doubting are both present, and when people can move back and forth freely between them, true communion among people, buttressed by clearer thinking, is more possible because we are more able really to listen to perspectives outside our own. ☺

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Friday Writes: An Exercise in the Believing Game

Stephanie Paterson

Think of how often in your pressured, overscheduled life you are cut off from your own imagination and can't even hear yourself think, let alone sense the significance of what you're thinking.
(Linda Trichter Metcalf and Tobin Simon xxii)

I

This past semester I tried something new in all of my undergraduate writing classes and called the practice “Friday Writes.”

Thomas Newkirk has described the time the Scots call the “gloaming” hour in his Introduction to *What To Expect When You're Expected To Teach*. There are dark days, days he comes into the classroom and feels “as if there is a great weight” he must move, and he is not always sure he can do it (3). For me this symbolic twilight, this heavy, slow, deadweight time occurs most prominently on Fridays—all day on Fridays. It's as if all the life energy has drained out of my students; I can see the writing on their slumped bodies and downcast heads. They are tired and they want out and they've only just arrived. Since historically this has almost always been the case, and since I was scheduled to teach three Monday, Wednesday, and Friday classes, I was looking for something new and exciting and, most important, something different from the status quo.

The idea for the classroom ritual of Friday Writes came from reading *Writing the Mind Alive: The Proprioceptive Method For Finding Your Authentic Voice* by Linda Trichter Metcalf and Tobin Simon. The book was given to me as a gift and had been sitting on my shelf for the past six years until this past July when the gift-giver gently reminded me that I might want to try this practice. I have re-read the book now several times with a highlighter in hand, so there are several streams of highlighter tracks in the book. The re-reading (as is so often the case) is so much richer that I have to hold back from marking the whole book.

I have been doing this writing practice in earnest now for the past eight months. The book begins with a foreword from Christiane Northrup, M.D., who writes, “The essence of health is trusting yourself, your thoughts, and your feelings. Self-trust is the ability to know the truth about what you think and feel in your very bones—and then to use this information to guide your life” (xv). I have been too adept at playing what Peter Elbow calls “the doubting game” for much of my life. I tend to doubt everything first. I doubt I have anything worthwhile to

Stephanie Paterson is Associate Professor of English at California State University, Stanislaus. She teaches composition, creative nonfiction, and graduate seminars in Rhetoric and the Teaching of Writing (RTW). She also co-directs the Great Valley Writing Project and leads teacher research inquiry groups. Her website: <http://www.csustan.edu/English/Paterson/>.

say, I doubt my preparation, I doubt my ability, I doubt gut instincts, I doubt what I think and feel. I have found that the doubting game, played well, can be annihilating. Peggy McIntosh maps this emotion in a wider cultural frame in a series of Stone Center (Wellesley) talks entitled, "Feeling Like a Fraud," Parts I, II, and III. McIntosh argues that, in some cases, a woman's sense of being a fraud may be an indication of her rejection of the traditional competitive and hierarchical power structure. In the first paper she writes, "The more hierarchical the activity or institution, and the higher up we go in it, the greater our feelings of fraudulence are likely to be" (4).

As if it wasn't enough to skewer myself with the stick of self-doubt, I've even been in trouble with the believing game, as Irene Papoulis describes (see this issue), being too quick to believe others as a way of connecting so that I can run into the equal danger of losing myself in this way, too. I do agree with Peter Elbow that "we need to build a richer culture of rationality—richer than mere doubting or critical thinking . . . so that people will feel that they are not thinking carefully unless they try to believe ideas they don't want to believe" ("The Believing Game" 5). In this way I approached the Friday Writes as a series of trial-and-error experiments (Moffett).

Pain has been a great motivator in my life, so it is not surprising, in retrospect, that before I began this daily writing I was plagued with stress and work-related health issues. Pain, coupled with the hunger for a kind of interior freedom, made the promise of "writing the mind alive" attractive and led me to make a date with myself to write for twenty-five minutes at a time, a day at a time. The goal was not to think too far ahead and to simply commit to doing one Proprioceptive Write each day. While I have a terrible time following rules, miraculously, by playing the believing game I was able to follow the directions for writing proprioceptively.

Grasping the meaning of the key term "proprioceptive" was the first high hurdle. Metcalf and Simon anticipate resistance and sub-title the section in the book in which they explain the concept of proprioception "Why Such a Funny Name?". In a sense proprioception is embodied knowing. They trace the term back to Nobel Laureate and pioneering neurophysicist Sir Charles Scott Sherrington who identified the system over a hundred years ago. They explain that biologically we have "actual nerves, called proprioceptors, located in the muscles, joints, and tendons [that] communicate back and forth with the brain, orienting the body to its own movement, position, and tone" (10). It is proprioceptive sense that enables us to "grasp a flower or a glass of water without crushing it or dropping it" (10). "Through proprioception we are able to synthesize emotion and imagination" and for this reason "the proprioceptive system may be viewed as the interface of body and mind, as well as the source of emotional expression," so that when we write in this way we respond bodily and mentally. Metcalf and Simon use the term metaphorically to describe a kind of writing that unifies the mind/body split (12).

They also acknowledge David Bohm's theory of proprioception of thought in his book, *On Dialogue*. Bohm was "a protégé of Einstein and an important twentieth-century physicist, [and he] was concerned with how thought, feeling, and memory—in other words, consciousness—shape our reality. He believed that 'the proprioception of thought,' could change consciousness if we listen to ourselves and others openly" (Metcalf and Simon 12).

In the actual Proprioceptive Method there are three simple rules:

1. Write What You Hear
2. Listen to What You Write
3. Be Ready To Ask The Proprioceptive Question: “What do I mean by_____?”.

I clear a space on a large wooden table in my office. I purchase some white tapered candles and play a Bach disc. This music is suggested because it “roughly reflects the steady rhythm of the human pulse” (xxi). I get in the habit of dating each Proprioceptive Write (PW). I write on blank sheets of 8½ x 11-sized paper, as recommended. Unlined paper is symbolic. Metcalf and Simon explain:

using plain, unlined paper for your Write is a gesture of freedom. With it you are departing from the schoolroom that straight lines suggest and becoming *the author of a more complex, perhaps messier, but inherently richer script whose movement and direction is entirely your own.* (31, emphasis added)

I let my words spill on to additional white pages; after dating them, I include page numbers and add them to a binder. The practice which includes lighting a candle, listening to my self, listening to Bach, and circling back to ask the important proprioceptive question has grounded me. I start to notice more of a balance between the believing and doubting games. I learn to listen as I write. I start to feel like a Writer who is writing. I start to breathe differently. I start to trust myself more. As the summer unfolds, I start dreaming and imagining what it might look like to bring this practice into the classroom in a university setting, and I am stopped dead in my tracks.

The first concern is that students will feel uncomfortable. “You can’t do this in the college classroom,” I hear. Then I hear the internalized voice of self-defense and self-preservation, the proprietary, “keeping up appearances” voice, worried about what colleagues, administrators, and parents will say. This voice is capable of endless berating, experienced as self-battery: “but this isn’t academic writing . . . our job is to prepare students to write academically.” Doubt. Doubt. Doubt.

I continue to write. The writing strengthens me. At the end of each PW, to bring the writing ritual to a formal close, I blow out the candle, turn off the music, and write in response to what Metcalf and Simon refer to as the “Four Concluding Questions.” They are as follows:

- 1) What thoughts were heard but not written yet?
- 2) How or what do I feel now?
- 3) What larger story is this Write part of?
- 4) What ideas came up for future Writes?

I take time in the silence to respond fully to these important concluding questions. “The shape of the believing game is waiting, patience, not being in a hurry,” as Elbow says (*Writing Without Teachers* 177). In answering the four concluding questions, Metcalf and Simon say, “this is often where revelations occur in the

session" (39). Consequently, they explain, "don't hurry through them or cut short your answers. Remember the joke about the airplane pilot who contacted the control tower. 'I'm lost,' he reported, 'but I'm making good time'" (39). In this context, following the rules pays off. In the patient waiting and listening all sorts of intricate connections slowly start to reveal themselves. I expose assumptions and expectations. I start to see small, isolated events in my life against a backdrop of cultural stories I've inherited, some shaping me in ways I don't care to be shaped. I start to give myself assignments: "look into this," or "read that," or "write more about ____." These self-assignments are part of a much larger curriculum I can't see or conceptualize, only intuit. I start to trust inklings and to follow leads as they emerge in the writing. I have months and months of "larger stories" to return to, and months and months of rooting myself in my emotional responses, and rich plans for future PWs.

All through the summer days, I continue to light the candle. I hit "play" on the CD player, and I am swept along by the tempo of the Baroque music. I write with a listening ear and day-by-day I gather pages until the fall term begins, and I have a small binder full of writing to show my students.

II

The goal of any curriculum is to focus attention and effort on what is essential; it is to honor the principle of economy, to resist the attractions of comprehensiveness.

(Newkirk, Holding On 132)

In the elaborate process of curriculum planning and of dreaming up the new semester, I realize I want my students to experience some of the joy and surprise and rewards of this writing. I make the decision to include this approach to writing alongside genre-based approaches to writing. I feel like I'm smuggling in something subversive. The truth is, I am. I have to play the believing game to make these Friday Writes work, and I do.

On the first day of introducing Friday Writes, I come with a ream of white paper, the Baroque music, and a candle. I explain a little of the theory behind the practice which I culled from *Writing the Mind Alive*. Then I project the three rules on an overhead using a transparency. Pressing this ancient artifact into service is intentional; I am playing school. I imagine the familiar beam of the overhead as somehow comforting to my students in its familiarity. I tell my students quite simply, "this is going to feel weird." I look up and see some smiles and smirks. There is an air of suspense. There is also nervous electricity in the air because this is something unexpected. There is no script for what we are about to do together. "Since you probably haven't done writing like this before, it will help to be patient. Give this some time. Most likely it will feel strange the first few times, but then I think you will find some comfort and some surprising rewards in this writing." For the rationale for this weekly writing ritual, I quote my good friend, who says, "if you value something, you give it time." "I have carved out time in our curriculum for Friday Writes every Friday of the term. So let's begin."

In one class we are able to form a large circle, and in two other classes we write in rows. I cut out a quadrant of florescent lights, so we're not all under the

probing spotlight. For twenty-five minutes, all we hear is the music, we sense the glow of the candle, and we experience a silence that I have very rarely heard in school. It all feels taboo, and there is pleasure in this edgy feeling. We all write. The only way that I overtly and consciously deviate from the practice is that I explain that I will never ask to read their writes, nor will I ask them to read aloud. I say “this writing will be private to you, and at the end of the term you will do a guided Friday Write. This will require going back through and re-reading what you have written, observing and taking some notes.”

