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JAEPL, Vol. 21, Winter 2015-2016

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JAEPL



The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

SPECIAL SECTION: RHETORIC AND ETHICS

Reconsidering Virtue, John M. Duffy

Why Rhetoric and Ethics? Revisiting History/Revising Pedagogy, Lois Agnew

Being There: Mindfulness as Ethical Classroom Practice, Paula Mathieu

Composition as a Spiritual Discipline, Scott Wagar

Buddhism's Pedagogical Contribution to Mindfulness, Erec Smith

'Alas, Not Yours to Have': Problems with Audience in High-Stakes Writing Tests and the Promise of Felt Sense, Peter H. Khost

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Toward a Poetics and Pedagogy of Sound: Students as Production Engineers in the Literature Classroom, Karen Lee Osborne

Out of the Box: My Mom's Letter, Robert M. Randolph

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The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

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JAEPL

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

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

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

Topics of interest include but are not limited to:

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- New applications of writing & rhetoric
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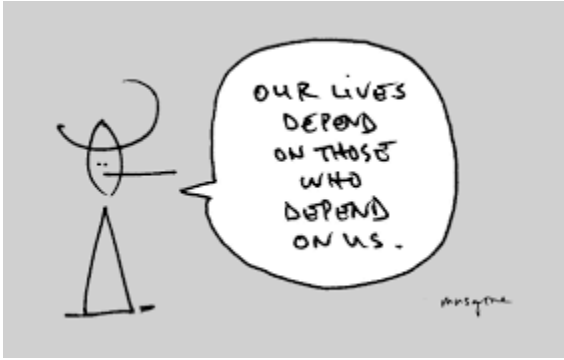
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EDITORS' MESSAGE

This issue features a five-essay special-topic section on rhetoric and ethics, inspired by a panel of AEPL friends who presented at the 2015 Conference of College Composition and Communication. Presenter Paula Mathieu specifically connected rhetoric and ethics to the research that Christy Wenger and other AEPL members in the Writing and Mindfulness Network have been doing. The topic recurred in several presentations at our 2015 summer AEPL Conference in Estes Park, CO, with its commemorative discussions of James Moffett's influence upon how we teach.



As usual, Laurence Musgrove's inimical Tex sums up the basic premise of our section topic with laconic precision: the inevitability of human interdependence. This premise seems particularly compelling as the ongoing presidential campaign strains the outmost limits of rhetoric and ethics alike.

Appropriately, John Duffy leads with a strong call

for writing pedagogues to recover the ancient rhetorical concept of *arête*—virtue—which found its most widely received articulation in Quintilian's assertion that rhetoric must exemplify the good person speaking well. *JAEPL* readers have long espoused this ideal with their insistence that we cannot separate language instruction from our values or from the human spirit that seeks a common good for all. We know you will find Duffy's call inspiring as well as affirming.

Lois Agnew, longtime reviewer for *JAEPL* manuscripts, follows with an examination of how an academic program might not only center upon rhetoric—as many composition programs in the nation do—but how such a program might place ethical training at the center of its mission as well. Ever a pragmatic idealist, Agnew reveals the fine quality of administrative thinking that must go into such a project.

Paula Mathieu, another composition program administrator, argues for the role that mindfulness plays in sustaining the connection between rhetoric and ethics, especially in the task of training new teaching assistants. She expands upon the same clear connections among mindfulness, spiritual writing, and neuroscience that many *JAEPL* contributors have done as she maps out her philosophy of writing pedagogy.

Taking up this philosophical thread, Scott Wagar weaves it into an argument for claiming composition studies as a spiritual discipline. He invites the kinds of reflection, compassion, and connectedness that even agnostics or secularists won't dismiss because of the sensible ties his claims make to humanistic ethical systems of belief. Erec Smith's fascinating work with the second chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* takes Wagar's argument beyond the realm of Western thinking, creating another link to the East-West dialog that AEPL has fostered from its beginnings. Smith sees a striking similitude between the

rhetorical concept of *Kairos* and the carefully delineated analysis that “The True Aspect of All Phenomena” conducts in its explanation of how the key concept of “interbeing” functions.

Peter Khost’s complex and incisive critique of how standardized testing truncates young writers’ perceptions of audience takes the progression of articles in this issue back again to era of the classics, but with a contemporary spin. Khost argues for a new application of “felt sense.” He illustrates that application through a new interpretation of the Orpheus myth that will have *JAEPL* readers revisiting his discussion again and again to study the pedagogical interventions he suggests.

This issue moves only a few short steps from rhetoric and ethics to teaching and learning, with a focus on audience that also distinguishes Sheri Rysdam’s and Lisa Johnson-Shull’s writing-center(ed) research on instructors’ response to students’ drafts. The insights they offer require us to consider how much of our response written to students is past-centric rather than forward-oriented in our efforts to help young writers develop.

Meanwhile, Mark Noe’s project in autoethnography in a university at the Mexico-Texas border shows why we should give students a genuine audience for their writing and how we can guide them toward joining greater cultural debates. His own autoethnography about informing himself of the pedagogies that enable his students to examine where their lives merge with critical texts mirrors what he achieves in his classroom. At the same time, Noe points to the question that Irene Lietz asks in her Midwestern American classroom: What are the potential long-term effects of a critical pedagogy that asks students to go beyond their cultural comfort zones? The answers that Lietz’s case study offers us will give us pause over the political debates the media are heightening at this political moment in our nation.

Next, underscoring a method that teaches students to forge interdependencies in her literature classroom, Karen Osborne’s thoughtful experiment enhances the powers of reading poetry. She asks students to record their oral interpretation of a poem they choose. Then she asks them to pair up with partners to become sound-production editors who aim to enhance each other’s readings. The result gently illustrates what students can achieve by collaborating rather than competing—a life lesson that does not get lost in the context of this issue’s foregoing essays.

We urge you as well to turn to our regularly featured sections. Robert Randolph’s “out of the Box” reflection on the inspiration a letter from his mother provided him speaks to anyone whose language background differs from the academic discourse we practice daily. New book-review editor Julie Nichols brings together a collection of volumes that invite “ethical reading.” And Helen Walker, in her final editorship of “Connecting,” rewards us with glimpses into the professional moments that sustain us.

Don’t forget also to inform yourself about this summer’s fast-approaching AEPL Conference at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, June 23-26. Organizers are hard at work planning another memorable experience, shaped by the theme of “Deep Reading: Reinventing Identity through Imagination.” We hope to see you there!



FOND FAREWELLS

Judith Halden-Sullivan and Helen Walker: Section Editors and Friends

People move on. We live with this simple fact. However, we cannot let our two friends—Judith Halden-Sullivan and Helen Walker—slip away too quietly. Neither our readers nor we would allow it, without expressing our heartfelt appreciation for their years of fine work.



Judith Halden-Sullivan

Judith Halden-Sullivan first appeared as book editor in Vol. 11 of *JAEPL*, taking over for Keith Rhodes. Since 2006, her discerning eye and thoughtful guidance have provided readers and reviewers alike with an assortment of texts that kept us informed of the kindred minds who further the scholarship we value so highly. Judy also brought to light many of our own colleagues' book-length publications, so we could discover how the shorter work that we have read earlier in these pages came to full fruition.

Judy continues as Professor of English at Millersville University of Pennsylvania, where she teaches courses in undergraduate composition, as well as seminars in rhetoric and contemporary American poetry. As she returns to her research with Gadamer, Heidegger, and Bakhtin—and her passions for gardening, film, and art history—we hope she will maintain her ties with *JAEPL*. We boldly suggest that she may even favor us with a manuscript, some of her poetry, or dare we say, even a book review or two.

Judy wrapped up her final duties as book editor in Vol. 20, but not before she played an instrumental role in bringing our new book editor, Julie Nichols, to Vol. 21.



Helen Walker

Meanwhile, Helen Walker pioneered *JAEPL*'s "Connecting" section back in 2002, with Vol. 7. When incoming editors Linda Calendrillo and Kristie Fleckenstein responded to readers' keen interest in stories and poetic vignettes from the life of teaching and learning, Helen was the natural choice as collector-in-chief. She always added her own gifts as raconteur to the section, and her voice has become synonymous with "Connecting."

Rumor has it that Helen is retiring from her rich and varied career as Professor of English at Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, PA. Since Helen started the rumor herself, it may prove true. But she will hardly idle away her time. She has taught environmental literature as well as academic, creative, and dramatic writing—and most likely, she will go on holding writing retreats at her home in the woods near East Berlin. She remains deeply committed to her work with young women of inner-city Harrisburg. And *JAEPL* readers know that Helen won't surrender her research with teachers and special-needs orphans in Kenya. Retired indeed.

Helen turns the “Connecting” editorship over to Christy Wenger, who also volunteers her leadership in AEPL as newly elected treasurer.

We will truly miss Judy and Helen, but we thank them for their long dedication to the journal and to AEPL. Their contributions and their friendship have enriched our lives, and they will go on to touch the lives of others. At the same time, if we ever grow lonesome for them, all we need do is get on the Web at <http://trace.tennessee.edu/jaepl/>, where we can visit the volumes they so generously helped bring into print.

Thank you, Judy and Helen. And best of luck in your next ventures!



RHETORIC & ETHICS

Reconsidering Virtue

John M. Duffy

For some time now, I have been trying to work out a theory of rhetorical ethics, a way of thinking and talking about ethical discourse that we might bring to our students and that might inform the way we teach writing and argument. I've been interested in this project for two reasons: first, because the deeply polarized political and cultural moment in which we live seems ripe for a fresh way of making public arguments. Most people would agree, I think, that our present public discourse is deeply dysfunctional. And yet there seems to be little in the way of repair beyond the perfunctory, mostly fruitless calls for greater civility. I don't know if we in Writing Studies can do better in improving the debased state of public discourse, but certainly we are intellectually and structurally positioned to do so.

Intellectually, we find ourselves in the twenty-first century United States as the professional inheritors, the custodians or keepers, of the rhetorical tradition. We are charged with teaching those practices that are the materials of public argument, whether made in a college classroom, or in a county courthouse, or in the editorial pages of the *New York Times*. We know what good arguments look like, we know how to make them, and we certainly know how to teach them.

Structurally, there is nothing else quite like us. Our courses in writing and rhetoric are required at most post-secondary institutions, and our classrooms are typically bursting at the seams. In her 1998 essay, "Composition in the University," Sharon Crowley, citing data indicating that more than twelve million students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, suggested that if just a quarter of those students were enrolled in freshman composition courses, enrollment in writing courses would exceed four million students (1). Using Crowley's same calculations today, when The National Center of Education Statistics reports that twenty-one million students are enrolled in 4,495 degree granting institutions as of 2009-2010 ("Fast Facts"), the number of students in our classes is more than five million annually. Annually! Who is better positioned then, structurally and intellectually, to shape the future of public argument in the United States than us?

But what have we done with these advantages? Have we fully engaged our students in the ethical dimensions of writing and rhetoric? Have we explored with students the construction of the ethical identities of the speaker and the writer? Have we examined the ethical entailments of speech and writing? I would argue we have not, and so I am looking for a way to talk about rhetorical ethics that will resonate with our colleagues and with our students.

The second reason I have been trying to work out a theory of rhetorical ethics is because I've come to believe that in teaching writing, we are, in fact, already doing ethics, by which I mean the teaching of writing is necessarily and inescapably the teaching of ethical discourse. When we teach claims, for example, we are teaching students to

frame their arguments honestly and without deception. When we teach counter-arguments, we are asking students to inhabit, at least for a while, the perspective of another, which calls for empathy and generosity. When we teach practices of revision, we are encouraging students toward habits of reflection, discernment, and, as Paula Matthieu has advised, mindfulness (“Excavating Indoor Voices”). To teach writing, in this view, is to be always and already teaching ethics. And so I am looking for a language in which to make explicit that which is often implicit.

But to speak of ethics in the writing course raises immediate questions: What do we mean by ethics? What do we mean ethical discourse? Upon what intellectual traditions do we draw? If we would say to students, colleagues, and deans, as I believe we should, that our classes are a site for learning and practicing ethical arguments, and if we would say to the general public and to the legislators who fund our public institutions, as I think we should, that our classes will help students succeed in college but will also prepare them beyond college to contribute to civic arguments concerning the common good, what answer would we offer if they challenged us to define what we mean, exactly, by “ethics”?

Western moral philosophy has made available different answers to that question, but two traditions stand apart from the rest, consequentialism and deontology (LaFollette, 6). The latter, deontology, is the ethics of rules and obligations. In this conception, moral judgments are categorical and absolute. What is good is good without qualification; for an action to be considered good it must be good for all people in all situations and circumstances. Think of “telling the truth” or “keeping one’s promises” as examples. There are no contingent conditions or moral ambiguities in which those rules may be transgressed. If a murderer asks you where his intended victim is hiding, you do not lie to him because lying is wrong—categorically (Shafer-Landau, 156).

But moral absolutes are not a foundation for an ethics of rhetoric, not if we understand the functions of rhetoric to go beyond communicating received truths. Were we to import deontological ethics to the writing classroom, we would in effect tell students that ethical arguments are guided by inflexible rules, that moral ambiguities can be resolved by the applications of these rules, and that situation, context, and audience are subordinate to categorical imperatives. But moral ambiguities are often the impetus for rhetorical action, and we need rhetoric most when we can discern no rules or certain paths to follow. Deontological ethics seems more doctrinal than rhetorical, and does not offer us, in my view, an ethical language we can use.

The second major tradition in Western moral philosophy is the ethics of outcomes, or consequentialism. In this conception, the morality of an action is contingent on its consequences.¹ What will happen if I tell this lie? Who will be hurt, or spared from hurt? What harms will I cause by lying, and which would I prevent? In an ethics of consequences, an action is judged to be morally right if it produces a good outcome, and morally wrong if it results in a bad consequence (Shafer-Landau, 112). Unlike deontology, then, consequen-

1. This is sometimes known as “act-consequentialism,” in which the “moral rightness” of an act is dependent on good outcomes. In contrast, “rule-consequentialism” holds that the rightness of an act depends not on the consequences of that action but rather on the consequences of following a particular code of rules. See Hooker, 183.

tialism admits contingencies and ambiguities, bringing it closer to rhetoric and providing perhaps a firmer foundation for the development of a rhetorical ethics.