III

You can't learn anything new if you're tied up in knots about how you're performing.
(Metcalf and Simon 44)

My self-study of the process brings me to this story. In a section entitled, “Perfection” in *Art & Fear: Observations On the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*, David Bayles and Ted Orland write:

The ceramics teacher announced on opening day that he was dividing the class into two groups. All those on the left side of the studio, he said, would be graded solely on the *quantity* of work they produced, all those on the right solely on its *quality*. His procedure was simple: on the final day of class he would bring in his bathroom scales and weigh the works of the “quantity” group: fifty pounds of pots rated an “A,” forty pounds a “B,” and so on. Those being graded on “quality,” however, need to produce only one pot—albeit a perfect one—to get an “A.” Well, came grading time and a curious fact emerged: the works of highest quality were all produced by the group being graded for quantity. It seems that while the “quantity” group was busily churning out piles of work—and learning from their mistakes—the “quality” group had sat theorizing about perfection, and in the end had little more to show for their efforts than grandiose theories and a pile of dead clay.
(29, original emphasis)

The moral of the story: “If you think good work is somehow synonymous with perfect work, you are headed for big trouble” (29). Frankly, I have been personally and professionally headed for big trouble for a long time now, spending too much time theorizing, tied up in knots. This pleasurable writing ritual has renewed a sense of hope and excitement in the practice of writing to learn, to discover, to remember, to befriend process, and to re-learn what I have forgotten from neglect.

IV

What you want to discover in Proprioceptive Writing is how you experience your life. . . . You want to stop reacting and start reflecting. . . . You want to use your own thought-flow and the feelings it carries in its stream to gain self-knowledge.
(Metcalf and Simon 44)

In order to make the Friday Writes work, I explicitly introduce students to both Elbow's concept of the believing and doubting games and Blau's seven traits of performative literacy. For me, Sheridan Blau's traits of performative literacy serve as part of the methodology required for playing the believing game. In other words, I have found that to "play" the believing game better, we all need to practice:

- * a capacity for sustained, focused attention
- * a willingness to suspend closure
- * a willingness to take risks
- * a tolerance for failure
- * a tolerance for ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty
- * intellectual generosity
- * metacognitive awareness. (211)

When the instinct is to clench or resist or quit, we can use the traits to become inquisitive and open, asking questions (tolerance for ambiguity, paradox, uncertainty), observing (suspending closure), and showing some compassion for ourselves in the throes of trying something new (intellectual generosity), etc.

I agree with Elbow that "the believing game is alive in our midst—but not well" ("The Believing Game" 10). We tend to privilege the doubting game in the academy and give short shrift to the believing game. We also tend to privilege textual and intertextual literacy and don't always foreground the traits of performative literacy which constitute the groundwork for most real learning to occur.

It occurs to me now that our Friday Writes may more closely resemble what Donna Strickland calls "the trying game" (see this issue). She explains, "the trying game asks readers and writers to suspend the stance taking long enough to notice the flux, the moment-to-moment changes as the body reacts." To tolerate "flux," we returned to the traits of performative literacy—the "willingness to suspend closure," and so forth. I think with the risky experiment of Friday Writes, without these habits of mind, we'd all be dead in the water.

V

When our teaching is determined by an unthinking subscription to professional norms, or an uncritical mimicking of the behaviors of teachers we encountered in our own lives, our chances of helping our students learn are severely reduced."
(Brookfield 25)

At the end the semester, I asked for anonymous feedback to learn how the activity was perceived and received. Students told me what they liked and identified a few things they learned from the weekly writing ritual. Fifty individuals responded to these prompts, and the feedback was surprisingly positive. I'll quote just a few of my undergraduate students in their own words:

- * The first thing I learned was that all of my thoughts are connected (well I re-learned this) and by writing about them I could make the connections and even deal with some problems I had been struggling with. The second thing Friday Writes gave to me was to remind me that I can express my

thoughts clearly and that helped me [to talk] with others and third, I remembered why I loved to write.

- * Yes, in a way [Friday Writes] made me a lot more aware [of] my thinking habits and how much I stress [about] things.
- * I learned how to stop and take a look at what I've written and ask myself the proprioceptive question.

They describe increased fluency, which they referred to as “flow,” increased self-trust, and increased interest in the practice and process of writing. Many noticed that “there is a larger story that builds up in the writing” after weeks and weeks of doing this practice. They noticed thematic patterns in the writing. They said that our Friday Writes helped them to be more open with their own ideas and emotions. In essence, they grew in self-trust. In addition, I have found, as Jacob Needleman eloquently articulates,

words, properly received; ideas, thoughtfully pondered; stories and images heard and attended to with an open heart, can help us feel the relationship between the question of our being and the problem of our life in time, after which ideas can find their proper place in our minds. (20)

Finally, the Friday Writes gave us respite from *chronos* time (the linear school clock) and allowed us to enter into *kairos* or sacred time. For twenty-five minutes each Friday, I protected this time and space for Friday Writes to happen and for me personally, there was a timeless quality to these Writes.

VI

This trait of insatiable curiosity is one I've encountered in talented people in every field of creativity. . . . The willingness to learn, to be curious, and always to be humble enough to seek out teachers is apparent in everyone who grows in their work.
(Cousineau 84)

I am reminded, as Elbow says, “that there will be perhaps more skeptical readers than usual whose teeth are set on edge by my mere mention of candles in the classroom.” Sometimes I am that reader. Just recently I attended a Writing Center Conference with a focus on incorporating play and embodiment in Writing Center work. The keynote speakers asked us all to shed our shoes before entering the gymnasium. “You want me to what?” I thought, sliding off my shoes with reservations. As we all entered the gym, I thought the discomfort in the room was palpable. Some in skirts and suits sat in folded metal chairs placed around the perimeter and looked down at those of us on the floor. Reflecting upon this, I am struck with how sometimes simple, ordinary, even mundane acts brought into new contexts can be counter-cultural. Ruth Danon, the keynote speaker, explained that she wanted to break the frame of the classroom as a way of returning to a childhood frame. She wanted us to consider how we might find a sense of play in writing. She noted that feeling uncomfortable was not necessarily a bad thing. I would add (having been reading Pema Chodron) that when we are uncomfortable we tend to start paying a different, more alert kind of attention.

VII

According to Peggy Noonan, Joseph Langford in *Mother Teresa's Secret Fire* described Mother Teresa as "a mystic with sleeves rolled up" (qtd. in Noonan), not, in Noonan's words, "as a female Albert Schweitzer." Noonan recounts Langford's story of the things heard and learned from Mother Teresa, especially the truth that "You must find your own Calcutta. You don't have to go to India. Calcutta is all around you" (qtd. in Noonan).

I teach at a California State University in the Central Valley of California, and I have the privilege of working with an incredibly diverse student body. It occurs to me every term that my students' particular experiences are historically underrepresented. They are the children of migrant farm workers, they are Hmong and Middle-Eastern refugees, they are predominantly second-language speakers, or Generation 1.5, who speak a primary language in home and English in the schools. They are often the first in their families to attend college. My students come from around the world—from India, Iran, Iraq, Thailand, Vietnam, Mexico, and South America to list only a few of the places. CSU Stanislaus is an Hispanic-serving institution. I offer this demographic snapshot not to compare myself to Mother Teresa but to argue that the university is my Calcutta.

The experience of being the first in a family to attend college can be more than scary; it can be downright alienating, as I have described in earlier writing (Paterson). Every semester I expect a certain amount of crisis and chaos because my students bring complex lives to the classroom; they balance work and school, and some are the primary caretakers of siblings. This past semester one student's brother was killed in a gang-related shooting. One student confessed that she couldn't come to class because of PTSD-related symptoms, suffered from an unreported rape that occurred at 2 a.m. on our campus. One student has returned to school after a long illness with a debilitating autoimmune disease. One Friday I come into class, and Harry, from the Bay area, asks, "Are we gonna do a Friday Write?" He says they set his mind at ease.

I'm sure those who crafted our University's Mission Statement didn't have "Friday Writes" in mind as an example of a strategy "that attract[s] and hold[s] student attention," but I can say that for almost every Friday of the term, for three different classes spread across the day for twenty-five minutes (with the exception of the Baroque music), you could almost hear a pin drop. There was a different sort of energy, an intellectual and emotional fuel fired by a writing in school unlike any other kind of writing in school. It was writing in school, but not of school, somehow.

I was pleased with my frightening experiment. Inspired by Georgia Heard, I ask my students to write down two things they will take with them from the semester and one thing they hope to leave behind. Perhaps the most rewarding piece of feedback I received came on the last day of the semester, when a student told me that my Friday Writes portion of the curriculum had become her extracurriculum (Gere). She said that she tried a Friday Write with her parents who were curious about this weekly writing ritual taking place in my class. They each took turns reading their Writes to each other and listening. My student explained that the one thing she will take with her is the goal to do Friday Writes once a month with her parents as a way of checking in with each other and connecting as a family.

For me personally, I have gone out on a limb to experiment with Proprioceptive Writing in the college classroom. And then further out on a limb to write this essay. In my home I have a lot of bookshelves, and every so often I have a title that I'm not sure I want to share with guests, so I flip the book on the shelf so the spine faces inward and the title remains private. These backward books blend right in. At first, I thought I might house this essay similarly. However, one of my favorite lines in *Writing Without Teachers* occurs in the Appendix, when Elbow explains that we play the believing game to get to better truths. I suspect this is true in my students' Friday Writes. Gratefully, it's true for me in my professional teaching life. Why would I want to hide this?¹ ☐

¹I would like to thank Dr. Linda Metcalf for taking the time to read a draft of this essay.

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Before Belief: Embodiment and the “Trying Game”

Donna Strickland

Last semester I taught a class I called “Mindful Writing.” Together, the students and I practiced simple breath-awareness meditation and read, quite slowly and deliberately, much of Robert Boice’s *How Writers Journey to Comfort and Fluency: A Psychological Adventure*. Boice, a psychologist, advocates the use of brief, daily writing sessions of 15-60 minutes each and frequent “comfort breaks” to notice and release any tension that arises while writing. As the title of his book suggests, his concern is with the psychology of writing, the ways in which emotional states, habitual patterns, and negative beliefs tend to get in the way of consistent, productive writing. In our class, we used mindful breath awareness, as well as other contemplative practices, as a way to practice comfort in writing and to notice those mind states that interfere with comfort and fluency.

Teaching this class was, without a doubt, a highlight of my more than twenty years as a writing instructor. Having practiced yoga even longer than I’ve taught writing, I’ve sensed that paying attention to the breath and coming into the body would be a helpful support to the process of learning and teaching writing. As teachers, and as writers, too, we’ve surely seen how psychologically loaded writing can be. We bring to any writing experience so much baggage, including our own sense of ourselves as writers, things we’ve been told by teachers, and the expectations of the writing situation itself. Bringing a little bodily centering to the process has always seemed like a good idea to me. But it wasn’t until I read Boice’s book that I felt “authorized” to bring mindful practices so overtly into the classroom. And doing so was tremendously rewarding: many students reported a new confidence in their ability to meet the challenges of assigned writing for other classes, a desire to write more often for pleasure rather than using self-sponsored writing only as a means of venting, and a more relaxed pace in their approach to writing. The effects, for many students, spilled over into the rest of their lives so that they became more aware of the effects of stress on their bodies and felt motivated to better care for themselves, to get more sleep, not to push themselves so hard.

Given the significant benefits students were reporting, I was surprised that a number of students expressed reluctance to try out Boice’s suggestions for making the writing process more comfortable. When Boice offered evidence against the idea that writers must wait for inspiration and advised instead that writing a little every day was the most effective way to cultivate inspiration and creativity, for example, some students countered that this wasn’t true, or that, if it were true, it was impractical, given the busy lives of students. In addition to this doubting game they played with the text, students indicted the reading as repetitive and overwhelming, even though we were reading only six to ten pages at a time.

Donna Strickland teaches writing and rhetoric at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She has published articles in a variety of journals and collections, and, with Jeanne Gunner, has edited The Writing Program Interrupted: Making Space for Critical Discourse (Boynton/Cook, 2009).

These responses to Boice's book surprised me for at least two reasons. So many students were reporting benefits from the practice of bringing mindfulness to their writing that I found it difficult to understand why they would simultaneously argue with the messenger of these practices.¹ Another cause for my surprise, however, was the fact that I had asked the members of the class, in their blog-based responses to the reading, to report on their learning, to report on their experiences with trying out any of Boice's strategies. I hadn't asked (though I also hadn't actively suppressed) whether they agreed or disagreed with Boice.

The tendency to express agreement or disagreement, even when asked to do something else, speaks quite persuasively to the dominance of the doubting game, a problematic dominance that Peter Elbow has pointed to many times over the past thirty-five years. Learning or engaging with texts, under the dominance of this game, comes to mean taking a critical stance. And while, as Elbow has always made clear, this kind of adversarial learning can be valuable and shouldn't be discarded, it is also only one kind of learning.

It occurred to me, each time that I read another blog posting that expressed skepticism toward Boice, that I might talk to the group about the believing game. I thought I might ask them to do their best to refrain from arguing with the text, to try believing it, affirming it, instead. And yet I never did bring up the believing game. It didn't feel quite right for the situation. I didn't care so much whether they believed Boice, after all—I wanted them simply to try out his exercises, to see for themselves whether and how his "rules" for comfortable and fluent writing might work for them.

Since we were meditating in the class and since meditation is also a part of Buddhist practice, I couldn't help but think of the Buddha's words to anyone who came to him seeking "the truth." Don't take my word for it, the Buddha would always insist; try it out for yourself. A group of people known as the Kalamas, for example, asked the Buddha for guidance in making sense of the believing and doubting games played by traveling teachers:

They expound and glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, revile them, show contempt for them, and disparage them. They leave us absolutely uncertain and in doubt: Which of these venerable priests and contemplatives are speaking the truth, and which ones are lying? (Kalama)

The Kalamas had heard a number of cognitive stances on the nature of truth, and they were left confused by the varieties. The Buddha, rather than offering another stance, advised them to test out the doctrines, to examine their effects:

Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, "This contemplative is our teacher." When you know for

¹Although Boice doesn't label his approach a mindful one, the practices he advises, such as pausing to notice tension and paying attention to the breath to produce calm, are quite in keeping with such as programs as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction; see Kabat-Zinn for more on this particular approach.

yourselves that, “These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to welfare and to happiness”—then you should enter and remain in them.
(Kalama)

The Buddha advised coming to know through testing and experiencing, coming to “know for yourselves” what it is that, “when adopted and carried out,” leads to positive outcomes.

As it happens, one student very consistently tried out—that is, tested and experienced—Boice’s suggestions, as well as my own. I asked the class, for example, to sense what “unpleasant” feels like in the body. I wanted them to be able to feel when tension or aversion was coming up around writing. Not surprisingly, given the unfamiliar nature of this assignment, most students had trouble feeling, much less describing, the bodily sensations associated with the unpleasant. But not M. In his blog posting for that day of class, he described a heavy feeling in his chest. Another time, he tried out Boice’s advice on “preparing useful outlines” (64-72). Boice acknowledges that most people have experienced outlines as “mechanical listings that were unpleasant to assemble and unlikely to find much willing use” (64). His suggestion is that writers try conceptual outlines that describe how one point is connected to the next, as a way of arranging ideas that have been developed through reading and freewriting (65). Setting aside his own negative experiences with outlines, M. ended the class quite devoted to Boice’s method, writing in his final reflection for the class that doing outlines had significantly changed his writing for the better, helping him to better organize his thoughts.

When I expressed my appreciation to him for so consistently taking on the challenges of the class, M. explained to me that he approached it like learning strategies in a sport. When as a youngster he was learning to throw a baseball, he said he had to go against his natural inclinations in throwing, which would lead him to throw the ball with limited force. He had to learn to move his arm in ways that felt unnatural and awkward at first. But he stuck with it, practiced, and eventually learned to throw a baseball effectively, with power, according to the conventions of the game of baseball. He was approaching Boice’s recommendations in the same way: he knew that he needed to practice them in order to observe their effects and get any use out of them.

M.’s analogy of learning to throw a baseball immediately helped me to understand why I was inclining away from the believing game, or at least away from the language of belief. Belief wasn’t the issue here. Experience—embodied experience—was. What I wish to explore, then, is the possibility that embodied experience is prior to belief, that experience is non-cognitive, while belief is cognitive. I began to think of what I was asking of students as not so much the “believing” as the “trying” game. This essay is my effort to consider the difference this distinction might make.

The Believing Game

First, I want to make clear that I do understand Elbow’s believing game to be very much about experiencing and trying out ideas. In his recent *JAEPL* essay,

he asserts that "the doubting game is the rhetoric of *propositions* while the believing game is the rhetoric of experience" ("The Believing Game" 8, original emphasis). He emphasizes the importance of "understanding through doing and inhabiting not debating" (8). Just as I wanted the students in my class to do rather than debate, so does Elbow's believing game asks this of all of us.

Writing Without Teachers, moreover, the book in which Elbow first articulated his epistemology of the believing game, is, above all, a book about experiences. Elbow privileges experience in dedicating the book "to those people who actually use it—not just read it." In other words, he hopes readers will approach his book in the very same way that I hoped students in my class would approach Boice: I wanted them to use Boice's book, not to simply read it and take some sort of stance, one that might ultimately defer writing experiences.

I could certainly offer even more examples of how prominent a role experience plays in Elbow's believing game. Given the emphasis that Elbow places on experience, then, it would seem that my experiential "trying game" is very much the same as the believing game. And yet I don't consider my request that students try out some of Boice's suggestions to be the same as a wish that they would, at least temporarily, believe Boice. While it might seem that I am splitting semantic hairs here, I want to make clear that the distinction is in more than word choice. Believing, just like doubting, is a cognitive stance. Experiencing, on the other hand, is, at least at the beginning, non-cognitive. We experience all things first of all with the body, even if that experience is a gut-level reaction to a text. It can be difficult to see the separation between our bodily experience of and our cognitive stance on that experience, but I would suggest that noticing that separation offers a powerful opening for learning.

Before pursuing this distinction a bit further, I want to end this reflection on Elbow's believing game by noting, then, that I find two different kinds of learning—the cognitive game of believing and the bodily, experiential game that I'm, for now, calling "trying"—in what Elbow has tended to describe as one. When Elbow construes the believing game as "searching out competing ideas and seeking strengths in them—instead of looking directly for weaknesses in what is to be tested," then I understand him to be describing a cognitive process, one that isn't quite the same as direct, bodily experience (*Writing* xxiv). Certainly, "seeking strengths" is a kind of experience, but it is a cognitive one. To actually experience competing ideas, we might try them out, as we try out, say, a new recipe or a new approach like freewriting. It's through the experience of "trying out" that we then are able to bring a kind of experience-based cognition to the question: what does freewriting do? What does my experience of freewriting suggest to me about the benefits of freewriting? The experience happens, then the reflection, the cogitating on that experience. A person doesn't need to believe in freewriting to try out freewriting, anymore than one needs to "believe" in a recipe in order to experiment with it. She needs simply to suspend her doubting, to suspend all stance-taking, including believing. And then see for herself how it works.

The Body in Motion

In his *JAEP* essay, Elbow offers a wonderful anecdote about being persuaded by his older siblings to try horseradish. I had a similar experience with hot peppers. He uses his anecdote to illustrate the propensity children have for

the believing game. He believed, as I believed, that older siblings tell the truth. The sharp experience of tasting the horseradish or hot peppers might insert a momentary doubting, but believing soon returns.

But what else is learned in that experience? I take the hot pepper; I put it in my mouth, expecting a pleasant sensation. My body reacts: I spit it out. No cognition there. Pure bodily movement.

But cognition and stance-taking follow so closely after the bodily experience that it can be hard to pry them apart. I decide that my older sister is mean, that hot peppers are to be avoided. These are beliefs born of experience. But they are not the same as the physical, embodied experience itself.

Writing, it bears noting, is a physical activity. Because we've long linked writing with thinking (a link I certainly wouldn't deny), we have tended to overlook the physicality of writing. Without a body, without bodily movements of one kind or another, writing would not happen. Think, for example, of the amazing feat accomplished by Jean-Dominique Bauby, the paralyzed author of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. Deprived by a stroke of speech and of any movement save for the ability to blink his left eye, he used that one bodily movement to communicate telegraphically, letter by letter, a memoir of his experience. His story speaks powerfully to the endurance of the human spirit even as it demonstrates the necessity of the human body for its expression. Just as my student M. had to learn to move in new ways in order to throw a baseball effectively, so did Bauby have to learn to use a part of his body in new ways in order to write.

In addition to asking that writers try out new writing experiences, the trying game also asks that we become attuned to what it is that stops us from trying. While we might simply call the roadblock "doubt," doubt itself is a position, a way of holding the body. In other words, the motivation—or lack of motivation—to try necessarily begins with the body.

To explain what I mean here, I need to turn to a sampling of the recent scientific research and theoretical writings that have begun exploring the pre-cognitive, bodily experiences that precede and make possible thought. Although they often use different vocabularies to describe these experiences, they tend to all agree that what we usually call emotion occurs first as a bodily response of moving toward or away from something, and that the naming or narrativizing of that movement comes later (even if an infinitesimal microsecond later). Antonio Damasio, a neuroscientist, refers to "the complex chain of events that begins with emotion and ends up with feeling," where "bodily emotions become the kinds of thoughts we call feelings" (27, 7). For Damasio, then, before they are anything else, emotions are bodily movements:

In the context of this book . . . emotions are actions or movements, many of them public, visible to others as they occur in the face, in the voice, in the specific behaviors. To be sure, some components of the emotion process are not visible to the naked eye but can be made "visible" with current scientific probes such as hormonal assays and electrophysiological wave patterns. Feelings, on the other hand, are always hidden, like all mental images necessarily are, unseen to anyone other than their rightful owner. (28)

What's significant here, for my purposes, is not so much the specific terms used (since different researchers may change the labels), but to see that emotion originates in the body before it is linguistic or symbolic. And, because emotions first occur in the body, they are "public," insofar as they appear in the face or voice or can be picked up by scientific scanning. Once they are labeled by the mind with names like "sad" or "happy" or even have a subtle feeling tone of "unpleasant" or "pleasant," they are private, in the locked domain of the cognitive until spoken. While Damasio places emphasis on the "public" dimension of the bodily, it is often the bodily that remains most unnoticed by the person experiencing the emotion. The attention tends to jump quickly to the "private" realm of thoughts and images associated with the bodily movement. When I eat something I don't like, for example, I tend to notice more the thought of not liking (what Damasio labels "feeling") than the way my upper body tends to subtly recoil from the taste, as if readying itself to spit it out (what Damasio terms "emotion"). The body moves with reactivity; the mind only afterwards labels that reactivity.