And yet do we teach students to judge their writing solely on the basis of its outcomes? In *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, Edwin Black tells the story of one John Jay Chapman, who read an account of “a particularly brutal lynching” of a black man by a white mob in Coatesville, Pennsylvania in 1911 (78). Chapman had no connection to the victim or to Coatesville, but the account so disturbed him that as the first anniversary of the murder approached, Chapman announced to his family that he was going to Coatesville to hold a prayer meeting and deliver a public address to commemorate the terrible event. He was not welcomed in the town, and had trouble finding a location from which to speak. Eventually, he rented a storefront and delivered his address to exactly three people: a woman who had accompanied him to Coatesville, an elderly African-American woman, and a third, unidentified person who Black says was believed to be a local spy. In terms of immediate outcomes, writes Black, the speech was a failure: the audience was tiny, the critical response negligible, and the social and political effects of the oration virtually nil.

And yet the speech, Black concludes, should not be judged on the basis of its immediate effects. Rather, Chapman’s speech should be understood as part of a broader cultural dialogue, one conducted over time and distances of the American moral landscape, and one that was joined at different moments, Black argues, by Jefferson, Lincoln, Melville, and Faulkner. In this sense, the audience for the speech was not those few gathered in the Coatesville storefront but rather all those “interested in a meaningful interpretation of history and moral status of this country” (84). Moreover, the dialogue to which John Jay Chapman contributed continues to this day, notes Black, meaning that the speech continues to be read, its audience continues to grow, and its transformative possibilities, its effects and outcomes, have yet to be fully realized.

Those of us who teach writing are not indifferent to effects and outcomes. Certainly we try to help students achieve good results in their writing, helping our students write accomplished college papers, successful application essays, award winning scholarships, and the like. But we also teach our students—I am about to generalize here, but not too inaccurately, I hope—that they may someday write, whether as citizens, as activists, as parents, for outcomes that likely will not be achieved. They may someday write for lost causes, knowing their words will not be heard, and their letters, essays, and petitions will be unread. And yet they may write regardless, our students, compelled by deeper motives than outcomes and effects. In such instances, our students’ writing will be judged not simply by results, the consequentialist ethic, but by the qualities of courage, compassion, and conviction in their written work. An ethics of rhetoric, I mean to suggest, should account for more than consequences.

My summaries of both traditions are oversimplified and perhaps crude, yet I do not see either providing a foundation for rhetorical ethics. And so far, neither has. So where does that leave us? I said earlier that to teach writing is to teach, by definition, the practices of such things as honesty, empathy, and discernment; of generosity, reflection, and mindfulness. There is a word for such practices. They are examples of what Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* called “virtues,” and which are today the focus of that branch of moral philosophy known as “virtue ethics.”

A virtue is a character trait, a disposition, a way of living that, as the philosopher Rosalind Hursthouse puts it, “goes all the way down” in defining the character of the moral agent (12). Virtues are characteristics such as truthfulness, judgment, and wisdom that provide answers to the questions, “What kind of person do I want to be?” and “How should I live my life?” And since character is not formed in isolation, the practices of virtue speak as well to the values of the community, its traditions, narratives, and beliefs (Velasquez et al.). To the extent that virtues become discursive acts, practices of ethical speech and writing, we may think of them as “rhetorical virtues.”

In the language of the virtues, we have a conception of ethics that is consonant with rhetorical practice. That is, the practice of rhetorical virtues is based not on rules, because good writers know when to break rules, nor on the calculation of outcomes, because at times we must write without fear of consequences. The virtues offer instead a conception of ethics that is context-dependent, responsive to the kairotic moment, social in nature, and developed, according to Aristotle, through instruction, practice, and habit.

The language of rhetorical virtues provides a vocabulary in which we and our students can think, write, and argue in ways that might move us beyond the corrosive rhetoric of our polarized cultural moment toward more productive ways of reasoning and writing.² In virtue-inflected arguments about race, poverty, or same-sex marriage, for example, topics on which students’ positions are often calcified long before they enter our classrooms, we may invite students to argue not on the basis of rigid ideologies, but rather in accordance with the discursive practices of tolerance, caring, open-mindedness, and more. In an ethics of rhetorical virtue, we encourage students (and we are encouraged ourselves) to speak and write less in the language of dogma, less in the language of tribe, and more the discourses of respectfulness, fair-mindedness, and regard for others, especially those others whose views are antithetical to our own. Nor does this mean we compromise our deepest values or argue any less passionately for our causes. Righteous anger can also be a virtue, called upon in the right moment, for the right audience, for the right purpose.

I am aware that many in the post-modern academy are skeptical of the term “virtue.” I understand the skepticism. When I first began encountering the word, virtue, I was reminded of what the poet Marianne Moore said about poetry: “I, too, dislike it.” Virtue has been associated with Christian fundamentalism, with right-wing punditry, and with the subjugation of women, among other things. There are reasons why the term “virtue” is not exactly trending in Writing Studies.

The historical baggage of the word should indeed give us pause. But it should not, I submit, cause us to reject the tradition. While is true, for example, that virtue is often associated with Christian doctrine, suggesting that it excludes or is less relevant to those outside the Christian faith, the virtues may be traced back to the decidedly non-Christian ancient Greeks, and to the Confucian concepts of *de* and *dexing* (roughly, “virtuous conduct” and “virtuous character”) before that (Lai, 15). And there are traditions of virtue in Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish, Ba’hai, and other faiths. There is nothing exclusively Christian about virtue.

2. I am indebted to Lois Agnew for this insight.

And while the concept of “virtue” has been appropriated as an ideological instrument by those on the political right—William Bennett’s best-selling *The Book of Virtues*, for example, was criticized for representing virtue as divorced from political struggle and social action (Porter)—appropriation of a word is not ownership. If five million students left our classrooms every year talking about the truthfulness of claims, the integrity of evidence, the generosity of trying to understand the arguments of the other side, I am willing to bet the word “virtue” would take on new meanings in American cultural and political life.

And, finally, while virtue has been used historically as a trope for subjugating and controlling women—the British historian Lynne Abrams reminds us that the “ideal woman” in Victorian England was confined to the home and expected to enact the virtues of “piety, patience, frugality, and industry” (“Ideals of Womanhood”)—does the misuse of a word in one era forever fix its meanings for future generations? Do we understand words to be frozen in historical amber, never to be reconceived and animated with fresh meanings? Contemporary philosophers such as Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, Julia Annas, and others have recovered the word “virtue” and given it a central place in their moral theories. Are such acts of recovery foreclosed to us? Or can we also redeem and rehabilitate words of our choosing, as we have redeemed and rehabilitated “rhetoric,” to use in our own time, for our own purposes?

Whether or not the concept of virtue will find a place in Writing Studies remains to be seen. I have tried to suggest that it provides a language for thinking about the ethics of rhetorical practice, and that it may offer us a way out of the blind alleys of our current dysfunctional discourse. But I think it finally does more than that. In the tradition of the virtues we find, or so it seems to me, the very *telos* or purpose of our work as teachers and scholars of writing: why we do what we do. Why do we care so deeply about the teaching of writing? Toward what ends do we work? What visions move and animate us. To speak to those ends and visions, and conclude these remarks, I will quote a wonderfully eloquent passage from Robert Yagelski’s “A Thousand Writers Writing,” to which I was introduced when reading Don J. Kramer’s equally eloquent essay “Just Comp.” In Yagelski’s essay he writes:

If the overriding purpose of formal education is to enable us to imagine and create just and sustainable communities that contribute to our individual and collective well-being . . . then teaching writing cannot be defined exclusively by the widely accepted but limited goals of producing effective communicators and academically successful learners for the existing consumer-oriented culture and for workplaces defined by economic globalization . . . Rather, writing instruction, like schooling in general, should ultimately be about creating a better world. (8)

In the ethical tradition of the virtues we are offered a language, those of us teaching writing, for the rhetorical work of creating that better world.



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Why Rhetoric and Ethics? Revisiting History/Revising Pedagogy

Lois Agnew

Any attempt to revitalize the relationship between rhetoric and ethics is challenged by traditional depictions of Western rhetorical history. Those accounts often prod us toward well-known binary frameworks that suggest that rhetoric and ethics are not strong allies, and may even have antithetical goals: closed hand/open fist, truth/contingency, certain knowledge/situated judgment. It is critical for our field to revisit rhetorical history in order to challenge the strict opposition between rhetoric and ethics that has been inscribed in our tradition since Plato's attack on the sophists. This challenge can highlight a longstanding interest in rhetoric's role in cultivating an ethical disposition and fostering respectful relationships with people with whom one does not agree—a role that includes a delicate balance between somewhat stable notions of appropriate conduct and the intrinsically bounded, contextual, and contingent nature of rhetoric.

Although rhetoric's complex ethical function has historically been acknowledged by many traditions, I share John Duffy's view that ethics merits greater attention from the field of rhetoric and writing studies. My focus in this presentation is on the particular significance this area of inquiry can have for the undergraduate writing major. The establishment of majors in writing has signaled our field's coming of age. Thomas Moriarty and Greg Giberson identify this moment as "a milestone," adding, "We finally have a place in the undergraduate catalog, on the department Web site, a prominent place that puts us on equal footing with other disciplines" (204). These majors offer the field's response to David Fleming's 1998 essay, "Rhetoric as a Course of Study," in which Fleming identifies the establishment of a major as a central way in which rhetoric's pedagogical mission can be recaptured after a period of stagnation in the 1990s. Fleming's article depicts a cultural moment in which rhetoric's presence in English departments is confined to "the two extremes of higher education: at one end, a fifteen-week course on writing for incoming freshmen; at the other, a multi-year program of advanced study for PhD students. Between the two, there is little or nothing" (173). Fleming proposes that this void can best be filled by an undergraduate major, which could constitute a true "test for the revival of rhetoric in English Departments" (173). The fifteen years following Fleming's essay reveal that undergraduate majors have indeed become a feature of rhetoric's revival in a number of institutions across the country.

The undergraduate major has expanded the territory of the field through the development of a curriculum supporting the wide array of future careers that majors might pursue; this in turn extends a pattern of diversity among ways of approaching research and pedagogy that have long existed in the field as a result of competing visions of rhetoric's scope and mission. Richard Fulkerson's 2005 characterization of the field concludes with an emphasis on fragmentation: "Composition studies is a less unified field than it was a decade ago. We differ about what our courses are supposed to achieve, about how effective writing is best produced, about what an effective classroom looks like, and

about what it means to make knowledge” (680–81). David Beard also emphasizes disciplinary fragmentation, but from the perspective of the varied institutional locations that house rhetorical studies. Beard supports his claim that “fragmentation may be the norm in rhetorical education” (132) with a detailed explication of the varying locations where rhetoric may be found across the university, a point that leads him to conclude, “As much as rhetoric is part of the core of our discipline, it is also our greatest liability” (130). Beard sees the fragmentation revealed in his survey as particularly significant for writing programs that are considering the establishment of writing majors, arguing that “institutional realities militate against the possibility of such a thing” (149).

While the growth of writing majors suggests that Beard’s pessimism may be misplaced, it is the case that the fractured identities of rhetoric and composition, writing studies, and English studies are particularly challenging for undergraduate students to navigate. More than those disciplines focused on the mastery of the mastery of discrete content, our field’s emphasis on productive knowledge has left the central goals of the major open to debate. These discussions, taking place in conference presentations, journals, and edited collections, as well as in the hallways and conference rooms of the departments in which writing majors are housed, demonstrate the vitality of our discipline and the multiple points of entry that we can offer to undergraduate students as they prepare for their academic, professional, and public lives. At the same time, many people have sought unifying principles that will provide the undergraduate major with a more definite identity. A number of scholars argue that rhetoric provides a sufficient focus, but rhetoric’s well-known flexibility allows for its diffusion across the curriculum in ways that are sometimes imperceptible to students and teachers alike. Rhetoric has often been connected to the notion of a major that promotes engagement with civic life (Fleming, Moriarty/Giberson), but it has also been conceived as offering a framework for a major focused on professional writing (Baker and Henning) and establishing a disciplinary link to other liberal arts disciplines. While these variations reflect rhetoric’s strength and adaptability, the possibility also exists that the pervasive use of the term rhetoric will promote a type of invisibility that will result in a major without any organizing principle.

Such an organizing principle can be provided by a focus on rhetoric and ethics. The ethical concerns that surround language use are relevant to students whose primary interests lie in professional communication, civic writing, rhetorical history, and creative nonfiction. Weaving ethical concerns into the fabric of the writing major can provide the unifying framework that every undergraduate major needs, while providing students with space to pursue a wide array of objectives. This approach holds significant benefit for students, as it offers both historical perspective and a nuanced and contextually sensitive understanding of contemporary issues that surround writing and language. Tracking complicated debates about language, identity, and ethics that have taken place across centuries of rhetoric’s development can help students challenge the binaries that they often encounter in contemporary discussions of language and public life. Students who explore the ethical complexities that surround language are uniquely positioned to be more successful and sensitive users of language in various civic, professional, personal, and academic contexts.

This assumption has provided the basis for the development of a 400-level core course titled "Rhetoric and Ethics" in the Syracuse University writing and rhetoric major. Established six years ago in one of the first stand-alone writing programs in the country, the Syracuse Writing and Rhetoric major reflects the widely varying areas of expertise of the faculty and the diverse interests that our students bring to us. Prior to the development of the major, the upper-division curriculum included courses focused on professional and technical communication, new media, creative nonfiction, civic writing, and issues surrounding language, literacy, politics, and identity. While this assortment has promised new writing majors who are uncertain about their future aspirations with room to devise a course of study that makes sense to them, such breadth might have created so disparate an array of learning experiences that students would have difficulty seeing the connections among them. In order to support their understanding of these connections and to foster their exploration of options within the major, we developed a series of four core courses: a 200-level course that offers an introduction to rhetorical histories and concepts, 300-level courses in digital writing and professional writing, and a 400-level course on rhetoric and ethics.