As writers, our bodies hold habitual emotional responses that we may no longer even consciously think about. I've noticed, for example, that I habitually tense my shoulders when writing. To some extent, I "knew" that: I recognized that my shoulders tend to feel worse after I've been writing. What I didn't realize is how my body almost automatically assumes this aversive tension when I start writing. My body reacts emotionally to the act of writing, tensing up against what has come to be experienced as unpleasant. The act of noticing this tension can be the starting point of beginning to release it. Not noticing it only further solidifies that tension into a cognitive stance. The tension in the body that arises around writing then creates the mental belief: writing is unpleasant.

Damasio goes so far as to make quite a radical statement about the relation of the body to the mind: "to say that our mind is made up of ideas of one's body is equivalent to saying that our mind is made up of images, representations, or thoughts of our own parts of our body in spontaneous action or in the process of modifications caused by objects in the environment" (213-14). Cognition, in other words, follows from bodily actions and reactions. Both belief and doubt, as cognitive stances, follow from bodily movement, physical experience. We believe (or doubt) only after our bodies move.

In fact, it is this attention to bodily movement that the cultural theorist Brian Massumi privileges in his work, especially *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. This book represents his effort "to explore the implications for cultural theory of this simple conceptual displacement: body—(movement/sensation)—change" (1). Massumi notes that most cultural theories, in their efforts to promote social change or to observe reasons for stasis, have tended to overlook the middle terms, the literality of bodily movement. As a result, they have focused on critique (the doubting game) in their efforts to enforce belief. Think, for instance, of the work in composition studies by critics of Peter Elbow's work. James Berlin, as an example, worked hard to see the composition classroom as an avenue for social change. To promote this stance, he played a rigorous game of doubting with other composition scholars whom he saw as inadequately promoting social change, and he also advocated cultural criticism as the most appropriate work for students in composition classrooms (see, for instance, Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*). But according to Massumi, this focus on critique and stance

taking and the subsequent overlooking of bodily movement has led to a stalemate in cultural theory. Cultural theorists have become quite good at identifying what needs to be changed but have had a more difficult time imagining how change might happen. For Massumi, who also draws on scientific research, change is effected by way of the body, through its experience and movement in the world, both of which trigger new thoughts. And, using language that should make a process-based writer and teacher proud, Massumi states his intention to place “the emphasis . . . on process before signification or coding” while maintaining that “the latter are not false or unreal” but are “truly, really stop-operations” (7). Belief and doubt, then, would be what Massumi calls “significations” or “stop-operations”: they stop the process of experiencing and name it, turn it into a mental phenomenon.

For Massumi the significant question to ask if we are interested in how change happens is not how we know—an epistemological question that seeks to stop and label experience—but how we get from one position to the next. He derives this shift in focus from Henri Bergson’s theories of “creative evolution”:

The Bergsonian revolution turns the world on its head. Position no longer comes first, with movement a problematic second. It is secondary to movement and derived from it. It is retro movement, movement residue. The problem is no longer to explain how there can be change given positioning. The problem is to explain the wonder that there can be stasis given the primacy of process. (8)

To put this in terms of the believing game, we might say that the question isn’t how someone takes on new ideas. The question is how there can be fixed views at all considering how much daily experience is one of flux. Our bodies are constantly in motion—even if we are apparently sitting still. The constant reaction to stimuli pulls and tugs at our viscera, furrows our brows, and, in moments of grace, relaxes our shoulders. The trying game asks readers and writers to suspend the stance-taking long enough to notice that flux of reactivity, the moment-to-moment changes as the body responds. It asks, moreover, that we acknowledge the inevitability of change, honor it, by trying out new things.

Positions, then, whether positions of believing or doubting, are “residue” of bodily movement. We believe when our bodies move toward something; we doubt as our bodies recoil and move away. Of course, after years of social conditioning, those things we move toward and those things we move away from become habituated in the body. My body had become habituated to recoil as it writes, to tense up, to get ready to run away as soon as possible. I’m working to retrain it, to notice that recoiling, to relax the body, to take breaks. Boice calls it, in the title of his book, a “journey to comfort and fluency.” In a telling slip, a colleague thought the title was how to journey “from comfort to fluency.” Our schooling often sends the message that writing is hard work, that to write well demands that we give up comfort and give ourselves over to that suffering. Our bodies hold on to that message. It takes something other than belief to loosen that hold: we need to try to move.

Conclusion: Notes Toward a Trying Game

As I've mentioned before, I do see what I'm calling the trying game to already be part of the believing game. What I would like to see is a separating out of the trying game from the believing game so that beliefs and stances don't get mixed up with the purely physical experiencing of action and reaction. I'll end, then, with an illustration of one distinction between the believing game and the trying game that I have experienced and passed on to my students.

I explained in the introduction to this article that I never did talk directly to my class about the believing game, even as I found a number of students expressing their doubt of and even exasperation with Boice. I wasn't particularly concerned with the stance they took in relation to Boice, whether it was one of belief or doubt. Rather, I wanted them to try to suspend stances, to try to suspend believing and doubting in order to try out some of his ideas, to move their writing bodies as he suggested, giving attention to bodily comfort, to pacing, and to moderation.

But just asking them to do that wasn't particularly effective. Instead, their stances toward Boice seemed to become further solidified with each short section that we read. How can there be such stasis, given the dominance of change in our lived experience? There is stasis because the body gets fixed in its emotional reactions. These reactions have become habitual.

So instead of asking them to try believing Boice's ideas, I began asking them simply to notice what was happening in their bodies as they were reading. I varied the instructions I gave, but they were all inclined toward asking students to notice what sensations arose in their bodies as they read, and to try to find what prompted the aversive feelings. Here are two examples of my reading prompts:

As you begin to read, please pause for a moment and consciously relax. I would encourage you, if possible, to practice pausing as you read. Maybe at the end of every page, just pause for a second. Notice what's happening in your body and mind as you read.

Pause if you notice yourself feeling bogged down, frustrated, or otherwise feeling unpleasant. Notice where you feel it in your body. Try to identify what particular words brought on this feeling and make a note of them. Please also notice any words or phrases that provoke a more pleasant feeling. Make a note of those also.

While I would by no means claim that pausing and noticing where and how negative feelings arise in the body led all students to lose their aversion toward Boice, it did nonetheless give them a tool for noticing what might trigger the aversion. And students also, by and large, expressed greater patience with Boice when they practiced this slowing-down of the reading process. They seemed grateful for the opportunity to pause, and that pausing of the body helped to condition (for a little while, at least) a slightly more open approach to Boice. And that slowing-down of their reading was an example of trying out something new, trying out a different way of attending to and using the body.

Attending to the body, then, both by putting ideas into practice and by noticing the reactivity in the body that keeps us from practicing, is a key feature of this trying game. Insofar as it is affirmative, an effort to try out new things and to acknowledge what might be blocking us, it closely resembles the believing game that Elbow has long advocated. But as an effort to pay attention to the body and to observe the effects while suspending cognitive positions, the trying game strategically departs from the believing game. As a strategy, the trying game asks us to observe our own bodily experiences, to notice the effects of trying something new, and, through that process, in the words of the Buddha, to come to know for ourselves.

Afterword

Today, in the midst of working on a revision of this article, a moment of serendipity: I happened to run into M.—the student who shared the baseball analogy with me—in a crowded hallway on campus. The Mindful Writing class ended almost five months ago, but M. greets me with enthusiasm and tells me that if he hadn't had the class last semester, he doesn't think he could have survived the current semester. "I have two or three papers to write every week," he tells me, "But I did it, and I'm doing okay." It's the last week of classes before finals, a tense time. And he does seem to be doing okay; his face breaks into a gentle smile. It's a small thing, but I'm willing to take that smile, that subtle movement of the body, as a sign of the hopeful possibilities of the trying game. ☉

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A Highly Incomplete Bibliography

Peter Elbow

I'm nervous to include this because I've not read a lot of these books and articles, and the whole thing is so inadequate for such a large topic. Many are titles I've jotted down for when I "have time." But the list also includes a few suggestions from the authors in this issue, though this list mostly doesn't duplicate the valuable Works Cited sections they've put with each of their essays. I'm risking the amateur quality of this enterprise in hopes that it can help others to pursue an important issue. (At the end, I've listed my various essays about the believing game.)

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Essays by Peter Elbow about the Doubting and Believing Games

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REVIEWS

Meaning and The Evolution of Consciousness: A Retrospective on the Writing of Owen Barfield

Julie J. Nichols, Utah Valley University

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“
A mid all the menacing signs that surround us,” wrote Owen Barfield in 1961, “perhaps the one which fills thoughtful people with the greatest foreboding is the growing general sense of meaninglessness. It is this which underlies most of the other threats” (*Rediscovery of Meaning* 11). This sense of meaninglessness—which hasn’t gone away in the intervening years, I would venture to say—has its basis, according to Barfield, in the “habit” of “meticulously observing the

facts of nature and systematically interpreting them in terms of *physical* cause and effect” and in no other terms. Though this habit has produced “incalculable and largely beneficial results for the accumulation of practical knowledge, or knowledge enabling the manipulation of nature,” it has also solidified into the assumption that there is no other way to interpret our observations, or even (which is worse) to observe at all (11, original emphasis). The cost of this limitation is equally incalculable: since “there is usually little connection between the [physical] cause of a thing and its meaning,” our modern emphasis on the measurable and tangible seems to have obviated the need to seek for meaning at all (12). And that, declares Barfield, is egregious ignorance.

“The Rediscovery of Meaning” is the title both of the essay quoted above and the book into which it was collected with eighteen other essays in 1977. Here—and, progressively more strongly, in all his works—Barfield reminds us that human beings have not always founded their thinking on the materialist assumption. “The study of the transition from medieval to modern thought is the study of the great and painful wrench” from Aristotelianism to positivism, he says; “it is a mistake to suppose that we are more open-minded today; we are merely open-minded about different things” (*Rediscovery of Meaning* 14-15). In short, Owen Barfield is an iconoclast. He urges us to “unthink” the habits of thought that bind us to materialism so that we may begin to believe, again—to perceive, again—to participate, again, in meaning. The theory that human consciousness is in the process of evolving from what he calls “participatory consciousness” (*Saving the Appearances* 41) to “final consciousness” (133-37) is, in fact, the core of his contribution to twentieth and twenty-first-century thought.