The structure of the rhetoric and ethics course engages students with the task of connecting historical inquiry with their consideration of contemporary concerns, and it also encourages their reflection about the profound significance of language. At the beginning of the course, students explore rhetorical histories that assume links among language, character, and community, which provide models that help them consider the value that comes from taking language seriously, hold themselves accountable for their speech and writing, and imagine productive ways in which language can foster strong social relationships. This inquiry can also illuminate complexities that arise as individuals pursuing a vision of "the collective good" encounter others whose vision conflicts with theirs—and as communities defining the "good character" manifested in language simultaneously establish restrictions that implicitly connect deviance from the norm with moral deficiency.

Students' reflections on these topics are supported through their encounters with a range of historical texts dealing with themes that include rhetoric's civic responsibilities, the ethical challenges that inevitably surround acts of persuasion, the fraught historical relationship between rhetorical proficiency and character, and the reciprocal relationship between rhetorical technologies and cultures. Their thoughtful engagement with these texts provides students with a framework for recognizing a range of complex contemporary issues such as debates over language diversity, campus protests over censorship, digital circulation, the use of images to support persuasive purposes, and the challenges of providing rhetorical access for individuals with disabilities. Acknowledging the long and complex histories surrounding the relationship between rhetoric and ethics helps students recognize that contemporary issues function within intellectual contexts that might not be immediately apparent to them. Their ability to take those historical contexts into account as they respond to contemporary questions adds depth and breadth to their engagement with contemporary issues and promotes a useful awareness that every encounter with language has profound ethical significance. Attention to the vexed issues that have surrounded attempts to construct "ethical discourse" across centuries of rhetorical history can help students identify dominant lines of thought that have shaped

contemporary assumptions about how rhetoric functions in public life—an important step for undergraduate majors who are prepared to carry insights from our field into various careers and whose relationships with public life are in early stages of development.

This course's examination of the fraught relationship of rhetoric and ethics provides the type of cohesion many undergraduate writing majors lack, and it also offers students an opportunity for the type of critical reflection about language that they will need as individuals, professionals, and citizens. Asserting that this recognition is a fundamental goal of the writing major has important implications for our understanding of our broader disciplinary identity. Recognizing the centrality of ethics in rhetorical traditions and practices opens the path to a conception of a writing major and a discipline that acknowledges the breadth and variety that defines our discipline, while offering the important recognition that ethical concerns surround every language act and every manner of constructing a discipline that brings together language, images, persuasion, identity, technologies, and public life. Courses that attend to rhetoric's historic link with ethics provides students with an opportunity to recognize patterns of exclusion that have persistently appeared in the midst of idealistic visions of the power available through rhetorical education. At the same time, an awareness of the intricate interweaving of rhetoric and ethics illustrates rhetoric's potential to promote positive change in the world, and students are often better able to appreciate this possibility by investigating issues within a broad range of historical and cultural contexts.

An historical focus on rhetoric and ethics can help to orient our field and the undergraduate writing major toward a set of concerns that offer valuable coherence and a unified scope without limiting our inquiry to a linear historical narrative. This focus can also connect traditional areas of disciplinary inquiry with rhetorical practices that extend beyond the West and include communities that have not historically had access to formal education in civic oratory. The study of rhetoric and ethics immerses students in disciplinary history without restricting their understanding of the complexity of that history. It supports students in pursuing disparate goals while providing them with opportunities for shared inquiry that support their exploration of those goals. It also opens the path for idealistic visions of rhetoric's power and capacity for supporting the pursuit of justice, even as it tempers those visions with a realistic understanding that rhetorical skill has often been deployed for ends that are not just, rhetorical access has often been restricted rather than expansive, and rhetorical virtue has often been the subject of bitter contest rather than thoughtfully reasoned consensus.

It is vital to make undergraduate students aware that, while rhetoric has historically been viewed as a field of study that fosters skills that help people make arguments that win the day and provide individuals with suitable credentials for success, it has also been conceived and deployed as the vehicle for developing an ethical sensibility and promoting empathetic relationships. Students can gain a new communicative perspective through exploring rhetoric's ethical potential and recognizing challenges that have prevented this promise from being realized across centuries of rhetorical history. Such an exploration productively destabilizes students' established ways of thinking about argument, providing them with more complex and nuanced points of engagement with the communities in which they are situated.



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Being There: Mindfulness as Ethical Classroom Practice

Paula Mathieu

I begin with gratitude for the two essays preceding this one. When Lois Agnew writes about rhetorical history, pedagogy, or any subject for that matter, I find her to be both captivating and persuasive. Thank you, Lois, for all you do and teach. And my thanks also for John Duffy. John's work on the intersection of composition and ethics strikes me as critically urgent. If you haven't, you should read his wonderful article in the spring 2014 issue of the *Journal of Advanced Composition*, which details the tacit connections between composition and ethics and eloquently argues for a more explicit focus on ethics in our scholarship and public discourse.

I use some ideas from John's article as the springboard for my essay, which focuses on the intersection between ethics and mindfulness—which I define simply as “developing nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment while observing one's thoughts and emotions.”¹ John tells us:

. . .when we write for an audience. . . we propose a relationship with other human beings, our readers. And . . . we inevitably address, either explicitly and deliberately or implicitly and unintentionally, the questions that occupy moral philosophers: what kind of person do I want to be? How should I treat others? What are my commitments to my community? (218)

I would like to extend John's statement in ways I assume he would see as a friendly: When we teach writing, we *also* propose and enact relationships with other humans: our students and the larger community. And these propositions also imply ethical questions: what kind of teacher do I want to be? How should I treat my students? To whom do I feel committed?

John also writes the following: “To teach writing, then is to teach more than rhetorical strategies, and processes: it is equally to teach the ethical commitments that are enacted in the course of communicating with others” (219). I couldn't agree more.

But what exactly lies beyond rhetorical strategies and processes? *How* do we teach ethical commitments? Teaching and learning in a writing classroom is already complex and vexed, even more so if one considers the important ethical commitments that John discusses. Part of that complexity rests in the human interaction: each teacher and student brings accumulated past experiences, preconditioned responses, resistance and fears into every class. For example, a student might worry that she could never be the kind of writer she wants to be: What if my words have unintended affects? What if I'm too something (insert any negative self-talk word—stupid, lazy, distracted) to accomplish my goals? Such thoughts can cloud any genuine teaching interaction. In other words, there can be a significant gap between ethical intent and ethical effect. We as teachers might aim for ethical relations with our students, but our feedback on papers might ring

1. This definition draws from the definition used by John Kabat-Zinn.

to students as unnecessarily harsh or discouraging.² Our students might aim to create goodwill in an email with a professor, but by rushing to write between classes, the writer comes off as self-centered and sloppy.

The question I will explore here is what *else* should we teach besides rhetorical strategies and devices in order to enact more-ethical relationships in our classrooms? While there are numerous productive ways to respond to this question, my answer resides in issues of awareness and mindfulness.

Why mindfulness? For me, this relatively new research and teaching interest emerged from personal need and experience. After a challenging first semester as an assistant professor in fall 2001, I found myself hampered by negative self-talk and anxiety related to teaching. At the same time, I was preparing MA and PhD students to teach freshman composition for the first time. Similar to my struggles, many competent and skilled teachers with whom I worked excelled at teaching rhetorical strategies but stumbled when building productive working relationships with their students. This was sometimes out of fear (an inner rhetoric that told the teacher, "I'm not smart enough," or "I lack authority to teach these smart kids anything"), or other times out of self-involvement (one new teacher said that the best thing about teaching was hearing his own voice in the classroom). So for myself and for my new teachers, I increasingly have focused on awareness and mindfulness practices to help us pay attention to those "indoor voices" and perhaps revise them, working to develop compassion, and exploring empathy.³

What mindful practices share in common is that they're not about thinking. In fact, thinking and the intellect are the very problem they seek to counter. They are fundamentally about what could be called *awareness*. About being fully present—as a writer or a teacher—in the current moment, and not preoccupied with thoughts of the past or future. I would like to argue that mindfulness practices offer one way of teaching *awareness*, which is a necessary addition to the intellectual training we give to student writers and teachers of writing, especially if our goal is ethical teaching and writing.

I will spend my remaining pages justifying this argument and will do so from three sources: (1) scholarship within our discipline, (2) popular literature typically labeled as spiritual, and (3) scholarship in neuroscience.

Composition has had a longstanding relationship with various versions of what I would call awareness-focused practices (to distinguish them from thinking practices). Through reflective writing, for example, students are taught to gain metacognitive awareness of their processes as writers (Carroll). Writers such as Peter Elbow, Mary Rose O'Reilly, Barry Kroll, and Michael Blitz and Claude Mark Hurlbert have focused on teaching both hearts and minds, seeking ways that writing can help students make peace, end violence, or express authentic versions of themselves. Despite the importance of this work, the focus on awareness has remained at the periphery of the discipline. The past decade has seen a small but increasing interest in awareness practices in composition scholarship. I'll just offer a few examples. In 2002, Sheryl Fontaine wrote an essay that connects the Buddhist concept of "Beginner's Mind," to her work in the writing

2. Editors' note: see Rysdam and Johnson-Shull, this volume, on responding to student writing.

3. For more about my own teaching story and how I use mindfulness practices with new teachers, you can read my article in the same issue of *JAC* as John's essay on ethics.

classroom. Gesa Kirsch in 2009 argued that “mindfulness, introspection and reflection,” are practices helpful for discovering rhetorical agency. In 2013, Sheila Kennedy, Christy Wenger and Jen Consilio Kukler began the Writing and Mindfulness Network⁴, which is affiliated with the Assembly of Expanded Perspectives on Learning.⁵ The creation of this network, when announced on the WPA listserv, caused a lively and sometimes contentious discussion about the appropriateness of connections between mindfulness and writing. At the 2015 Conference on College Composition and Communication, at least three other panels centered on issues of mindfulness.

While these examples testify to the field’s interest in mindful awareness, it is Robert Yagelski’s 2011 *Writing as a Way of Being: Writing Instruction, Nonduality and the Crisis of Sustainability* that offers the most in-depth theoretical justification for why “ways of being” should be made central to composition studies. I encourage you all to read this deep and thoughtful book, but I will summarize a few key points. Yagelski argues that contemporary schooling and writing instruction are limited because of a tacit but unshaking reliance on a Cartesian separation between self and the world (Descartes’ famous “I think, therefore I am”), which encourages students to pursue notions of success that are antithetical to the common good. Writing and writing instruction, argue Yagelski, foster a disconnection between self and world, not because writing itself is an alienating activity, but because our teaching of it, despite advances in our theorizing, still prioritizes textual production over the experience of writing itself. Even social and post-process theories, argues Yagelski, fall short of their radical potential because of their tacit embrace of Cartesian dualism, which posits the self as an autonomous being, the world as separate and knowable from the knower, and language as a relatively unproblematic conduit for thought (45). Separating self from world, argues Yagelski, erases the connections humans have with each other, other living beings, and the planet itself, which have led to numerous problems, including our planet’s worsening environmental crisis.

Relevant to my argument is Yagelski’s insistence that the self who thinks is insufficient as the subject of writing studies—if we hope for a more ethical and sustainable world. In addition to thought, we need to teach awareness and nondualist ways of being, because thinking alone is dangerous to our very survival.

A strikingly similar argument is made somewhat differently in what can be called popular spiritual literature, namely Eckhart Tolle’s *The Power of Now* and its follow-up, *A New Earth*. Tolle argues that when Descartes expressed, “I think therefore I am,” he had not found ultimate truth but “he had, in fact, given expression to the most basic error: to equate thinking with Being and identity with thinking” (*Now* 15). Tolle sees thinking as a valuable tool, but one that has “become a disease” because most thinking is typically incessant and compulsive, and because people tend to equate their thoughts with self (*Now* 16). “Identification with your mind,” according to Tolle, “creates an opaque screen of labels, images, words, judgments and definitions that blocks all true relationships” (*Now* 15).

Hmm. . . Images? Words? Definitions? Judgments? Definitions? Those seem to be the stock and trade of a writing instructor. Does this argument mean that teaching writ-

4. See <https://aeplblog.wordpress.com/mindfulness-network/>

5. See <http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=175717>

ing is inherently problematic? Not necessarily. Tolle would argue that traditional forms of argumentation, based on pro-con, assertion and defense, can easily serve to uphold a “mind-made sense of self comprised of thought and emotion,” which he describes as the ego:

There is nothing that strengthens the ego more than being right. Being right is identification with a mental position—a perspective, an opinion, a judgment, a story. For you to be right of course, you need someone else to be wrong, and so the ego loves to make wrong in order to be right. . . . Being right puts you in a position of imagined moral superiority in relation to the person or situation that is being judged and found wanting. It is that sense of superiority that the ego craves and through which it enhances itself. (67)

To Tolle, arguing as a means to identify with mental positions is problematic. But aren't argument and deliberation essentially what rhetoric is? Am I suggesting that the entire discipline teaches ego and greater unconsciousness? No. But I am suggesting that teaching the *intellectual tools* of writing and rhetoric without accompanying *tools of awareness* makes writing instruction incomplete at best and dangerous at worst. In Tolle's viewpoint:

. . . you won't find absolute truth if you look for it where it cannot be found: in doctrines, ideologies, sets of rules or stories. What do all of these have in common? They are made up of thought. Thought can at best point to the truth, but it never *is* the truth. That's why Buddhists say, “The finger pointing to the moon is not the moon.” . . . (*Earth* 70).

In other words, thought, and writing (or any intellectual enterprise) are useful tools but incomplete; they need accompanying awareness in order to be ethical:

All that is required to become free of the ego is to be aware of it, since awareness and ego are incompatible. Awareness is the power that is concealed within the present moment. This is why we may also call it Presence. The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose, is to bring that power into this world. And this is also why becoming free of the ego cannot be made into a goal to be attained at some point in the future. Only Presence can free you of the ego, and you can only be present Now, not yesterday or tomorrow. Only Presence can undo the past in you and thus transform your state of consciousness. (78)

For those of you who may not find spiritual writing persuasive, I turn now to the field of neuroscience, where, once again, a similar argument is being made in slightly different terms. Much research is being done in this area, so I will highlight only a few examples. Several studies are currently under way on what are deemed “expert meditators” (those who have meditated more than 10,000 hours) to see how their brains differ from more ordinary people. An article in the November 2014 *Scientific American* outlines some of these studies (Matthieu, Lutz et al). One finding relevant to my argument is that brain scanning shows that the wandering voice in the head (or what I called our *indoor voices* in my *JAC* article) occur in a different part of the brain than that which registers awareness of distraction, which is also a different part of the brain than where focused thinking occurs. In other words, the awareness part of the brain is separate from the thinking part of the brain, and in advanced meditators, there is significant difference in the structures of how brains look (Matthieu, Lutz et al). In still other words, as

writing teachers, we have mostly been teaching the thinking parts of writing, but that is only part of the mental apparatus that our brains conduct.