Owen Barfield’s life and work span the entire twentieth century. He was born in 1898 in North London, and his first major works, *History in English Words* and *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, were published in 1926 and 1928, respectively. Educated at Highgate School (where Coleridge and Hopkins were students in their time) and at Wadham College, Oxford, he is often remembered first, by those who recognize his name at all, as a friend of C. S. Lewis. Like the other Inklings, he was interested in literature and language. But as G. B. Tennyson, a Barfield editor and scholar, puts it in his introduction to *A Barfield Reader*, this was no ordinary interest: “He saw in the nature of poetry and in the deepest nature of language itself . . . elements that no materialist philosophy could explain” (xvii). In a concise online introduction to Barfield, Gary Lachman says Barfield’s “belief in language as an archaeological record of ‘the evolution of consciousness,’ and as a means of translogical insight, was as at odds with the reigning [positivist] *Zietgeist* as you could get.” For those of us who teach language—whether explicitly or implicitly, modern education foregrounding language and literacy above all else—Barfield’s writings deserve more exposure than they typically receive. In a time when “meaning” is often downplayed as the least important thing about a text, Barfield advocates the primacy of meaning in an unfolding set of arguments whose cumulative effect is a profound integrity.

History in English Words, to begin at the beginning, is not another Bill Moyers journey through the “history of the language.” The preposition *in* (rather than *of*) is key here. Barfield employs this preposition deliberately throughout his *oeuvre*, reminding readers that it is necessary to think from *within* the worldview of the writers we read—essential, in fact, to break the habit we have developed of imposing on earlier times and earlier writers our consciousness:

It has only just begun to dawn on us that in our own language alone . . . the past history of humanity is spread out in an imperishable map, just as the history of the mineral earth lies embedded in the layers of its outer crust . . . language has preserved for us the inner, living history of man's soul. It reveals the evolution of consciousness. (18)

This notion—already identified as “evolution of consciousness” and first hinted at in *History in English Words* (86)—is central to Barfield's argument. Barfield read and approved of Julian Jaynes's *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* because it was one of the first books to suggest from a materialist point of view what Barfield asserted was obvious if you looked at ancient languages and philosophies:

[The] larger process . . . told by the history of the Aryan languages as a whole . . . is the shifting of the centre of gravity of consciousness from the cosmos around him into the personal human being himself. . . . [This] general process . . . can be traced working itself out into all kinds of details; not only in that intimate, metaphysical change of outlook which it is so hard for us to realize now that the change has taken place—in the appearance of words betokening a sharper self-consciousness—but also in the moral and personal sphere. (171-72)

In its first four chapters, *History in English Words* provides a co-chronology of the English language and British consciousness. Copious examples in the last five chapters, from such categories as “myth” (specifically the ways mythological consciousness is still present in such English words as *panic*, *day*, and *sky*), “philosophy and religion” and “devotion” (*cosmos*, *initiate*, *mystery*, *conscience*), and “experiment” (*attraction*, *dubious*, *analyse*, *distinguish*), offer ample evidence that since consciousness and language evolve together, these concepts and perceptions did not exist before the words for them appear. And the order in which words appeared chronologically suggests that consciousness has *devolved* from a state in which humans saw themselves as undifferentiated from their environment to our current habit and assumption that only our differentiatedness matters.

But there is reason to see this in an affirmative light; and the affirmation lies in language itself.

If the thesis of *History in English Words* is that language reveals the evolution of consciousness, *Poetic Diction* starts with the premise that the aesthetic effect of “poetic” language happens because of a “felt change of consciousness” (48-49). Scientific language (i.e., “the human being needs nitrogen and oxygen in a particular ratio in order to live”) is tautologous. It does not add to the sum of consciousness or knowledge. Its purpose is to engender subjectivity or self-consciousness (i.e., “this is what each thing consists of in external form—the only important kind of form”). But for Barfield, “the poetic does not *handle* terms; it *makes* them” (*History in English Words* 31, emphasis added). Considerable time is spent in *Poetic Diction* distinguishing between knowledge, perception, wisdom, and aesthetic pleasure. “[The] actual moment of the pleasure of appreciation [of ‘the poetic’] depends upon . . . a kind of discrepancy between two moods or modes of consciousness” (52, 54): truly poetic reveals by the poet's choice of

words a meaning so different from the reader's habit "that, for a moment, [the reader] sheds Western civilization like an old garment and beholds [his] perceptions in a new and strange light" (49).

Since words and consciousness co-evolve, these genuinely expansive poetic moments (which include but are not limited to figurative language) actually re-create the world for those who experience them. The thesis of *Poetic Diction* is that

reality, once self-evident, and therefore not conceptually experienced, but which can now only be reached by an effort of the individual mind—this is what is contained in a true poetic metaphor; and every metaphor is 'true' only in so far as it contains such a reality, or hints at it. The world, like Dionysus, is torn to pieces by pure intellect; but the poet is Zeus; he has swallowed the heart of the world; and he can reproduce it as a living body. (87-88)

According to Barfield, just as we observe in children the growing awareness of self, of separate identity, as a necessary feature of the development of individual consciousness, so the principle of differentiation is an inevitable and desirable feature of the evolution of human consciousness. In fact, it's inextricable from the development of language. Appreciation of "the poetic" *requires* this splitting of subject from object. But for Barfield, "the poetic" moves the individuated soul *through* the splitting process into an expanded consciousness. Barfield calls this "final participation" (*Saving the Appearances* 137). Though this process is never complete, since final participation always carries in it the seeds of more differentiation, it is nevertheless the goal of the evolution of consciousness. Whatever obstructs this cycle—such as the assumption that *differentiation* is final—requires correction. It requires transformation.

From 1929 to the late 1950s, Barfield made his living as a lawyer. During this period he wrote little, but his family and social life were active and busy: he and his wife adopted three children, and he spent much time with literary friends in Oxford and London. In 1957, when he retired from the law, he published the third of his foundational works, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*. It won him a following with invitations to lecture as a visiting professor throughout North America.

In the history of philosophy and science, when we look back at early statements about the place of the earth in the universe, and its shape, and the role of mankind on the earth, what we see, according to Barfield, is not a naive worldview proven false by later, smarter, truer scientific experimentation. What we see are theories that best "saved the appearances" of the perceptions and experiences people had, of the phenomena in which they lived and moved—of, in short, their consciousness. For Barfield it is crucial to remember that former human perceptions differed from *ours because the world was different*. It is simply inaccurate to impose upon our study of the past our current perceptions. Barfield illustrates this in a discussion of the technique of perspective in art. He says:

if, with the help of some time-machine working in reverse, a man of the Middle Ages could be suddenly transported into the skin of a man of the twentieth century, seeing through our eyes

and with our “figuration” the objects we see, I think he would feel like a child who looks for the first time at a photograph through the ingenious magic of a stereoscope. “Oh!” he would say, “look how they stand out!” We must not forget that in his time perspective had not yet been discovered, nor underrate the significance of this. True, it is no more than a device for pictorially representing depth, and separateness, in space. But how comes it that the device had never been discovered before—or, if discovered, never adopted? There were plenty of skilled artists, and they would certainly have hit upon it soon enough if depth in space had characterized the collective representations they wish to reproduce, as it characterizes ours. *They did not need it. Before the scientific revolution the world was more like a garment men wore about them than a stage on which they moved. In such a world the convention of perspective was unnecessary.* To such a world other conventions of visual reproduction, such as the nimbus and the halo, were as appropriate as to ours they are not. It was as if the observers were themselves in the picture. Compared with us, they felt themselves and the objects around them and the words that expressed those objects, immersed together in something like a clear lake of—what shall we say?—of “meaning,” if you choose. (*Saving the Appearances* 94-95, emphasis added)

The “idolatry” this book examines, then, is the positivistic assumption that only the material is “real.” Such an idea is not borne out by language or history:

The English words *diurnal*, *diary*, *dial* are derived from the Latin “dies” (day), while *journal* comes to us, via the French language, from the same word. These syllables conceal among themselves the central religious conception common to the Aryan nations. As far back as we can trace them, the Sanskrit word “dyaus,” the Greek “zeus” (accusative “dia”), and the Teutonic “tiu” were all used in contexts where we should use the word sky; but the same words were also used to mean God, the Supreme Being, the Father of all the other gods—Sanskrit “Dyaus pitar,” Greek “Zeus pater,” Illyrian “Depaturos,” Latin “juppiter” (old form Diespiter). We can best understand what this means if we consider how the English word *heaven* and the French “ciel” are still used for a similar double purpose, and how it was once not a double purpose at all. There are still English and French people for whom the spiritual “heaven” is identical with the visible sky; and in the Spanish language it is even a matter of some difficulty to draw the distinction. But if we are to judge from language, we must assume that when our earliest ancestors looked up to the blue vault they felt that they saw not merely a place, whether heavenly or earthly, but the bodily vesture, as it were, of a living Being. (*History in English Words* 89, original emphasis)

Now, if your fundamental assumption is that the material world is the only reality, and always has been—that we are the most right population in the history of the planet, and our use of measurement and quantification is the only and most accurate source of evidence and proof, so that every hint of an immaterial reality must be “falsified” for the sake of academic inclusion—then you must play the doubting game eternally. For, according to Barfield, the tautological nature of this assumption allows you to perceive nothing that cannot be measured, even though language, history, and the poetic experience offer irrefutable proof that there is, and always has been, an immaterial reality behind and within and underlying the physical world we live in now. In prehistory and certainly in written history, humans—in fact all things—were immersed in “original participation” (*Saving the Appearances* 41), participating co-creators of and in realities constituted of a great deal more than any one-time material moment. (He was very interested, before his death, in the implications of quantum mechanics.) The descent to the materialism of our time, even to the declaration that robots and electronics technologies can take over our human capacities better than we ourselves, is all part of an evolutionary trajectory of contraction into separateness. Further, “this contraction seeks to be followed by an expansion from the separate new centers thus created. This involves realizing that the centers—human beings—are still, in their subconscious depths, transpersonal” (*Rediscovery of Meaning* 5). In Barfield’s system, then, “believing” in the sense of “participating” in perceived phenomena is the original activity of human consciousness and the final, co-creative one to which it aspires.

We must be clear that Barfield doesn’t call this activity “believing.” For Barfield, “belief” is a blind behavior, not associated with *thinking*. He considers thinking a central and necessary development in the evolution of consciousness. But I think *willed, thoughtful “participatory consciousness”* is another way of naming the believing game. I think Peter Elbow would rejoice in the logic that drives Barfield’s points to their fascinating home.

There is one other way Barfield’s work can be called upon to support a certain variant of the believing game. Barfield declared himself an agnostic as a young man. He was not raised as a Christian; he denied any conversion of the type his friend C.S. Lewis experienced and wrote from so powerfully. But in “Philology and the Incarnation,” found in *The Rediscovery of Meaning* (262–71), he writes that his investigation into the history of language led him inevitably to accept the birth, life, and death of the man called Jesus Christ as “the moment at which there was consummated that age-long process of contraction of the immaterial qualities of the cosmos into a human center” (270). He speaks of “a man . . . who startled all those who stood around him, and strove to reverse the direction of their thought—for the word *metanoia*, which is translated ‘repentance,’ also means a reversal of the direction of the mind” (271, original emphasis). And he says “that if [a person] had never heard of [the story of the birth and resurrection of Christ] through the Scriptures, he would have been obliged to try his best to invent something like it as a hypothesis to save the appearances” (271). To say it a different way: Barfield saw, in the development of language and the patterns of history, irrefutable evidence that the story of a fall from oneness, with the resultant need for transformative re-birth—the Christian story—is the planetary story. The implication is that “believing” (in the sense of willed participatory consciousness) is not a game. It’s the most important thing we can do.

That consciousness is the basis and foundation of this planet's evolution; that language yields up evidence for the direction of that evolution; that it is not a chance or random evolution but one whose goal is "final participation," possible with the aid of the kinds of powers embodied in poetic diction, these are always his propositions. Rejecting the materialist philosophies that deprive our work of inner meaning, offering reasoned and reasonable proof that meaning evolves and can be recovered, restoring the reality of innerly-felt meaning through imaginative exegesis from within the history of our written texts, Owen Barfield submits the believing game to our most severe testing. In Barfield, believing wins because thinking and consciousness win. Reading Barfield, our sense of our place in the world widens and expands; we experience the "felt change of consciousness" he names as early as 1928 in *Poetic Diction*. Suddenly everything we read feels a little different—not because we perceive it to be, but because it is.¹ ☐

¹ N.B.: David Lavery, Owen A. Barfield (grandson of Owen Barfield), and other Barfield scholars presented and participated at the Rocky Mountain MLA October 2009 at Snowbird, Utah.

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Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.

Charles Suhor, Retired, National Council of Teachers of English

This is a review essay in two senses. Karen Armstrong's *The Great Transformation* was the subject of several teleconferences for AEPL members arranged by Bruce Novak prior to the June 2008 conference. Riane Eisler was a keynoter. I was unable to attend, but my reflections on relationships between the Armstrong book and Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade* took shape. Those mental reviews morphed into an essay that deals with common themes in the books, the teleconferences, and related readings.

Both Armstrong and Eisler provide insight into the wisdom traditions that AEPL continues to mine and assess critically because of their rich implications for personal and professional growth. The obvious contrasts in Armstrong and Eisler's works are the historical periods they cover and the differences in their emphases. The span of the Armstrong/Karl Jaspers's Axial Age is vast, 1600 BCE-220 CE. Those years of development of our wisdom traditions exclude the transformative spirituality of earlier times, notably, the Old Europe and Cretan civilizations described by Eisler. Eisler's closer focus is on scholars' neglect of the early partnership societies in which men

and women were properly regarded as equals, and peace and prosperity were dominant. Historians, anthropologists, and social theorists found numerous ways of ignoring, marginalizing, or dismissing those civilizations. They were seen as having little evolutionary merit in themselves, in contrast to the androcratic/dominator Axial Age cultures that followed, and they were not seen as possible models for building partnership societies today.

Armstrong recognizes her neglect of women's roles in the Axial Age but rationalizes it in an odd way. In the introduction she writes, "the question of women was so peripheral . . . I found that any sustained discussion of the topic was distracting" and "intrusive" (xvi-xvii). Eisler, in contrast, shows significant but widely neglected contributions and roles of women throughout history (Chapters 8-10).

Beyond that, it is hard to accept Armstrong's basic idea that the periods and cultures described (Greek, Hebrew, Chinese, and Indian) could be viewed as a coherent "age" of heightened spirituality. On the one hand, reservations abound as Armstrong acknowledges that the Axial peoples "did not evolve in a uniform way" but "sporadically, by fits and starts" and that they were not as "contemporaneous" as Jaspers (originator of the Axial Age idea) believed (xvii). But she then proceeds to trace parallel developmental trends moving in eight stages toward more expansive spirituality in each culture, measured out in years (ritual, c. 900 to 800 BCE; kenosis, c. 800 to 700 BCE; knowledge, 700 to 600 BCE; suffering, 600 to 530 BCE; empathy, 530 to 450 BCE; concern for everybody, 450 to 398 BCE; all is one, 400 to 300 BCE; empire, 300 to 220 BCE). Her data are rich and dazzling, but the claim of comprehensible spiritual breakthroughs in the four cultures is belied by the many misrules and atrocities, often at peak Axial times, that Armstrong acknowledges. And again, she barely addresses the dominant androcentrism of the Axial cultures.

Armstrong's descriptions seem less like a discernible "age" than a historic ebb-and-flow, with stunning stumbles forward and uncertain falls backward, and concurrence of contrary forces within particular time frames. Eisler appropriately acknowledges the messiness of it all, noting for example that much of what was excellent in Greek culture was from "feminine" influences, often carried over from the values and practices of earlier times (106-17).

Sociologist Robert Bellah addresses Axial Age cultures from a different perspective, one that throws a different light on Eisler's ideas about why the moral brilliance of Crete and early European partnership cultures has been poorly acknowledged. Bellah sees Axial Age cultures as the first in history in which there was "a clear emergence of theory as an alternative to mimesis and myth" in religious experience (57). The reflective, theoretic element took different forms and had varying degrees of influence in each of the Axial cultures, but it transcended particular contexts.

A reading of Eisler from Bellah's perspective suggests that the archeological and other evidence of the early partnership cultures lacked a theoretic dimension. Or, if it was there, it wasn't preserved in well articulated oral or written forms as were the ideas of Confucius, the Buddha, the Hebrew prophets, Plato, and other Axial figures. Eisler seems in accord with Bellah in stating that the idea of gylany was "*operationally* expressed in more equalitarian and peaceful societies" (164, emphasis added). This does not denigrate the partially inferable theoretic ideals of partnership cultures, but it helps to account for their lack of

primacy in the writings of scholars who studied the more accessible spiritual-theoretic roots of our civilizations.

Other perspectives avoid Armstrong's claim of a coherent Axial Age. Ken Wilber cautions against supposing that the cutting edge thinkers, sages, artists, and groups in any era represented the spirituality of the majority. Many leaders were in fact often countercultural or were viewed as ideals rather than the normative influence. Seen this way, the Axial period marked the emergence not of societies transformed in developmental stages but of key thinkers whose ideas lived on in a markedly untidy way. Guided by Eisler's use of systems theory, we might say that many of the Axial transformations, like the early gylanic societies, did not become well-embedded "static attractors" but were "periodic attractors," more "like a plant that refuses to be killed no matter how often it is crushed or cut back" (137).

The blurriness and nonlinearity of social evolution is also expressed by Charles Fisher in a recent book, *Dismantling Discontent: Buddha's Way Through Darwin's World*. Taking a long-range view, Fisher says, "We know that, as civilizations failed, some of their inhabitants went back to earlier modes of subsistence. We know that many changes which underlay civilization were irreversible and affected even those people who continued to live as hunter-gatherers" (314).

Surely, Axial wisdom traditions and early gylanic societies are inspirational and can offer much guidance to educators as we witness dazzling changes and daunting challenges in our own time. We can, in fact, make use of the traditions in trying to shape current change. Many theorists and researchers cite evidence that we are straining towards new wisdom (Ardagh; Beck and Cowan; Wilber), that a crucial tipping point is at hand, and that we can midwife the birth of an expanded human consciousness. My sense of the work of AEPL is that few believe that the answer is a return to or recapturing of idyllic yesteryears, whether cast as Axial times, gylanic societies, or lost Edens. As Wilber notes, the task in authentic transformation is to "transcend and include" (25), not harken back.

The countless social, philosophical, and technological problems that have evolved are not nuisances to be reversed but the raw material of transformation today. There's no reclaiming of the wisdom traditions without reshaping them in our time. New questions and crises unimagined by Axial peoples have arisen, and new possibilities for solutions are being offered in areas like human sexuality, distribution of wealth, ways of governance, religious experiences and institutions, relation to the environment, nationalism and globalism, the uses of technology, and more. As citizens of the world and educators in the here and now, we can see these interesting times not as a curse but as a crucial opportunity and an exciting invitation to the unexpected. ☯

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Edward Sullivan, Lebanon Valley College

About fifteen years ago, I saw the film *Searching for Bobby Fisher*. The movie is based on the (then) young life of Josh Waitzkin, a chess prodigy. It depicts the highly competitive world of children's chess and traces the boy's path to winning his first National Chess Championship at the age of nine. From time to time, I would think about that film, especially when a news story appeared about the eccentric grandmaster and one-time world chess champion Bobby Fisher. I wondered what happened to Josh. I suspected that he burned out, but I was wrong. It turns out he stayed very busy. In the subsequent years, he racked up eight National Chess Championships, and then he did something *really* interesting: he all but abandoned his chess career and began studying the ancient Chinese martial art, Tai Chi Chuan.

Even if you are not familiar with Tai Chi, you have probably seen it performed. Tai Chi is often depicted as a graceful set of flowing motions performed very slowly by a group of senior citizens on television ads. It does not look martial at all. Practitioners claim that Tai Chi, among other things, promotes good health by restoring flexibility and stimulating a person's life force or *chi* (Japanese: *ki*). Because so many people practice Tai Chi for its health benefits, it is easy to forget its martial aspects. Tai Chi is considered one of the "internal" or "soft" martial arts because of its reliance on *chi* rather than muscle to generate power. Only after learning "the form," the sequence of flowing motions described above, does one move on to the more martial and competitive aspect of this practice called *push hands*. Push hands is performed by two players facing each other with their opposite arms touching. The idea is to use your skill and chi to "push" your opponent off balance and away from you. At the competitive level, push hands bears little resemblance to the graceful movements demonstrated in the form. It is a fast and furious competition that can easily result in injury to the opponent being pushed. In 2004, Waitzkin won or tied the Tai Chi Chuan World Championship in two categories of push hands (fixed step and moving step, respectively). He is the first westerner ever to win these competitions. Besides a couple of trophies and some bragging rights, what did Tai Chi teach Waitzkin? He writes, "On a deeper level, the practice had the effect of connecting disparate elements of my being" (102). As one delves further into his story, Waitzkin becomes a man searching for harmony and identifying its principles.

Besides giving the reader a peek into the two somewhat obscure worlds of competitive chess and Tai Chi, this book offers Waitzkin's principles for learning just about anything. Some of his principles will be familiar to any educator, while others less so. Either way, I found this book to be an entertaining and occasionally insightful read.

After a brief review of his career as a chess prodigy in the opening chapters, Waitzkin grounds his method by reviewing two well-known ideas in developmental psychology: the entity and incremental theories of learning. According to the first theory, some individuals see their intelligence or abilities in a discipline as a fixed entity, something that cannot be cultivated or grown. In contrast, the

incremental theory argues that, by dint of effort, skills can be developed systematically and incrementally. Of course, most educators subscribe to the latter theory. Yet, as someone who teaches quantitatively-oriented courses (economics and finance), I am dismayed by the number of students who believe in the entity theory. Too often I have heard students give up on challenging material, echoing the familiar refrain, “I’ve never been good at math!” Why do so many of our students believe this nonsense? I suspect they have heard it from a solicitous parent who also “wasn’t good at math,” or it is simply an excuse to avoid working hard. Waitzkin, a prodigiously hard worker, holds himself as a living proof of the incremental theory. Of course, hard work that is not smart work merely exhausts and frustrates the novice. The rest of the book is Waitzkin’s suggestions for working smarter.