In the book *Buddha's Brain, The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom*, Rick Hanson and Richard Mendius argue that ethical behavior requires both the ability to assert an argument (what we typically teach) and compassion, which both inhabit separate places in the brain:

Doing the right thing draws on both head and heart. Your prefrontal cortex ('head') forms values, makes plans, and gives instructions to the rest of the brain. Your limbic system ('heart') fuels the inner strength you use to do the right thing when it's hard, and supports heart-centered virtues such as courage, generosity and forgiveness. . . . people with damage to the limbic system have a hard time making certain ethical decisions . . . (Hanson and Mendius 146-7)

The authors argue for the necessary linkage between assertion and compassion—that one without the other is incomplete and both are mutually informing. They further argue that not only can compassion be found in the brain, it can be fed (and reinforced) or starved, depending upon learning and usage: "What happens in your mind changes your brain, both temporarily and in lasting ways; neurons that fire together wire together. And what happens in your brain changes your mind, since the brain and mind are a single integrated system" (18).

To conclude, my argument is that if we accept the premise that the teaching of writing is or should be connected to ethics, then writing studies must teach not only the thinking mind but also must help cultivate awareness, in the forms of breaks from thinking or observing one's thinking. Incorporating mindful practices into our classes and in our preparation of new teachers is both necessary and urgent. Briefly, the mindfulness practices that I have done and do use in classes include meditation and mindful breathing, discussion of empathy and how much or little we each have, readings on issues of awareness, and discussions of inner rhetoric and ways to revise the voices in our heads.

Taken together, mindful awareness practices can help us teach both the human and the being—which can lead to more ethical practice. As one of my students recently wrote: "Being mindful makes me feel as though I have a better grasp on my priorities. I can think more clearly about what is important and for what reasons. In this way, mindfulness translates into a more ethical version of myself."

And as a caveat, I am not suggesting that a mindfully informed writing class or world would be utopian or idyllic. This sentiment is conveyed nicely by Congressman Tim Ryan in his recent book, *A Mindful Nation*:

In a mindful nation, we will still misplace our keys. We will still forget people's names. We will still say and do things that may hurt others, including those we love. We will say the exact wrong thing at exactly the wrong time. But in each of these instances, with mindfulness we may do it just a bit less. We may see the humor in our mistakes and be able to laugh at ourselves more. We may be just a little less critical of others, and of ourselves. Or we may deal with our mistakes more quickly and with a more sincere and kind heart. We may more easily forgive the people who have hurt us. We may sit down and have civil political conversations with those who strongly disagree with us. My goal is not that America will become a perfect nation. My goal is that

America will be a kinder, more compassionate nation, because I know down deep in my heart that we are a kinder, more compassionate country than is evident today. Reviving our compassionate spirit will allow us to listen carefully to each other, find points of agreement, and recapture the unity of purpose that made America great. (166-167).⁶

Nor would a mindful classroom and world eliminate the need for social and political struggle. It is not a retreat from political engagement, but as Deborah Shoeberlein writes, a necessary component of political engagement:

Mindfulness isn't a panacea for the world's problem, but it does provide a practical strategy for working directly with reality. You might not be able to change certain things in your life, at work, or at home, but you can change *how* you experience those immutable aspects of life, work, and home. And the more present you are to your own life, the more choices you have that influence its unfolding. (32).

Ultimately, the challenge of mindfulness is to change our practices, which require ongoing commitment and work, to help us grow in intellect *and* awareness, which together can bring us toward an ethical understanding of truth. And the discovery of truth is never a finished process, as Lucy Grealy wisely notes in her autobiography: "I once thought that truth was eternal, that when you understood something, it was with you forever. I now know that this isn't so, that most truths are inherently unretainable, that we have to work hard all our lives to remember the most basic things" (23).

That, surely, is a pronouncement that deserves our time and attention.



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6. Editors' note: Congressman Tim Ryan serves Ohio's 13th Congressional District. He is not to be confused with Paul Ryan, current Speaker of the House.

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Composition as a Spiritual Discipline

Scott Wagar

I want to claim in this article that it's possible, and indeed even desirable, to see composition and rhetoric as an academic discipline marked by a spiritual *ethos*. I'm not merely talking about the fact that quite a few scholars have written approvingly about spirituality or spiritual practices in the teaching of composition.¹ Instead, my argument is broader: I want to offer a spiritual "lens" on some of the core practices and values of the field *writ large*, including a propensity for self-scrutiny as well as what I call the value of *radical inclusivity*, of continually expanding our purview to welcome what Parker J. Palmer calls the "alien other." In a contemporary societal context where "spirituality," as a concept distinct from "religion," has taken on positive connotations of interdependence, compassion, and self-reflection, a spiritual perspective on the work of composition provides a new way to frame and even reinvigorate the teaching of writing.

A few words are in order first to help set up my argument: about composition's attitudes towards religion and spirituality, and about the contemporary conceptual distinction between the two ideas. Michael-John DePalma (2011) observes that within composition scholarship, religion has often been "treated as an object of interrogation" and suspicion when it might instead be approached with more respect and positivity as a source of meaning and a potential "discursive resource" for students of faith (223). A look at Vander Lei and Kyburz's 2005 edited collection on religion and writing pedagogy reveals a respectful stance toward religious students on the part of its editors and contributors, but the book's title, *Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom*, gestures toward DePalma's point and toward the often-fraught status of religious discourses in college writing classes. Teachers have frequently wondered how to "negotiate" their fears that students will inappropriately treat sacred texts tautologically as timeless sources of authority, or invoke religious beliefs in support of intolerant views. By way of contrast, "spirituality" has appeared in composition studies in a more positive light. Teachers have advocated for spiritually-associated practices such as meditation (e.g., Moffett, 1982); for assignments such as spiritual autobiographies (Kirsch, 2009); and for spirituality as a guiding principle in pedagogical activities as seemingly mundane as writing conferences (O'Reilly, 1998). Beth Daniell writes approvingly of how Paolo Freire stirred in his students "...that striving . . . for something beyond ourselves . . . Seeking a connection with God, the universe, the life-force, humankind, one's own higher 'self'; attempting to give life coherence and purpose beyond professional, economic, or personal goals—which is precisely the definition of spirituality" (239). She goes on to note that she does "not mean to imply that this quest is necessarily associated with any formal religion" (239).

1. See, for instance, Moffett, 1982; O'Reilly, 1993, 1998; Berthoff, 1994; Swearingen, 1994; Campbell, 1994; Papoulis, 1996; Kalamaras, 1996; Fleckenstein, 1997; Foehr and Schiller, 1997; Briggs, Schunter and Melvin, 2000; McCurrie, 2003; Kirsch, 2009. Not a few articles on spirituality have appeared in the pages of this very journal.

What makes possible this contrast between disciplinary views of “religion” and “spirituality” is, I argue, the universalistic flavor that “spirituality” has taken on in contemporary public discourse. As religion scholar Robert C. Fuller notes, in the 20th century the term “religious” came to be associated with formal membership in religious institutions and belief in institutional creeds, while “spiritual” came to refer to “the private realm of thought and experience” (5). Spirituality eventually became construed as “a universal human capacity for transcendence” that need not entail religious membership or belief in a deity (Bregman 8). Much commentary has been devoted to the “spiritual but not religious” or “SBNR” phenomenon (e.g., Mercadante, 2014; Smith and Snell, 2009; Fuller, 2001), and indeed it’s now even comprehensible for avowed atheists to publicly argue in favor of spirituality (e.g., Harris, 2014; de Botton, 2012; Comte-Sponville, 2008). Scholars have shown, however, that in practice “spirituality” continues to correlate and overlap with “religion” in the lived experiences of those who profess spiritual identities (Ammerman, 2014; Bass, 2012), and Diana Butler Bass observes that “spiritual *and* religious” has become a widely embraced self-descriptor for Americans.

In any case, as sociologist Nancy Ammerman affirms, “[s]pirituality talk has clearly entered the national vocabulary [in the United States]” (23). Although definitions of spirituality vary, a common connotation is illustrated in a brief remark by *Atlantic* writer James Fallows, in the context of an early-2011 media debate about whether incendiary political language had helped motivate a shooter who wounded U.S Representative Gabrielle Giffords and left six others dead. *The Atlantic* solicited online suggestions from readers for promoting a more civil discourse; when characterizing these reader comments during an appearance on National Public Radio’s *The Diane Rehm Show*, Fallows used the word “spiritual” to describe themes of “capacity for self-doubt” and “recognizing . . . the humanity in the other side” that emerged in the suggestions (“Encouraging”). Neither the host of the program nor the other panelists remarked on Fallows’ choice of descriptor, suggesting that “spiritual” has not only become widely acceptable but has even taken on ethical associations of humility and empathy, with implications for our speech and behavior toward others.

It’s in this spirit (so to speak) that my argument in this article should be understood. While I’m in strong agreement with views such as DePalma’s which suggest we need to find ways to respect religious students’ identities, my concern here is not so much with religion as with this contemporary “spiritual moment” and its implications for composition studies. Spirituality’s current status as holistic, inclusive, and ethical offers a framework through which we might usefully understand our work as writing teachers and scholars.

Composition as Spiritual

The “secrets” of good teaching are the same as the secrets of good living: seeing one’s self without blinking, offering hospitality to the alien other, having compassion for suffering, speaking truth to power, being present and being real.

Parker J. Palmer, Foreword to Mary Rose O’Reilly’s *Radical Presence* (13)

To my mind, Tenzin Gyatso (His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama), and Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh have been two of the best contemporary articulators

of a spirituality compatible with, but not requiring, formal religious or metaphysical beliefs of any kind.² (Within English/composition studies, Thich Nhat Hanh has also been cited as a significant influence by bell hooks as well as Mary Rose O'Reilley.) As the Dalai Lama writes in his 2012 *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*, "For all its benefits . . . in bringing people together, giving guidance and solace, and offering a vision of the good life which people can strive to emulate—I do not think that religion is indispensable to the spiritual life" (16). The Dalai Lama suggests that spirituality has two levels, the most fundamental of which is "basic spiritual well-being—by which I mean inner mental and emotional strength and balance"; this fundamental level "does not depend on religion but comes from our innate human nature as beings with a natural disposition toward compassion, kindness, and caring for others" (17). Using a simple metaphor of water and tea, the Dalai Lama writes that this first level of spirituality is the necessary one (water); tea—here compared with formal religion, the second level of spirituality—can be made in many different ways, but always has water as its base. The water can exist without the tea, but not vice versa. For the Dalai Lama, the first spiritual level, but not the second, is necessary for a wide-ranging ethics.

And in many ways it's really ethics that I'm talking about here. Thich Nhat Hanh puts the matter succinctly in 2012's *Good Citizens: Creating Enlightened Society*: "There is no barrier dividing the ethical and the spiritual—they are one" (117). For Nhat Hanh, an ethical spirituality is not abstract but pragmatic: "It's so important that whenever we reflect on the subject of a global ethic, we always do so in terms of the practice. Our basic practice is the practice of generating the energy of mindfulness, concentration, and insight. Insight will bring compassion, love, harmony, and peace" (97). In other words, subjective practices of self-reflection are part and parcel of a more ethical way of being in the world. Here is a key paragraph from the Dalai Lama, words well in accord with Nhat Hanh's:

I believe that an inclusive approach to secular ethics, one with the potential to be universally accepted, requires recognition of only two basic principles . . . The first principle is the recognition of our *shared humanity* and our shared aspiration to happiness and the avoidance of suffering; the second is the understanding of *interdependence* as a key feature of human reality, including our biological reality as social animals. From these two principles we can learn to appreciate the inextricable connection between our own well-being and that of others, and we can develop a genuine concern for others' welfare. Together, I believe, they constitute an adequate basis for establishing ethical awareness and the cultivation of inner values. It is through such values that we gain a sense of connection with others, and it is by moving beyond narrow self-interest that we find meaning, purpose, and satisfaction in life. (19, italics in original)

So, vis-à-vis composition, in making my argument here I could, instead of using "spiritual," say that the field has an *ethical ethos*. And indeed some of my readers might prefer that alternative. However, I have particular reasons to argue instead for a *spiritual ethos* of the discipline, not the least of which are the explicit concerns for compassion

2. I'm not the only one to find the work of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh significant: they were listed respectively as the number one and two "Most Spiritually Influential Living People" for 2013 on a list published in *Mind Body Spirit* magazine by the prominent "esoterica" book shop Watkins of London ("Watkins' Spiritual 100 List").

and interdependence shared by the spiritually-informed ethics of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh.³

In making my argument, I turn to Joseph Harris's 1997 *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966* because of *A Teaching Subject's* influence as one of the prominent histories of the field—but also exactly because Harris's work has so little to say explicitly about spirituality.⁴ That is, I think that a work with little self-evident connection to spirituality is especially useful for demonstrating the ways in which spirituality has been implicit in composition's history. I realize that Harris himself might resist a reading such as mine. However, I don't actually think "reading" is the proper term here, because I'm not attempting to show a spiritual subtext in Harris's own work, but rather to point more toward currents in composition that can be productively understood through a spiritual lens.

Growth, Voice, and Expression: The Personal and the Social

Notably, the very first chapter of Harris's history of the discipline is centered on *growth*. Harris uses the 1966 Dartmouth Seminar as a focal point for discussing what was for many teachers "a kind of Copernican shift from a view of English as something you *learn about* to a sense of it as something you *do*" (1, italics in original); Dartmouth becomes known as the point when composition became the "teaching subject" of Harris's title. In particular, he cites theorists such as James Moffett who advocated a "growth model" focusing on authenticity in student writing rather than on, say, mastering genre conventions of literature. Harris critiques what seems to him the excessively individualistic focus of Moffett et al., believing that "[t]he question of where this [valorized] sense of self came from in the first place [i.e., culture, society, institutions, etc.] was not seriously addressed" (16). But Harris also suggests that "it needs to be said that in many ways the aims of the growth theorists were radical ones" in their challenge to elitist, "top-down" views of English teaching as well as in their suggestion that "looking closely at the talk and writing of students" constituted "serious work in English" (17). In focusing on Moffett as a key figure and growth as a key concept, Harris, in my view, demonstrates that some sense of spirituality was inherent in the making of composition—for Moffett, as Harris points out in his next chapter ("Voice"), was by the 1980s moving even further in the direction of focusing on inward aspects of composition, "arguing for writing as a form of 'discursive meditation' much like the spiritual exercises of Loyola and the practices of Zen and yoga" (30).

In Harris's "Voice" chapter, Peter Elbow is, unsurprisingly, another key figure under examination. I dwell for a moment here on Harris's critique of Elbow because Harris

3. It seems important to acknowledge here that the spirituality I'm advocating isn't free-floating or ahistorical; it is most certainly influenced by Buddhist perspectives in particular. Nhat Hanh suggests that a "Buddhist contribution to global ethics . . . is a practice that can be accepted by everyone, regardless of whether or not you believe in a god" (*Good Citizens* 2), and while I agree, and would argue that this spirituality requires no assent to metaphysical propositions, I imagine that Nhat Hanh would concede (if he agreed to a label at all) that he is spiritual *and* religious.

4. Harris released a new edition of *A Teaching Subject* in 2011, mostly unaltered except for new chapter postscripts and a new "coda." My references here are to the original 1997 version of the text unless otherwise noted.

raises complaints of a sort that will be familiar to readers of David Bartholomae's early-1990s dialogue with Elbow, complaints that are now part of the history of composition studies.⁵ Harris contrasts Elbow's model of writing and writing instruction with Moffett's, noting that Elbow's work grew out of a group-therapy context instead of Moffett's meditative background, but Harris suggests that both teachers were part of a movement whereby "[w]riting . . . begins to be valued more as a form of self-discovery or self-expression than as a way of communicating with others" (29). Respectful of the way Elbow is "given to working through the ambiguities and tensions in his valuing of voice," Harris nevertheless believes that Elbow's approach "uses the social to foster the personal" even though Elbow claims that the inverse is at least as true (31). And so Harris, who admits to a political edge in his own vision of teaching writing, ultimately finds approaches such as Elbow's wanting in fostering a sense of the social in students (25).

But this is not the only way to understand voice. The proudly Elbownian Mary Rose O'Reilley (writing prior to Harris) flatly argues in *The Peaceable Classroom* that "...finding voice—let's be clear—is a political act. It defines a moment of presence, of being awake; and it involves not only self-understanding, but the ability to transmit that self-understanding to others. Learning to write so that you will be read, therefore, vitalizes both the self and the community" (58).

Just a couple of pages later comes this parallel claim which gives the argument an explicitly spiritual twist: "Finding voice is a spiritual event. In many religious traditions, it is the reward of a vision quest. Think of Isaiah . . . *given words*. And spiritual events change the face of community. A prophet, or prophetic writer, calls us to a higher standard of what we could be. That's simply a prophet's job description (62).⁶

Clearly, O'Reilley is concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. Harris acknowledges the same about Elbow, yet remains unconvinced that Elbow's approach ultimately has enough political potential, or perhaps even enough of a genuine base level of political concern. But O'Reilley's words come in the context of an explicitly political program: *The Peaceable Classroom* is about O'Reilley's attempts to foster nonviolence, "to teach English so that people stop killing each other," as she quotes the challenge (from one of her graduate professors during the Vietnam era) that inspired her career-long quest as a teacher. Contrasting her own approach with "[f]ormal peace [studies] curricula," O'Reilley suggests that "Perhaps what I am encouraging instead is Inner Peace Studies, which asks Who am I? Am I at peace with who I am? Who are these other people? What is the nature of community? What do they believe, and why? Is it possible for us to work together" (37)?

O'Reilley, then, makes a direct link between expressivism, spirituality, and the social/political. From this spiritual viewpoint, time spent in the wilderness of personally-focused writing has the potential to pay dividends to the whole community in the form of voice-full, lively, and even prophetic language.

5. I don't agree with these complaints, but they are important to recognize insofar as they are held by colleagues I respect and as they are concerned with fundamental questions of how we might best teach our students.

6. A tall order, *prophet*, but don't even the most social-epistemic of radical pedagogues hope their students will learn to make strong arguments for needed change in their communities?

Continuation

O'Reilley and Harris differ on another important part of composition's history. Harris follows his examinations of growth and voice with a critique of the idea of *process*, an idea which in his view gained legitimacy for "composition as a research field" in the 1970s, especially via cognitive-studies approaches (55). But for Harris, "the proposition that writing is a process" is "a claim that is true, banal, and of a real if limited use" since in his view the process approach can and should be taught rather quickly, leaving more room for content-based, dialogical revision (57). However, O'Reilley, for her part, conflates the process approach with the search for voice, which in her view also crucially includes freewriting and small-group work (*Peaceable* 38-39). For O'Reilley, "what we now think of as a process model for teaching writing" begins with Elbow and Macrorie rather than Janet Emig or Linda Flower (38-39). So O'Reilley distinguishes between the process *model* and the process *theory* that's largely the focus of Harris's process chapter, and her preferred version of process is far from "banal" and "of limited use" but instead underlies much of her attempt at a peaceable classroom. For example, she claims that the writing group "forces us to stake out the terrain between our own and other people's view of reality; hence, it reinforces both personal identity and the sense of relationship to a community" (33). In freewriting, meanwhile, "we begin to listen to voices inside. They may surprise us. They may surprise the world, which badly needs new ideas" (44). Again here is the idea that writers' attention, first turned inward, must always be brought outward. So for Harris "process" may indeed be banal, but insofar as a vision of process like O'Reilley's *can* point toward specific classroom practices connecting the inner and outer, process is another foundation of composition with spiritual overtones.

Yet there is an additional way in which "process" takes on a spiritual bent. In Nhat Hanh's spirituality, *continuation* is a key concept. For instance, he suggests that instead of saying "Happy Birthday," we instead wish each other "Happy Continuation Day." This passage from *Good Citizens* gives some idea of his reasoning:

Your birth is not your beginning. It's only your continuation, because you were there before your birth, in other forms. For example, this [paper] page that you are reading existed first in many other forms. It didn't come from nothing, because from nothing you can't become something. Looking into the sheet of paper, we see the forest, the trees, the cloud, the rain, and the soil that nourishes the trees. We can see the saw that cut the tree down, the lumberjack, and the paper mill. The sheet of paper has not come from nothing. Its manifestation as a sheet of paper is only a new manifestation, not a birth. (27)

Nhat Hanh suggests that this view has a number of implications, among them (merely!) the possibility of lessening one's own dissatisfaction and suffering at the vicissitudes of life and death, as well as ethical implications that stem from the ultimate interconnection—or *interbeing*, as Nhat Hanh dubs it—of seemingly disparate elements of reality. As I'll argue, *interbeing* is an idea with close parallels to notions we already hold dear in postmodern academia. But for the moment I want to dwell on the notion of continuation as it relates to process. Despite the seeming banality of process for Harris, his choice to build one of his five main chapters around the concept testifies to its pervasiveness in the field. From a spiritual perspective, it's significant that compositionists are steeped in the idea of writing as process—as (in the 1982 words of Maxine Hair-

ston) “messy, recursive, convoluted, and uneven” (448). To that list we might now add “chronotopically laminated,” a descriptor for the complex mixture of elements—including time—that influence writing (Prior and Shipka, 2003, n. pag.). Compositionists see writing as potentially ever-unfinished, always revisable, revisitable, remixable; the field continually finds new ways to talk about its mutability. In some sense, then, one of our key concerns as compositionists is flux. It’s therefore possible to see composition studies as aligned with a spiritual view of reality that insists on the importance of change, flow, continuation, and renewal.

Community and Radical Inclusivity

I’ve shown that, contrary to Harris’s view, the early concerns of composition—authenticity, voice, cognitive theories of writing process—in fact have significant social aspects. But Harris himself begins to make such connections when he turns to examine Mina Shaughnessy’s 1977 *Errors and Expectations*, a text seen by Harris as a kind of fulcrum point in a move toward social concerns in composition studies. Taking Shaughnessy’s book to task for what he believes is its overwhelming focus on teaching grammar, Harris nevertheless titles one of his chapters “Error” because he finds real importance in the way Shaughnessy “argued for a new kind of student” (79), the basic writer, whose problems were seen by Shaughnessy as ones of inexperience rather than inadequacy. As Harris observes when discussing what he perceives as her strengths, “[Shaughnessy’s] message was consistently one of *inclusion*” (80, italics in original). Debates over linguistic correctness, Harris concludes, are intimately tied to hopes and fears related to language and social mobility; underlying these debates are arguments about who is to be included and who—if anyone—is to be left out. After looking at Shaughnessy, Harris’s history takes up the era of composition that John Trimbur called the “social turn,” examining the idea of *community* (as seen through the emergence in the 1980s of concepts such as the discourse community) and then concluding with a chapter on *contact and negotiation*, focusing less on intra-community writing and more on the sometimes messy ways in which different discourses, cultures, and identities intersect in the writing classroom (Trimbur 109).

The trends toward social awareness that Harris highlights are indicative of a move in composition toward what I call *radical inclusivity*, a move that continues to this day. Shaughnessy’s open-admissions students, “for the most part blacks and Hispanics” (Harris 78), may have been among the first groups to which composition extended its efforts and sympathies, but they were hardly the last. Clearly, as Harris notes, “gender, race, and class” have now long since become familiar identity markers discussed in composition, with members of marginalized groups welcomed and even championed (124). To these markers can be added sexual orientation, disability, nationality, and others. And of course there is the work calling for attention to two-year colleges, to the status and working conditions of contingent faculty, to extra-curricular writing, to the “world Englishes” movement, to the call for greater attention to affect and emotion. Further, as I noted earlier when discussing DePalma’s work on religion, the move toward inclusion isn’t simply toward obviously-marginalized or minority students or groups. For instance, Christian students in our classrooms may be members of a socially-dominant religious group, but compositionists have

begun to realize that these students too can be marginalized to the extent that religion is treated as incompatible with academic skepticism and inquiry.

Some might, quite reasonably, see these moves toward inclusion through *democratic* or *dialogic* frameworks. Andrea Lunsford, for one, has suggested—writing in 1990, in the middle of the “social turn” era—that two defining characteristics of composition are “We are dialogic, multi-voiced, heteroglossic...” and “We are radically democratic...” (76). She also noted that composition had “resist[ed] the temptation” to be, like other humanistic disciplines, “defined by what we exclude” (76). But I suggest a spiritual framework for viewing our inclusiveness, what we are “at our best,” to quote Lunsford’s introduction to her list of disciplinary characteristics. For one reason, I believe that a spiritual viewpoint attends explicitly to compassion in a way I’m not sure is inherent in democratic or dialogic perspectives. To be sure, those perspectives aren’t *uncompassionate* by any means. They involve bringing in as many voices as possible and putting those voices in dynamic play; they imply respect, tolerance, and the positive value of a good rhetorical wrangle. But they aren’t explicitly motivated by compassion; they lack a certain emotional element; they welcome the other’s voice but perhaps remain silent on the inherent value of the other’s being. And I think part of what we do in composition is not just extending inclusivity and promoting dialogue, but in fact openly extending compassion.⁷ We know the second and third secrets for good teaching and good living from Parker J. Palmer’s list in my epigraph above: “offering hospitality to the alien other” and “having compassion for suffering” (O’Reilly 13)

Another reason I’m partial to “spiritual” as a descriptor for composition’s work is that the field appears to be moving beyond a strict focus on the human. Scot Barnett, in a 2010 review article, suggests that our field is perhaps in the midst of a “material” or “posthuman” turn focusing on “[a]mong a host of others . . . technology, the body, space and place, and the natural world” (“Toward,” n. pag.).⁸ As Barnett puts it, “Not separate or merely additional constituents in rhetorical situations, these materialities and their intertwinings constitute our reality—are part of the very is-ness of that reality—in ways that fundamentally shape our very senses of what writing means and how we practice and teach writing in the world today.”

In other words, our inclusiveness is becoming so radical as to include *everything*, the whole of reality itself.⁹ A spiritual perspective like Nhat Hanh’s interbeing, in which all things ultimately bear some relationship to each other, can be one framework for

7. To be clear, I am not arguing that composition has *achieved* full inclusion by any means, but rather I am noting an undeniable *impulse* marking the discipline.

8. Among the “host of others” are non-human animals (e.g., Hawhee, “Toward,” 2011; Kennedy, *Comparative Rhetoric*, 1997), a group of beings to which, in my view, we certainly owe more ethical consideration; adopting an explicitly spiritual viewpoint, in which we inter-are with the non-human world as surely as with the human, might help move us toward such consideration. Certainly, if we are going to extend our rhetorical viewpoint to inanimate objects, we ought to also consider animate, sentient beings that we ask to suffer and die for our pleasure.

9. Object-oriented ontology (or OOO), with which Barnett suggests an affinity, is especially interested in the *-thing* aspect of this concept. See, for example, Ian Bogost’s *Alien Phenomenonology, or What It’s Like to Be a Thing* (2011). Since Bogost invokes the term “alien,” I should probably be clear that I’m not necessarily suggesting a correspondence between OOO and Palmer’s

understanding what's happening as we extend our interest and our welcome more and more widely.

Reflection and the Postmodern

In addition to reaching further and further outward, composition has also been inclined to intense self-scrutiny, to looking inward, as it were. Harris's text is just one example of many attempts to reexamine, redefine, and rearticulate the field itself—we can also think of Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*, Susan Miller's *Textual Carnivals*, Hawk's *A Counter-History of Composition*, Palmer's *Remixing Composition*, and Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality*, to name just a few of the book-length treatments of the subject. So, too, do we teach the importance of reflection to students, regularly asking them to compose "writer's memos" on their own work—not to mention assignments that are heavily reflective from the outset, e.g., the literacy narrative, or the analysis of a rhetorical moment in one's own life. Composition, in its literature and its practice, is certainly inclined toward the "meta." Here then is another way that composition can be considered spiritual since spirituality, according to Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama, must include a practice of intensive inner focus and contemplation, of observing one's own patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving—and as Palmer puts it, of "seeing one's self without blinking." As a field, we are consistently engaged in asking who we are and how we might be better.