Early on, Waitzkin poses the question: what is it that differentiates a world-class performer from others? One of Waitzkin’s more interesting ideas is the notion of investing in failure. Simply put, if you want to get better at some activity, then practice with people who are better at it than you are. Yes, you will lose a lot, but, more importantly, you can learn a lot. What seems to distinguish the great from the good is that the great are willing to fail. In other words, as someone becomes proficient and successful in an activity, there’s a tendency to stay within the comfort zone. Once this happens, excellence becomes unattainable. While the “comfort zone” critique is not particularly new, it does tie into the entity theory of learning neatly. The problem with some people, naturally gifted individuals, is that, when they encounter failure (as we all inevitably do), their self-confidence is easily shaken. As a result, they will either avoid meaningful challenges and plateau in their performance, or drift away from their activity. Not so for the incremental learner. By not being naturally gifted, the incrementalist learns resilience through failure and success through hard work. In other words, world-class performers are incremental learners.

Another unique aspect of Waitzkin’s prescription for success is applying “beginner’s mind.” The notion of beginner’s mind is traced to the well-known Japanese Zen master Shunryu Suzuki, who said, “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s mind there are few” (21). As educators, we become so comfortable in our chosen fields that we forget what it is like to be a beginner. Unless we take up some new study or activity that challenges us, it is difficult to reclaim beginner’s mind. Waitzkin ventured into the beginner’s domain while preparing for the World Under 21 Championship in Chess. His motivation: he was starting to burn out. He began to practice meditation and, eventually, Tai Chi in order to relax and find some serenity. Little did he know that his career choice was about to change. But why would an expert want beginner’s mind? Because it transforms our point of view. It forces us to see things differently; in that process, it makes us better teachers. Waitzkin had a similar learning experience when he took up push hands. Imagine being a world-class performer and then taking up an activity where you begin as a world-class putz. The ego takes quite a beating—and that’s the point: by failing, by investing in failure, we attain beginner’s mind, and then we improve. Waitzkin observes:

My whole life I had studied techniques, principles, and theory until they were integrated into the unconscious. From the outside Tai Chi and chess couldn’t be more different, but they

began to converge in my mind. I started to translate my chess ideas into Tai Chi language, as if the two arts were linked by an essential connecting ground. . . . My growth became defined by barrierlessness. Pure concentration didn't allow thoughts or false constructions to impede my awareness, and I observed clear connections between different life experiences through the common mode of consciousness by which they were perceived. (xvi-xvii)

Barrierlessness is a provocative way of perceiving learning: looking for the inter-connectedness of seemingly disparate knowledge and experience. Beyond the occasional interdisciplinary course, the academy zealously guards its departmental turf. Physicists teach physics, and philosophers teach philosophy. I suspect in Waitzkin's eyes, higher education does not invest enough in "essential connecting ground."

At times, Waitzkin sounds like a mystic. If he is, then he is a very practical mystic. While most of his book offers common-sense suggestions for improving performance, every now and then he shares a not-so-obvious insight, but an insight born of experience. While reading this book, I started to think of Michael Jordan, arguably the greatest guard in basketball history. Years ago, I remember legendary coach Rick Pitino making two compelling observations about Jordan. First, Pitino said he never saw an athlete with more natural ability than Jordan. Then Pitino said he never saw an athlete train harder than Jordan. Of course, this comment squares with every coach's advice: there is no substitute for hard work. Pitino's next observation was less expected. He said that when Jordan missed a shot, it was impossible to tell by looking at his face; it betrayed no emotion. Pitino contrasted this behavior with many other athletes who wince, curse, or act-out after missing a basket. Jordan was not rattled by a failure. Every shot was his first shot. At some level, Jordan had realized beginner's mind. Can beginner's mind be cultivated in our students? Can we valorize it? Just as importantly, can we, the educators, cultivate it within ourselves? Waitzkin thinks so. ☐

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Connecting—Teaching: A Hero Journey

Section Editor's Message

First, let me make a suggestion to you: try a retreat of two-plus weeks on the top of a mountain somewhere, preferably a mountain where using email and cell phones is impossible. Bring books and a notebook, a pen, sunglasses, and hiking shoes. Adding a good friend is fine, too. This is where I am right now, in Oregon where the Southern Cascades and Siskiyou Mountains converge. We leave only on Fridays to go to Ashland for groceries. I am in this place, like Mary Oliver and Annie Dillard are in their *Nature*. My work is to keep myself healthy, to roam the fields and woods at will, and to notice so my eyes and heart will bulge with metaphor.

I share a cabin with a friend who teaches in a wilderness school back home in PA. She's here to write a new curriculum for adjudicated girls, and she runs her emerging lesson plans by me most evenings. Between the two of us, we are obsessed with the inspiring metaphor of the Hero Journey—perfect for her girls, perfect for my rhythmic Hiawathan days. Joseph Campbell and others have popularized its mythic stages: hearing the call, crossing the threshold, then slaying the dragons, crossing deadly swamps with help from wise women and amulets, arriving, and deciding to return to the world—to get ready to start all over again.

As I sit here beside the millpond, I see “the call” happening in front of me! A line of six geese splash into the pond, the two parents calling to their brood of four: “Follow me, follow me.” They do and then glide smoothly out of my view. Two weeks ago, they were downy goslings, today almost as big as their parents, training for their hero journeys, of course.

Almost hidden in the algae, a frog stares at me—the same fellow as yesterday, I am quite sure, with his disproportionately long legs. I envision my own dive headfirst into the black depths to the root-entangled bottom of this pond to save a prince and thus the world; no one else is here to do it, and I say, “Yes!” and swim with a powerful frog kick to the rescue.

In this context, with this metaphor influencing everything I see, I have been reading the submissions of teacher narratives for “Connecting.” Not surprisingly, some are the adventures of heroic teachers. They speak of the courage it takes to cross thresholds into the maze called classroom to “save the prince and princess.” Perhaps you will recognize yourself here and remember that you too are the hero of your teaching journey.

Hero Andrew Statum discusses his call to the teaching journey in “The Question.” Vic Kryston’s “Conflict Resolution” narrates how he handled a wily little dragon and turned her into a princess. Jie Li’s “Teaching with Accent” broadens our metaphor-making skills across cultures as she discovers the “wise woman” in herself underneath the “hag in rags.” Dominique Zino courageously and patiently navigates impenetrable spaces. Finally, the narrator of Joonna Trapp’s poem “Composition Class 7:45AM” is the lone-hero-voice-crying-out-in-the-wilderness. She gives us hope that the voice is sometimes heard and, when we really get lucky, can even become a chorus.

Blessings on your own Hero Journey.

The Question

Andrew Statum

“So what do you do?”

The Question. My old adversary. I’ve been answering it my whole life. It haunts me like a specter. At family reunions, at gatherings of old friends, in polite conversation, it shows itself. This time, it has followed me to church where, home for Easter, I am confronted by the blue-haired Mrs. Baker, first alto for twenty years in the St. John’s adult choir. The Question seems to know my every move. It knows where I am and where I’ll be next, though I’ve learned not to fear it. Rather, I’ve come to loathe it with the frosty stoicism of an aging catcher whose knee, yet again, is acting up: it’s not really a surprise, but the ache is wearisome, and it forces me to consider a new line of work. Maybe insurance isn’t so bad. My cousin Frankie in Michigan is making a killing. . . .

“I’m getting my PhD in English.”

“Oh, really?” she says. “How interesting.” Yep, there it is, that familiar look of bafflement, the kind nod, the fluttering eyelids, the pleasant smile. I can feel her panicking to keep the conversation alive though we both know this is going nowhere: “And what exactly do you want to do with that? Do you want to teach or something?”

Ugh. It’s that “or something” that gets me every time, that vague, condescending gesture to the possibility of other possibilities that she doesn’t believe exist. I smile back though I feel my insides curdling. “Yes,” I say. “I want to teach English literature,” and then I politely excuse myself for the cookie table, much to the relief of us both.

I love talking about literature. But to discuss it as an aspiration or a profession, rather than as a hobby or abiding interest, is, for me, to engage in an existential offensive that is just too exhausting to bear. Maybe it’s my family. Maybe it’s the company I keep. Maybe I’m too sensitive. Whatever the reason, The Question puts me on the defensive, for I can’t help but perceive the slightest twinge of contempt in its delivery. It’s as if, underneath the feigned interest, my interlocutors are insisting I justify what they consider to be a frivolous, unambitious vocation. Nobody asks this of someone who’s getting her MBA. No one questions the ambitions of a law student. Hell, nobody’s ever questioned Frankie’s decision to sell insurance.

But, when I stop for a moment and breathe, I realize that, behind The Question, there are other questions I’ve yet to confront. Why do I want to teach? And why English literature? Furthermore, why don’t I want to do anything else? Just who do I think I am?

I’ve heard many people refer to the profession of teaching as a “calling,” imbuing the entire enterprise with a kind of Oprahesque spirituality. Does this really happen? Do people get “called” to teach, the way some are called to God? This has yet to happen to me. I am not, nor do I want to be, a high priest of pedagogy. Like most of us, I want to be happy doing what I do for a living, and

Andrew Statum is pursuing his PhD in English at The Graduate Center, CUNY. He teaches College Writing and Composition at Queens College, CUNY.

I've found that I'm happiest when I'm engaging people in a critical dialogue about the things that matter to them. I feel a genuine connection to the larger picture of humanity when I'm exchanging ideas in an environment of curiosity and discovery. I thrive in situations where it's my job to break down complex ideas and communicate them to others in an enlightening way. Teaching, then, was the most logical career choice.

Which begs the second question: why English? Why not mathematics or welding—you know, something useful? First, let me say that I am not espousing the utility of any one academic discipline over that of another. There's room enough in this painting? collage? for everyone. But I do think an education in literature is a valuable part of any pedagogical agenda that proposes to create a "well-rounded" human being. Literature—real, solid, good literature—has the effect of stretching our moral faculties to the point of breaking them or strengthening them. Literature teaches us to question the appearance of things. It teaches that suppositions are not enough. Literature and, more specifically, the understanding of a piece of writing as a product of careful intellectual construction, teaches us to look beneath the facade of words, to kick the tires of the text and find out what the words are really worth. An education in literature empowers readers, shaping them into critical thinkers. Ultimately, it is as a critical thinker that we develop the confidence to articulate, and to believe in the validity of, our own conscience.

And, if I don't teach that, then who will? Okay, maybe there is a hint of the messianic about me after all. But literature has taught me to analyze and to refine and, finally, to believe in my own voice. And if I'm given the opportunity to set up that same lesson for others, well, I'm going to jump on it. And I don't think I need to feel defensive about that. ☹️

Conflict Resolution

Vic Kryston

Sometimes it is a good thing to measure what students don't know. More often, it is a great thing to measure what they do know. Here is a final exam I handed out the day before the test.