There has also been an "institutional turn" in composition, a call for reflective and often critical attention to the particular, local contexts that shape writing instruction.¹⁰ Harris too contributes to this turn in a new postscript to the "Community" chapter in the 2011 version of *A Teaching Subject*, suggesting a "programmatic" approach to dealing with the messy business of improving teaching and learning conditions within individual writing programs; he believes that such an approach means "asking how, at a particular school and a particular time, you can best support the work of writing students and their teachers" (*New Edition* 160). The institutional turn, I think, is simultaneously part of our move toward inclusivity (i.e., still another set of answers to the question, "Which rhetors, contexts, eras, and aspects of writing/writing instruction have we not yet properly examined?") and a self-reminder of one of our own mantras, "Context matters."

The parallel with spirituality here is that spirituality is at once oriented toward ultimate connection (interbeing) and experienced by particular individuals, each one an "institution" unto herself. What I mean is that individuals are, like institutions, composites; each of us has characteristics and patterns of functioning, but our "selves" are ultimately relational as well as unstable, built of constantly shifting non-self elements. This statement will probably be uncontroversial to most compositionists, steeped as we are in postmodern visions of relativity, wrangle, performance, and constructedness. For

spiritually-inclined nod toward the "alien other" – though OOO theorists might find it interesting to consider where OOO and spirituality do or do not intersect.

10. See, for example, Porter et al., "Institutional Critique," 2000; Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson, "Not Just Anywhere, Anywhen," 2005; Grego and Thompson, *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces*, 2008; Selber, "Institutional Dimensions of Academic Computing," 2009; LaFrance and Nicolas, "Institutional Ethnography," 2012.

instance, Harris, citing a seemingly-before-its-time (1952) writing assignment by Theodore Baird, approvingly notes that “[t]he self is here imagined not as an essence but as a set of perspectives, as something that can only be seen in relation to something else” (Harris, 1997, 36). But Nhat Hanh’s interbeing gives us another way to understand this relationality. The passage I cited earlier about the “continuation” of a sheet of paper is also illustrative of interbeing, a concept highlighting a kind of ultimate interwovenness, in which any given “thing”—say, a cell phone—is revealed, upon reflection, to be linked to myriad “non-thing” elements. The phone would not exist without the various rare-earth minerals that make its functioning possible; or without the rain that helped grow the food that nourished the miners of those minerals; or without the designers of the phone’s operating system. And that system could not exist without the computer language created and refined by many previous programmers. This list of interwoven elements could go on and on.

For Nhat Hanh, interbeing is thoroughgoing, extending to physical as well as mental and social phenomena; things, people, and ideas inter-are. As I’ve noted, academic postmodernity has made it easy for us to believe along the same lines about the intellectual self and about ostensibly autonomous texts. We can point to a particular “book” and discuss it for practical purposes as an isolated object, but the book is, from a certain perspective, composed entirely of “non-book” elements. So, too, for larger units of discourse—“composition and rhetoric,” for instance—and rhetorical entities such as “America.” Nhat Hanh believes that to fully apprehend the concept of interbeing requires a process of “looking deeply” (*Be Free* 36); in a kind of paradox, it is incumbent upon individuals to engage in intensive reflection which can reveal the truth of interbeing, of how individuality is in some sense an illusion. Thus, Nhat Hanh’s interbeing is resonant not only with the radical inclusivity I’ve mentioned earlier, but with composition’s valuing of both self-scrutiny and constructedness.

A final resonance is appropriate to mention at this point—between spirituality and rhetoric itself. Rhetoric has probably regained prominence in our pedagogies because it is so-well suited to a postmodern sensibility, in which “truths,” such as they are, are local and always shored up by discourse. Paradoxically, though, as Barry Brummett suggests in “Rhetorical Epistemology and Spirituality,” rhetoric can be seen not just as local and contextual but as a kind of epistemological common ground: we all “know because we have been persuaded to know, and whatever ideas we validate as knowledge we validate (in this view) because we have been persuaded to do so” (132). Even if different belief systems seem to conflict, “[r]hetoric is the flux that merges epistemologies. Argument is the secret passage connecting ways of knowing” (132). Rhetoric is seen as a kind of always-in-motion but nevertheless fundamental grounding of how any of us know anything. Rhetoric, Brummett suggests, provides a kind of commensurability underlying seemingly disparate arguments.

In this light, insofar as rhetoric is a practice we all share, it accords well with a spirituality of interbeing.¹¹ Brummett nods in this direction in the concluding section of his

11. Communication scholar H.L. Goodall, in a 1993 essay, suggests provocatively that communication itself might be defined as an expression of spirituality, and especially of a spirituality of interbeing (44). Though Goodall’s discussion is situated within a different disciplinary context and takes a rather different tack than my approach here, I want to acknowledge his work and note a

essay when noting that he has mostly ignored the aspect of spirituality that focuses on “connection and connectedness” (134). “But surely,” he writes, “I have ended up with that dimension of spirituality by dissolving epistemology in rhetoric. For when we live rhetorically, we live in connection with others” (134). Brummett further claims that a good teacher models rhetorical connectedness in the classroom, displaying “both a commitment to what he or she ‘knows’ and an awareness that he or she can ‘know’ differently, should he or she be persuaded to do so” (134). As teachers, we should be simultaneously confident about our knowledge and open to the possibility that some new instance of rhetoric might change that knowledge. We should acknowledge through our practices that we aren’t isolated containers of absolute truth but instead are connected, porous containers of what we have been persuaded—for now, at least—to understand as truth.

Conclusion

Every retelling of composition’s story is, of course, a reframing, a re-seeing. My goal here has been to offer a way to re-see composition through spiritual eyes: to note resonances, parallels, connections, and kinships between composition studies and spirituality. But why? What does an understanding of these connections contribute?

One answer is that connecting composition with spirituality helps place the discipline in further conversation with a thriving social phenomenon. In conjunction with the rise of “spiritual but not religious,” “spiritual *and* religious,” “spiritual atheist,” and other identities, “spirituality” has become for many a preferred term indicating a striving for deep meaning and interconnection. Certainly, as scholar Lucy Bregman points out, some have raised conceptual, ethical, and practical issues with “spirituality” as a blanket term. But I believe, with Bregman, that spirituality as a term and concept *works* for many people in the current historical moment, and I think its familiarity can render it useful for thinking about composition as an evolving field.

So, too, am I happy to admit a degree of (gentle) provocation in this article. Brummett suggests that “spirituality” is a term with “rhetorical wallop,” and I agree (123). I enjoy the thought that my work here might stimulate interest, pondering, agreement, or disagreement, as long as those reactions engage with the content of my claims.

Further, though, and I think quite importantly, spirituality as I’ve outlined it provides another way to view—and to bridge—the supposed expressivist/social-constructionist “divide” in composition studies. A spirituality of interbeing insists that the social and the personal are necessarily (dare I use “always already”?) interwoven, and it is no surprise that Mary Rose O’Reilly, who has written extensively about the influence of Thich Nhat Hanh’s work in her teaching, should be one of the most insightful articulators of how this dynamic plays out in writing. Seeing the supposed dichotomy of the social and personal not as a divide but as a dynamic can help us ask more interesting

couple of similarities. Goodall too compares spirituality with postmodern thought, but he is most interested in proposing spirituality as a “successor” to a fragmented postmodernity, rather than positing some complementarity as I do here (41). He also invokes Thich Nhat Hanh, though only briefly in order to introduce the concept of interbeing. I would like to note, however, Goodall’s intriguing suggestion that we think of ourselves as *interbeings* (44).

questions and find more interesting answers about how this interplay functions in the writing of our students.¹² Indeed, I think writing's ability to mediate between the personal and the social suggests a question (let me be provocative again here, following Goodall's lead as noted above): could not just the field of composition studies but *writing itself* be seen as spiritual? I will leave that larger question to readers, at least for now.

In the end, I emphasize a spiritual view of composition because my preferred understanding of spirituality indicates a worldview inclined toward extending compassion and seeking connection. Composition has already evolved to become, I believe—to borrow a phrase from the popular Buddhist author Jack Kornfield—“a path with heart,” and a spiritual framework could encourage compositionists to continue on that path even as we expand, age, change, and remix ourselves. Seeing composition as spiritual does not, in my view, conflict with the intellectual and democratizing goals of the field but rather provides an ethically-oriented way to undergird and support them. We study writing and the teaching of writing with an underlying sense of deep compassion for and interdependence with our students, their lives, and the work they do.

And ultimately our underlying conception of our motivations matters very much. I use terms like “undergird” and “support” because I believe our frameworks—one might also call them lenses, paradigms, guiding metaphors—help orient and sustain us. We are constrained by many of the externalities—the institutional, economic, and social contexts—of our work as teachers, but we have some freedom in choosing how we will *conceive* of what we do. And perhaps altering our underlying paradigms can better position us to effect positive change on some of those externalities, many of which would be improved by a greater commitment to connection and compassion. Because spirituality, for me, *means* cultivating connection and compassion, I choose a spiritual paradigm for my work.

Such a perspective can be applied to the field as a whole as well as to the small moments of our individual teaching lives. Perhaps some readers will resonate with my titular notion that our work is a “spiritual discipline.” Others, however, may agree with me that compassion and connectedness are important aspects of our field but still reject, for any number of reasons, the language of “spirituality.” More than anything, I hope that my discussion here provides an opportunity for readers to spend some time defining for themselves—whatever the terminology—the underlying belief systems and ethical frameworks that drive their work as teachers and as people. I believe that such reflection, in challenging us to articulate our commitments, may open up new conversations about the motivations for our work in the study and teaching of writing.



12. See also Tara Roeder and Roseanne Gatto's 2015 edited collection *Critical Expressivism: Theory and Practice in the Composition Classroom* for a contemporary re-examining of this issue. My essay in that volume addresses some similar themes to ones I explore here, but in the context of a look at composition and nonviolence.

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Buddhism's Pedagogical Contribution to Mindfulness

Erec Smith

In *The Academy and the Possibility of Belief: Essays on Intellectual and Spiritual Life*, editors Buley-Meissner, Thompson, and Tan argue that spirituality's ubiquity in society should not be completely ignored in educational contexts, especially when it comes to language and literature courses (2). Regarding the place of religion in academia, they write that "if conditions of bias against religiously informed viewpoints exist within religion departments and society at large, it is not surprising that language and literature programs offer little room for serious or respectful dialogue about contemporary spirituality (7). Thus, a driving question for the editors and others who would "save" spirituality from academia's trash bin asks, "How can English teachers—and other educators in humanities—extend their discussions of students' diverse identifications to include more careful consideration of students' spirituality?" (2) As a rhetoric and composition scholar, I extend this question into the realm of writing pedagogy: How can we acknowledge student spirituality while maintaining our duties to teach skill in writing and communication?¹

In "From Introspection to Action: Connecting Spirituality and Civic Engagement," Gesa Kirsch looks for the place of spirituality—specifically, opportunities for "mindfulness, introspection, and reflection" (W2)—in writing pedagogy. She writes, "Contemplative practices, I contend, can enhance creativity, listening, and expression of meaning—key goals of most writing courses. They do so by inviting students and teachers to practice mindfulness, to become introspective, to listen to the voices of others—and our own—and to the sounds of silence" (W1). I tend to agree with Kirsch on this point. However, I believe her commendable efforts to accomplish these pedagogical goals can be streamlined by looking into spiritual practices that already synthesize cognitive and spiritual faculties in a heuristically sound manner.

Kirsch's primary method for inducing mindfulness, introspection, and reflection involves the use of the spiritual autobiography, a genre she admits is fraught with emotional triggers and unpredictability. Of course, most spiritual practice comes face-to-face with such things at some point. In fact, I do not reference Kirsch to critique her work, specifically, but to show how valiant and commendable efforts to instill mindfulness in students is wrought with mental and emotional obstacles. I believe these blocks result from students' profound fear of exploration and the relinquishing of mindlessly acquired beliefs and ideologies. To question one's beliefs and ideologies is to question oneself, an act that is often abandoned prior to completion. So, how do we avoid the pitfalls that frustrated Kirsch's efforts?

I believe we, as would-be spiritual pedagogues, really seek to instill a kind of mindfulness or propensity for critical thinking deemed beneficial to our students as writers

1. Writing may be more beneficial to instilling mindfulness in students. This conclusion derives from Janet Emig's canonical "Writing as a Mode of Learning," in which she posits that writing's nature as enactive, iconic, and representation or symbolic enhances engaged learning and, therefore, mindfulness

and thinkers. In fact, I believe when we speak of spirituality in the learning environment, we often mean a kind of *fulfilling* Mindfulness. We would do well to consider Ellen Langer's definition of mindfulness—arguably the most well-known definition in academic circles—for a concept that, upon fruition, will ensure critical thinking. According to Langer, “Mindfulness is a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context (“Mindful Learning” 220). Perhaps the benefits of mindfulness are best described by some scholars’ lamentation of its opposite, mindlessness:

Mindless, unreflective, and unintelligent living is not only morally corrupt, it is aesthetically dull, boring, and repetitive. As an educator, I am sadly aware of how the tendency (of politicians, media, the mavens of industry, and such) to judge others greatly affects education. Most forms of education are little more than subtle indoctrination into the established political, economic, and social order. (Garrison et al, 241)

What’s more, Nell Noddings, in *Education and Democracy in the 21st Century*, explains the benefits of mindfulness in a way that echoes Garrison, et al. while inadvertently commenting on Kirsch’s obstacles: “Students should be encouraged to think about their spiritual life and examine the encounters that produce spiritual highs. They should not be compelled to share these experiences, but voluntary disclosure should be allowed. . . . We should remind students that one can find spiritual satisfaction in everyday life” (130). Both scholars insist that mindfulness can remedy these disempowering aspects of society and education. Indeed, I believe that a practical and didactic spirituality promotes a self-reflection that both enhances self-understanding and communicative effectiveness. Langer, Garrison, Kirsch, and others would call this mode of spirituality “mindfulness.”

But how do we implement this mindfulness while avoiding Kirsch’s aforementioned pitfalls? Based on Langer’s definition, one can see the connection between mindfulness and the rhetorical concept of *Kairos*—keen attention to one’s mutable rhetorical situation, or, as Eric Charles White writes in *Kaironomia*, a regarding of the present “as unprecedented, as a moment of decision, a moment of crisis, and . . . impossible, therefore, to intervene successfully in the course of events merely on the basis of past experience” (14). Such a concept of mindfulness—one appropriately synthesized with *Kairos*—can surely enhance critical thinking for, as Langer and Piper insist, based on their mindfulness experiments, mindfulness “is characterized by active distinction making and differentiation. One who demonstrates mindfulness engages in the process of creating new categories of making finer and finer distinctions” (Langer and Piper 280). To solidify the connection of mindfulness and *Kairos*, Langer’s mindfulness can be rendered as the following components that Robert Sternberg enumerates:

- a) Openness to novelty
- b) Alertness to distinction
- c) Sensitivity to different contexts
- d) Implicit, if not explicit, awareness of multiple perspectives
- e) Orientation in the present (Sternberg 12)

So, *kairotic* savvy—the “adaption to an always mutating situation” or the ability to resign oneself to “unending improvisation and experiment”—is tantamount to mindful-

ness (White 13, 35). But so what? Yes, the connection between mindfulness and *Kairos* may give clue to rhetoric's usefulness in acquiring mindfulness, but such knowledge does not necessarily make that acquisition easier.

As suggested by Garrison, et al., perhaps the most salient aspect of this definition of mindfulness is our understanding of *mindlessness* and how it comes about. Langer writes, "When we are mindless, our behavior is rule and routine governed; when we are mindful, rules and routines may guide our behavior rather than predetermine it" (220). The continued presence of rules and routines while seeking innovative, critical thought is nothing new. Such thoughts were labeled "pragmatism" by the likes of William James and John Dewey. However, we need to take a step back and help students gain mindfulness by avoiding mindlessness. Thus, my purpose, here, is to help students acquire the ability to embrace the present as fully as possible for, as Langer conclusively states, "there is power in uncertainty, yet most of us mistakenly see certainty" (220).

How do we get our students to acquire comfort in uncertainty and glean what Allan Watts called "the wisdom of insecurity": the ability to see the benefit and power of uncertainty and anti-essentialism? Critical thinking and mindfulness necessitate breaking out of a reliance on the "well-known" or the familiar. This is a necessary first step to critical thinking and innovative thought. How do we help students accomplish this initial but imperative step?

Apparently, Kirsch was onto something when she sought such answers in spirituality. Mindfulness or the propensity to think critically is often a primary subject of Buddhist philosophy, where the concept of *Kairos* is alive and well and where mindfulness carries both practical and spiritual connotations. *Kairos* is the bridge that connects Buddhism to key educational objectives such as critical thinking and rhetoric. This connection enhances mindfulness and, therefore, self-knowledge, critical thinking, and innovative thought.

By exploring the connection between Buddhist practice and *Kairos*, pedagogues can help students embrace mindfulness and introspection. The acquisition of mindfulness may also enhance a writer's ability to understand and construct appropriate subject positions, assess rhetorical situations, strengthen one's savvy with rhetorical appeals, participate in sound research, and write in a more lively and engaged manner. Such a pedagogy—one that may enhance a student's ability to embrace and utilize mindfulness while alleviating the insecurities that may arise in the process—derives from the Buddhist concept of the ten factors, or, as rendered in the *Lotus Sutra*, "The True Aspect of All Phenomena." I wish to present this concept as a strong synthesis of pedagogy, communication/interaction, and spirituality that can enhance our students' pursuits as both scholars and citizens of the world.²

2. Various Buddhist scholars have written about mindfulness, but I see the Nichiren school and the *Lotus Sutra* as a more concentrated source. For example, if I compare the Nichiren take on mindfulness to that of Thich Nhat Hanh in *Interbeing*, we compare a short passage unpacked into a profound description of mindfulness and practical spirituality to a large treatise—Hanh's "The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings—that need to be memorized and particularized. If we seek a more palatable and embraceable method of mindfulness, that found in Nichiren school and the *Lotus Sutra* may be more ideal.

Again, what we are really after is a method for instilling mindfulness in our students. Mindfulness can enhance learning and rhetorical skill, and the ten factors of Buddhism can enhance mindfulness while providing the fulfillment of a spiritual practice.

Buddhism and the Ten Factors

Before diving into the concept of the ten factors, some brief context may be in order. The ten factors are derived from the second chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. This text, a fixture in Mahayana Buddhism—a branch of Buddhism that gives more power and agency to practitioners by focusing on their own inherent Buddha nature and potential as enlightened beings—is one of the most popular sutras in the Buddhist canon. Initially expounded by the Chinese Buddhist philosopher Chih-i, founder of the T'ien-T'ai school of Buddhism, it survives most prominently as the primary text of the Nichiren school of Buddhism, a medieval Japanese offshoot of the T'ien-T'ai school. Both schools recognize the importance of rhetoric in life and human interaction. In fact, The *Lotus Sutra* introduces the ten factors as “The True Aspect of all Phenomena” in a chapter titled “Expedient Means,” which, in the context of the sutra, is a term synonymous with “rhetoric.”³ This chapter is followed by a chapter titled “Simile and Parable,” which, itself, is followed by chapters that present parables and analogies as the Buddha's necessary media for guiding his followers to enlightenment.

One would not exaggerate to call the *Lotus Sutra* a kind of treatise on rhetoric, specifically *Kairos* and its concomitant mindfulness. Within this text, the Buddha actually states that his previous texts were merely provisional (expedient means, rhetoric) and used to lead people to the wisdom of the *Lotus Sutra*, which involves the ten factors. The ten factors, then, are a powerful tool for enhancing mindfulness, i.e., understanding the world in which we must communicate as well as the nature of that communication itself. Thus, the concept may be an effective first step for anyone who would write, listen, and live mindfully.

The *Lotus Sutra* introduces the ten factors thusly: “The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end” (57). Exegetes tend to split the factors into three or four groups when explaining them. I will first discuss the first three factors—appearance, nature, and reality—as one foundational unit on which the other factors rest. Next, I will discuss power and influence as a dyad of agency and interpellation. Next, I will discuss internal cause to manifest effect as the factors of cause and effect and symbiotic interdependence, and, last, I will discuss the general simultaneity of all the factors. After going over the significance of the factors, I will discuss ways to apply them as rhetorical heuristics for enhancing communication and mindfulness.

Appearance, Nature, Entity

The first three factors exemplify what Chih-i called the three-fold way of life. This three-fold way is considered the foundation of life that actualizes the other factors.

3. Editors' note: the author makes this argument in “Writing under the Bodhi Tree,” *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 9.2.

Appearance is just that: the presence of a potentially active body. Daisaku Ikeda, in *Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth and Death. . . And Everything in Between: A Buddhist View of Life*, defines “appearance” as “attributes discernible from the outside, such as color, form, shape, and behavior” (127). Regarding human beings, appearance denotes “the manifested, superficial side of our existence, such as the way we look, the body and its various functions” (127).

Nature is described as the “disposition or potential of a thing or being that is invisible from the outside” (127). According to Chih-i, nature is, in essence, empty. That is, there is no substance or abiding essence to it (Chih-i 180). Emptiness is a common term in Buddhism and is often mistaken as a kind of nihilism. In reality, emptiness is potential. Akin to Nietzsche’s description of Dionysus as the formless fodder to be shaped into a more Apollonian form (*The Birth of Tragedy*), nature is considered a kind of force that can be molded into various modes of “mind and consciousness” (127).

Entity is the combination of appearance and nature. Regarding humans, we are entities in that we are beings that appear in the world with vast conscious potential. No one *is* anything (we will discuss the relevance of “to-be” verbs to the ten factors, shortly). One is always, “essentially,” a becoming. Chih-i calls entity “The Middle Way,” in that it presents humanity, for example, as both abiding and non-abiding—a duality of “somethingness” and “nothingness” rendered as “nondual” (175-176). Chih-i says that we abide as a certain kind of person for a particular situation or context but always have the potential to move into another kind of person—another ego state or *ethos*, if you will—in another context (180). This movement is akin to a single person shifting from one subject position to another when traversing discourse communities or rhetorical situations. And again, these three factors—appearance, nature, and entity—provide the foundation of “The True Aspect of All Phenomena.”

Power and Influence

The next two factors, power and influence, are a subcategory of appearance, nature, and entity. Power is considered the latent agency we each have. Ikeda writes that power is “life’s inherent capacity to act, its potential strength or energy to achieve something” (Ikeda 127). This power is activated by Influence, the contextual forces that bring forth certain capacities over others. The pairing of the two is akin to an agent being interpellated by powerful hegemonic devices. For example, in certain contexts, I have the power to effect change based on my *ethos* as a professional, but other aspects of potential power—knowledge of sports, for instance—are not activated. Thus, power and influence may describe the dynamics of the rhetorical appeal of *ethos*—one’s credibility at any given moment. *Ethos* can change based on the aspects of ourselves being interpellated by the contingent powers-that-be.

The relevance of Power and Influence to mindfulness, then, becomes apparent when considering the required cognizance of one’s surroundings. Awareness of one’s subject position as temporary and contingent on the present moment does, indeed, focus on *Kairos* and rest less on established self-conceptions (*ethos*) that become the fodder for mindlessness. Understanding the contextual forces (Influence) that activate one’s extemporaneous agency (Power) is a powerful exercise in mindfulness.

Internal Cause, Relation, Latent Effect, Manifest Effect

A more detailed rendering of the power/influence dynamic is found in the next four factors. To be fair, these factors are separated for a reason; they denote the cause and effect inherent in interpellation, and, along with power and influence, promote a keen self-awareness. Unlike power and influence, these factors may promote a more intricate and personal self-awareness.

Internal cause is considered a latent aspect in one's consciousness, waiting to be activated by a relation—an outer action that brings forth an internal cause. Initially, this internal cause presents itself as a latent effect. That is, its influence has not been felt in the world yet. When it has, it becomes a manifested effect. Theoretically, each of us has spent our lives collecting internal causes—impressions, memories, habits—that come forth when called forth or activated by certain environmental happenings. In Ego-state psychology, the term for this activation is *cathexis*, a mental and emotional calling forth of one or more internal causes when situations that initiated and perpetuated those internal causes come forth (Watkins and Watkins 13-16). I, for example, would like to think that I am a grown, autonomous man at this moment. However, upon visiting my family on holidays, internal causes indicative of being a son, a little brother, a big brother, and such are activated, causing a latent effect that eventually manifests itself as an action or actions indicative of one or more of those roles. (Of course, resistance is possible, but the desire for resistance is, itself, brought up by the internal causes and relations. Certain aspects of a situation may not pique a desire to resist.)

The interaction of these factors—internal cause to manifest effect—can be so closely married to mindfulness as to seem synonymous. But such mindfulness is contingent upon feeling a latent effect where we attempt a cognizance keen enough to trace backwards to its impetus and forward to its potential manifestation. Then we essentially engage with the past to influence the present in ways more in line with our desires and, theoretically, our overall wellbeing. We can see this mindfulness as a rhetor's intent.

By remembering the foundational three factors—appearance, nature, and entity—one can see, based on the ten factors, that we are not at all autonomous beings, but the results of various interactions with our environment. We are always becoming. This constant becoming is the impetus for the concept of emptiness. No abiding being (or self) exists, only a being in constant flux based on contingent stimuli.⁴

Consistency from Beginning to End

The final factor, consistency from beginning to end, is less a factor and more an observation about how the other factors consistently interact with each other. The factors are split into ten for didactic reasons. That is, presenting this one phenomenon as ten factors is, itself, an expedient means—a rhetorical move—to enhance instruction. In reality, all these factors interact simultaneously at any given moment and are not parsed out into separate factors or groupings. "The True Aspect of all Phenomena" is really what the Buddha calls "one vehicle," one mode of understanding the self. Thus,

4. In Buddhist parlance, particularly Mahayana Buddhism, this is called "dependent origination": the inherent and necessarily symbiotic relationship between entity and environment.

to be mindful, one must conceptualize one's reality into separate components—aspects of a phenomenon—to better understand oneself and one's place in a particular moment.

In order to more clearly understand the ten factors' relevance to rhetoric, especially when it comes to understanding subject position and discourse, one must understand the partnership of the ten factors with what, in Buddhist parlance, are known as "worlds." Such worlds are akin to Burke's "terministic screens": each is a worldview shaped and dominated by a particular ideology or mindset. Theoretically, at any given moment, the ten factors can deliver us into particular mind states or "worlds," which are defined as follows:

- Hell (self-absorbed misery)
- Hunger (intense desire, hedonism)
- Animality (hunger for power)
- Anger (associated with competitiveness and jealousy)
- Humanity (rational calm)
- Heaven (fulfillment)
- Learning (joy of expanding knowledge)
- Realization (initial enlightenment, absorbed creativity)
- Bodhisattva (selflessness)
- Buddhahood (creative and wholly positive potential)

These possible mind states/worlds are not so finite, however. According to Buddhist philosophy, at any given moment, each mind state contains the other nine (Ikeda 123–126). These ten worlds squared into one hundred are then multiplied by three realms: the Realm of the Five Components (form, conception, volition, and consciousness), the Realm of Living Beings, and the Realm of Environment. The ten factors times ten mind states/worlds times three realms are rendered as "Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life," or, in its more concise Japanese rendering, *ichinen sanzen* (Ikeda 106). For our purposes, however, we can settle on the ten factors and the ten mind states/worlds, for they yield the most salient lesson about situational context, interpretive communities, subject position, writing style, and rhetoric.

For example, each world can be considered a kind of subject position shaped by the workings of the ten factors. These factors can work together to land us in a mind state of Hunger or Animality. Moving from one mind state to the next is likely—or even inevitable—but the ten factors can give us a way to remain mindful of these transitions, to consider the causes that created their respective effects. We can ask ourselves, "Who am I, right now? What relations landed me here? What powers are being brought forth by certain influences? What is my subject position? How might it change if I explore the internal causes that helped bring me here? Should it change at all?"