- * Final Exam, Question 1. Use pens or pencils or crayons or cut your finger and write in blood: demonstrate to me and to yourself how this class changed you.
- * Final Exam, Question II: There is no Question II.

Some might say I shouldn't have given them the question the night before. But then how would they know to bring crayons? And Samantha would not have had time to dwell deeply on her answer.

Samantha was a significant part of the class. She was a strange mixture of

Vic Kryston came out of Brooklyn, NY. During an extended adolescence, he carved out a career in the teaching of English to non-native speakers. He currently resides in Loudoun County, Virginia, where he is an adjunct teacher of Developmental Reading and Writing at N. VA Community College.

cosmetology student and punk rocker, the type that wouldn't have cared if I went to her for a manicure with dirty nails. Each day Samantha came to class wearing a black dress, black shoes, black make up (a goodly amount), along with the dark sneer announcing her punkness.

And each day she followed her own inner drummer into class late.

But there came a time when I, feeling pressure, angst, impatience, and sensing it was time to sell my soul to the wily administrators walking the halls, accosted Samantha. How dare she so consistently miss the first minutes of our class?

The class was already in a circle and starting a discussion. When Samantha joined us, finally, I asked the class to suggest some way to deal with Samantha's tardiness. I had worked hard to encourage the students to feel ownership for the class; Samantha's "tardiness issue" had become a class issue, and the class should help deal with it. Samantha blanched under her make up. The class decided that, as a punishment, Samantha would wear all white the next day.

She did! White dress, white shoes, makeup—all of it. She looked stunning, and we all told her so.

The year completed itself, and Samantha's variety in outfit color became more and more "normal," and I moved on to other happenings. And exam day arrived. Samantha sketched a fashion drawing using her crayons. It was a series of fashion sketches of models wearing multi-colored outfits, and Samantha wrote about how the experience of being made to wear white had, ironically, opened up a whole new world of color for her. She discovered she liked wearing lots of color. She liked the freedom of colors, the diversity of moods. And she also discovered she liked irony in her world. That having been one of our semester's topics, she and I were both delighted. ☺

Teaching with Accent

Jie Li

I speak English with Chinese accent, so do I teach composition with same accent. For this deficit, I suffered a long time. When I first began to teach first-year composition, I tried to Americanize my speaking, thinking, and teaching. After a time, I found that my attempt made things worse. I felt less confident because I didn't seem to be myself, losing control of my tongue and my mind. Uncertainty accompanied and tortured me. I realized that "playing American" was not a technique I could acquire with ease. I decided to teach with accent, giving my class a style typical of my culture.

I taught writing for about ten years in China before I became a student and a teaching assistant in the rhetoric and writing program in an American midwestern university. The current-traditional rhetoric still dominated writing instruction in my home university. Product is valued over process; grammar is put to the fore.

Jie Li, Chinese, is a second-year doctoral student in the Rhetoric and Writing Program, Bowling Green State University. Before studying in the States, she taught writing for 11 years at Xi'an International Studies University, China, where she served as Director of the Writing Center. Her research interests include pedagogies, culture and rhetoric, L2 writing, and writing assessment.

Students demonstrated a strong sense of accuracy and good command of sentence strategies because the teaching mode emphasized structure and rules. Admittedly, content and rhetoric did not get due attention, but, in their papers, Chinese students utilized different sentence structures, such as cleft sentences, inversions, parallel and balanced sentences, loose and periodic sentences. In my American students' works, I didn't find many effective sentences, so the beauty and musicology of the language was not fully displayed. In China, the large student population and test-driven educational system forced Chinese students to develop autonomy as well. Sifting through my memories, I decided to try out some of the methods I used in China. My motto was to make the best use of my advantages and bypass my disadvantages.

Adopting my own teaching method came after a long time of observation. I walked into the classroom, prepared but still frustrated because of my accent. First-year students brought to class their previous perceptions about writing and every second judged my ability or inability to teach. I saw doubtful and resistant eyes, but some smiling faces in the class were an incentive to do a good job. I taught the hard way: I spent far more time than my colleagues with and on my students to compensate for my own deficit. I prepared carefully, read every outline and draft they composed, responded to their questions in detail, held more conferences than required, and had a lot of online exchanges. Gradually, students paid more attention to what I taught than to my accent, and their writing improved too, though not tremendously.

My hard work brought about nice changes, but I found it was a big mistake to adopt fully what I had learned from the composition instructors' workshop. Students tended to be lazy and lacked motivation. I needed ways that fit my students and ensured better outcomes. I noted a big problem with process pedagogy even though the method nurtures students in many ways: teachers care about students' needs, creating various writing activities that help to build up their product. However, students become very dependent on teachers, which prevents them from developing critical thinking abilities. I found I thought and even wrote more than some of the students. Now and then students said, "I didn't fix this problem because you didn't mark it in my draft," or "I only looked at the part you pointed out and didn't realize I had the same problem in other areas." Some students procrastinated on revising until the last minute. In spite of the strengths of procedural pedagogy, its shortcomings in my eyes were equally prominent and worth attention.

Using my own cultural and educational background, I practiced motivating students by giving them some pressure and by connecting teaching with assessment. For example, I used a daily timeline to keep all students on the same page. I asked students to make progress reports. It worked well with serious students at first, and later most students formed the habit of finishing revisions on time. I also included mini-lessons on grammar and checked on them in evaluation. I taught students to write effective sentences and added sentence skills to the evaluative criteria. Students' papers seemed to come to life, and I could tell one paper from another. Students wrote in the evaluation saying they understood voice and style through the exercises. I was very excited to learn from students that grammar was not boring and intimidating but a magic touch.

I learned from the American system as well. One of my students, Sarah, didn't know how to write argument; her arguments were narratives. I worked with her

many times in my office, and finally she turned out to be one of the three strongest writers in the class. To my surprise, I got to know later that my practice was compatible to procedural composition studies. I noticed her to be the most frequent visitor to my office, and she worked more efficiently when she wrote in front of me. Later, she said it was because she wanted to impress me with her best work. In a sense, the office was like an examination site: she felt the pressure but did better. Used properly, pressure could turn into power.

All my students passed the portfolio evaluation. A big relief. A few students got so excited that they gave me a big hug and expressed their wish to invite me to have coffee together. I learned that students valued accomplishment, just like us! When I stepped into the writing class in the spring semester, I found some familiar faces in the new room. They became the most active and responsive students, taking leads in many interactive activities. I really appreciated their tolerance of my accent, my localized accent. ☺

Space

Dominique Zino

I teach first-year composition: thesis statements, paragraph structure, the research paper. This semester, though, I've found myself thinking a lot about outer space.

The universe that lies between me and my students measures approximately fifteen feet, from the front edge of my desk to the back wall of the classroom. At the beginning of every class, no matter how many times I encourage them to move, there are students who inevitably choose to sit against that wall, to define themselves in relation to it. There are those who rest against it to stabilize their sleep-deprived, bobbing heads; those who slide forward, legs extended, watching me, reflecting the pitch and volume of my voice in their wide eyes, yet refusing to speak; and then those who wriggle as far back in their seats as possible, notebooks close to their chests, heads down, bodies compact and closed off. This is the group that is hardest to coax off the wall. If that wall weren't there, they would happily put the length of the long linoleum-tiled hallway between us.

I speak too loudly in class. Sometimes just because I'm excited or am trying to rouse a dozing student at the end of the day but most of the time because I feel as if the success of my class depends on my ability to project across this cavernous space to the people in the back row. This space belongs neither to them nor to me. It's ethereal and yet dense with questions left unasked, relationships gone unexplored, topics waiting to be mined. For the first few weeks of school, we simply operate around it.

For one assignment I ask my students to go out into their neighborhoods and record a conversation between themselves and a person who interests them: a

Dominique Zino is a doctoral candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City where she is working toward a dissertation on nineteenth-century American memoir and self-portraiture (verbal and visual). She teaches composition, creative writing, and American literature at Queens College, CUNY.

friend, a neighbor, a local store owner. These are not to be “interviews” but will be developed into portraits. I use Studs Terkel’s *Division Street: America* to model how these written portraits might be composed. In the forward to Terkel’s book, Alex Horowitz writes that the point of Terkel’s project was not just to ask a list of questions; he was in the business of “excavating the human soul” (xvi). I remember Natalie Goldberg’s advice that internalizing overheard language is the way we learn to write, so I read this phrase multiple times. “Excavating the human soul,” I repeat into the great wide open. In the last fifteen minutes of class, I decide we should not wait to start our portraits at home. Assigning each student a partner, they get up (groans are audible) and sit face to face with a classmate.

“Ask your partners to tell you about a really important moment in their lives, where something changed for them; ask them about their mothers, about their favorite breakfast food—but ask in a way that you don’t allow for a one-sentence answer. Get them to tell you a story. Put their words on paper.”

I walk around the perimeter of the room, the center now filled with desks, listening to the buzzing and scratching of pens punctuated with the occasional burst of laughter. I loom closer to each pair, yet they are looking directly at one another, not at me. They don’t need me.

The portraits they bring back to class display some of the most effective writing they have done so far: lively, provocative, and thoughtful sketches of a parent’s experience migrating to America, a music teacher’s enthusiasm for playing the drums, a peer’s struggle to make friends. Students quote from their conversations and narrate them as well. They listen carefully and hold themselves accountable for what they transcribe. They can see who they are writing about, shake the person’s hand, smell his breath. Suddenly, the focus is not solely on the student’s abilities (or weaknesses) as a writer. As a result, I think, they see their task more clearly. They have a responsibility to illustrate, as accurately as they can from their interaction with this person, a life. The empty page apparently seems much less daunting to them this time around.

I will continue to have students to coax off the back wall and navigate through the spaces that threaten to isolate us. Yet, in making our course about listening deeply, with careful consideration, I hope that the gulf between us is a space into which my students feel welcomed, one they will increasingly want to enter. ☺

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Composition Class 7:45AM

Joonna Smitherman Trapp

Perched in rows, puffed against cold,
they politely listen to my lone warble,
heads cocked, eyelids half closed.
One note elicits twitters, a sort of song.

Feathers smooth. One sings and another,
then another on our vibrating wire.

Joonna Smitherman Trapp is the incoming co-editor of JAEPL and also the new Chair of English and Foreign Languages at Waynesburg University in Pennsylvania. She is currently working on recovering popular oratory of the old South on the Lyceum circuit.

Manuscript Submission Information for Volume 16

Deadline	January 31, 2010
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, 5000 words, including works cited
Documentation Style	Current <i>MLA Style Manual</i>
Copies	Electronic submission in rich text format (RTF) Special Sections: Book reviews (1000 words) are determined by book review editor. "Connecting" editor (hwalker@messiah.edu) determines 500-1000 word personal essays.
Editorial Report	Within 8–12 weeks
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