We can understand Gorgias' treatise on Non-Being as analogous to the conclusions gleaned from the ten factors and the ten worlds into which they lead. However, the ten factors give us an epistemological hold or a heuristic for mindfulness that can assist writing and writing pedagogy. The middle way, denoted by the factor of entity, embodies Gorgias' ideas of not-being, which does not posit not-being and being as an either/or construction, but a both/and construction. We are both the "I" writing or communicating in a given situation and the emptiness that represents a contingent or provisional

agency. So to continue with this line of reason, *Kairos* is not a concept we embrace to our advantage as extemporaneous communicators. That is, *Kairos* is not something outside of ourselves, nor are we something inside of *Kairos*. According to the ten factors, we *are Kairos*. That is, we *are* each embodiments of contingency and always-becoming opportunity. This ontological understanding of *Kairos* can ensure a mindful state over a mindless one, and the ten factors can serve as an effective tool for maintaining such mindfulness as often as possible.

Mindfulness, Rhetoric, and Composition

If we conceptualize *Kairos* as something we embody and not something we use or embrace, we must develop a different approach, a more mindful approach, to communication and communicative pedagogy, particularly writing pedagogy, especially when it comes to the understanding of subject position and research. To a degree, the middle way has already emerged in the concept of post-process pedagogy, especially that expounded by Lee Anne M. Kastman Breuch. Her dismissal of writing skill as a mode of mastery, for mastery implies a set body of knowledge, and her embrace of writing as situational, public, and interpretive, supports the concepts of emptiness and the constant becoming denoted by the ten factors. However, the ten factors give us a methodological heuristic Breuch did not seem to believe could exist in a traditional classroom setting (118-120). I believe contemplation on the ten factors can give students and writers, in general, a process of mindfulness that should accompany composition and communication.

The first step, of course, is for a rhetor to let herself be open to change. One would do well to embrace the potential to change or to consider oneself a kind of personified contingency. Mindfulness work is needed here.

Subject Position

Subject position is induced by the relationship of one's power and influence in a given context. When writing from a particular standpoint, one may discern personal ethos by evaluating how he or she has been interpellated by a particular environment. If one does not like the potential interpellations presented to her, one can then seek a more informed way to reach an audience by asking questions such as:

- How did I get here?
- What influences have created this situation?
- What power (ethos) do I possess to deal with it?
- Who else in my audience may have similar power in this situation?
- What internal causes and relations have brought about my power to deal with this situation?
- How might my power come to fruition (i.e., manifest effect) here?⁵

Power, which can be construed as both ethos and agency, must always be evaluated in relation to the context in which it potentially manifests. Students can use these factors to gauge a rhetorical context and think *kairotically* when communicating (White 20).

5. Editors' note: compare these questions for students to ask with Khost's on 'felt sense,' this volume.

Of course, one cannot remain cognitive of the nuances of positionality at every moment. Upon writing, one must employ what Roland Barthes describes in *Mythologies*, when he speaks of a character dubbed “the mythologist”: one who embodies a role as an expedient means, a rhetorical strategy, for temporal purposes (156-159). Thus, students can learn to represent themselves as embodiments of *Kairos*—no small feat.

Interdependence of writer and research

The ten factors and their relationship to the ten “worlds” may also benefit a student’s approach to research. Students who are in the initial stages of research—exploring a general topic—or students who may have trouble processing information that does not fit their preconceived notions, as Kirsch found, may benefit from applying the factors of internal cause, relation, latent effect, and manifest effect to the research process. If texts discovered through research are considered kinds of relations, what internal causes do they spark? Why those causes as opposed to others? Such mindfulness can both illicit interest on the part of the student writer and act as a mode of invention to create an approach or delivery of a student’s thesis.

Embracing the cause and effect factors (internal cause to manifest effect) may ease a student’s transition from old to new ideas and break that student out of a comfortable but mentally inert mindlessness. William James, when discussing paradigm shifts or transitions in consciousness, stresses that the new must intertwine, to some extent, with a bit of the old in order to be accepted; the novel without a bit of transition is too foreign for most to embrace (382-383). Likewise, if the new (relation) can be connected to the old (internal cause) a student may transition to new ideas more smoothly. Thus, the ability to move out of one’s comfort zone toward innovative thought can be enhanced.

So the concept of the ten factors presents itself as a mode of invention (discovering what to say and/or how to say it). Like Krista Ratcliffe’s definition of rhetorical listening—“a trope for interpretive invention” (19)—the ten factors help us listen to both ourselves and the surrounding environment. According to Ratcliffe, rhetorical listening “is a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture” that enhances “conscious identifications in ways that promote productive communication, especially but not solely cross-culturally” (25). Surely, one can see a correlation with the ten factors. However, the ten factors are not utterly contingent upon rhetorical listening. Our faculties for such mindfulness must always be on and can constantly be reset in other ways.

The ability to constantly reset (or to reset as often as humanly possible) can be enhanced through writing, or, at least, through a construction of language that evades essentialism as much as possible. Langer and Piper provide an interesting example. In their attempts to identify a “method of teaching conditionally” that “may be interpreted as a way of fostering creativity and teaching flexible thought” (285), Langer and Piper facilitated an experiment in which separate groups of college students were given familiar objects that were described unconditionally (“This is an X”) or conditionally (“This could be an X”). They say, “A need was then generated for which the object in question was not explicitly suited but could fulfill. In an independent assessment, the familiar and unfamiliar objects were determined equally able to fulfill the needs” (281). Langer and Piper discovered that the group for whom the object was described conditionally were

able to think more mindfully. In other words, they were able to make new distinctions based on present need (280). To put it another way, the students were able to think kairotically. The unconditional mode of rendering something in language ("This *is* an X") locked the other group of students into an essentialist mode that discouraged innovative thought. The conditional rendering promoted a world in which objects were not essentialized and, therefore, open to a constant change in meaning and use.

In a similar mode, Lawrence Weinstein, in *Grammar for the Soul*, sums up the risks involved when a student assumes the notion of a fixed, unchanging self. Such a notion is both inaccurate and overly constraining:

It is too simple, and it lacks respect for its subject's capacity for change over time . . . [T]he verb . . . form of "to be," seems to sum that person up. I, in my time, have been told I was a disappointment, a hero, a lightweight, a genius, a progressive, a frightened middle-of-the roader, and scores of other things. Every time a "to be" variant was wielded to define me, it gave me the distinct, paralyzing sense that my whole self had been encompassed. (92)

Mahayana Buddhism denies the existence of essential, autonomous selves and promotes the belief in an ontology of constant change. A Buddhist's attempt at discourse—at a rhetoric that reflects this ideology—promotes mindfulness. The lack of essentials and the disappearance of *the* self in exchange for *a* self, conditional and kairotic, becomes apparent.

Conclusion

Buddhist thought, specifically Mahayana Buddhism and the *Lotus Sutra*, seems to work well with contemporary theories of rhetoric and composition. Indeed, exegetes of this sutra may say that Buddhist thought, like epistemic rhetoric, permeates all that is (Ikeda et al, 176). Thus, I see the ten factors as pedagogical and heuristic supplements, both to the teaching of mindfulness *and* rhetoric. What's more, contemplating the ten factors and those who have written thoroughly about them point students toward the connection of rhetoric and spirituality that pedagogues like Kirsch are trying to attain.

I want to make clear that this essay is not meant to either proselytize or downplay the efficacy of other religions in the classroom. However, if one wants to combine the spiritual and the rhetorical, he or she would do well to look into the Nichiren school, the *Lotus Sutra*, and its exegetes, such as Chih-i, and Ikeda.

What's more, I am also suggesting that we move away from the concept of mastery and fixed knowledge and embrace the ten factors as a way of understanding *Kairos*, subject position, and research. Buddhist thought has been neglected for too long as a way to provide us with an alternative understanding of rhetoric and pedagogy. Perhaps the *Lotus Sutra* can help us remedy that.



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“Alas, Not Yours to Have”: Problems with Audience in High-Stakes Writing Tests and the Promise of Felt Sense

Peter H. Khost

This essay offers a conceptual basis and strategy for teaching an expanded application of felt-sense theory to avoid a standardized approach to written argumentation. Such an approach adopts a limited notion of audience and fails to acknowledge important aspects of the rhetorical situation. In particular, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) now influence argumentation in primary and secondary school curricula and may thereby shape students’ composing habits, consequently determining how they are placed in college (Smith).

My complaint about CCSS-aligned high-stakes testing is that it risks training students over many years to adopt a reductive and potentially unethical attitude toward audiences by privileging a monologic, agonistic brand of argumentation.¹ My essay encourages teachers to take counteractive measures, especially postsecondary first-year writing instructors whose students have been brought up on CCSS tests. While I highlight the application of felt sense theory, to help explain my views, I also offer an heuristic example in the myth of Orpheus. I contend Orpheus could have avoided the failure of his one-tracked argumentative mode by means of a rhetorical/ethical application of felt sense. My strategy is not presented as an outright solution to the deeply embedded problems of over-testing and the removal of curriculum and assessment from teachers’ hands in American public education. Rather, I am offering just one counteractive pedagogical measure among others that teachers can implement.²

After examining problems of audience in the treatment of argument by the Common Core’s writing standards, this essay engages theories of audience from rhetoric and composition scholarship, reviews the concept of felt sense, introduces my proposal for its rhetorical applications, and offers a pedagogical model for reconceiving audience more ethically in written argumentation.

1. The pairing of *agonistic* (meaning competitive) with *monologic* (meaning isolated from engagement with others) may appear contradictory; after all, how can one compete if not with others? But the kind of argumentation I critique makes some of the moves of genuine debate with others in the name of winning (e.g., stating claims, offering evidence) without genuinely engaging anyone. It is a monologue without an audience, let alone an interlocutor. For a good critique of other falseties underlying argumentation as the “dominant mode” in secondary and postsecondary instruction, see DeStigter.

2. I do not object to assessment methods that are replicable, aggregated, and data-driven (Haswell). But scholarship tells us these matters should be entrusted to trained, practicing educators, to the stated values of our professional organizations, and in some cases to our local institutional contexts. While we advocate for this ideal, teachers can and should take pedagogical steps to offset the ongoing pernicious influences of the current high-stakes testing regime.

Some Problems with High-stakes Writing Tests

Although some have praised the CCSS for increasing the importance of writing (Applebee) and argument (Marzano) in K-12 education, many more have objected to the high-stakes tests associated with the standards. The latter group includes a large and growing national “opt-out” movement. A reason for objections is the dubious treatment of audience by the writing prompts of CCSS-aligned tests, which are to be administered—along with multiple interim benchmark assessments—from third grade through twelfth grade in forty-five states. Writing is one of the central foci of these tests, and argumentative writing occupies a “special place” at the top of both the broad “college and career readiness anchor standards for writing” and the more specific grade 6-12 “writing standards” (National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 24; 41-42).³ Some attention is given to informational/explanatory and narrative forms of writing, but the standards explicitly state that they “put particular emphasis on students’ ability to write sound arguments,” especially in later years (24). According to the CCSS, “argument is a reasoned, logical way of demonstrating that the writer’s position, belief, or conclusion is valid. In English language arts, students make claims about the worth or meaning of a literary work or works. They defend their interpretations or judgments with evidence from the text(s) they are writing about” (23). Students are required to “make claims,” “argue,” and “defend” them, with the purposes being “to change a reader’s point of view, to bring about some action on the reader’s part, or to ask the reader to accept the writer’s explanation or evaluation of a concept, issue, or problem” (23).

But who is this ubiquitous “reader” supposedly receiving millions of students’ arguments year after year, and is there any reason for students to engage this audience in discourse other than being required to do so? The Common Core standards repeat several times that one must give “careful consideration” to the “audience” and write in a way that is “appropriate” to them (41, 63). Appropriateness to audience applies to the grade 6-12 standards for both writing generally and writing literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects (43, 66). Yet the reader is never identified, let alone made real or interesting to student writers. Nor is a context provided for addressing this cipher, other than perhaps the condition of test-taking itself. Under these circumstances, how can one be expected to change anyone’s mind, motivate action, or win acceptance other than by treating the reader as a straw man, which can hardly be considered an “appropriate” rhetorical gesture toward one’s audience? So as students are continually tested on this model under timed high-pressure circumstances, they become accustomed to targeting passive recipients with evidence in defense of arguments that receive no response other than test scores rendered incontrovertibly by an anonymous authority. Seen in this light, the rhetorical situation posed by high-stakes writing tests might aptly be characterized as Kafkaesque.

Let us consider specific language from my home state of New York’s CCSS-aligned ELA Regents Exam, two thirds of which consist of writing argumentatively. In a sample test provided online by the state, part one of the exam entails multiple choice reading comprehension questions about literary texts. Part two, “Writing from Sources,”

3. Henceforth these organizations will be identified by their acronyms, NGA and CCSSO.

prompts students as such: "Closely read each of the five texts provided . . . and write an evidence-based argument on the topic below" (New York State Education Department 21). Part three, "Text Analysis Writing," asks the following of students, which will register to many writing teachers as a form of argument:

Closely read the text provided . . . and write a well-developed, text-based response. . . . In your response, identify a central idea in the text and analyze how the author's use of one writing strategy (literary element or literary technique or rhetorical device) develops this central idea. Use strong and thorough evidence from the text to support your analysis. (36)

As indicated, the standards underpinning these test prompts make big claims about the importance of engaging audiences in significant ways, but the language of the tests themselves belies those intentions by substituting monologic, agonistic routines for genuine communicative exigency. While serving as president of the Modern Language Association, Gerald Graff criticized this kind of assignment for asking students to "say smart things about [literary] works in a vacuum" without "address[ing] the kind of questions that real readers would ask, like 'Does anyone say otherwise?' or 'So what?'" (3).

Few people want to write such texts under such circumstances or, for that matter, want to read them. Yet this writing and reading proliferates in Common Core tests, regardless of the inauthentic relationship to readers these tests force upon writers. So unwanted, inauthentic writing may often be the result, lending support to the familiar slogan: "Standardized tests produce standardized students." A less catchy but more befitting revision might be: "Standardized writing tests (re)produce unethical rhetorical situations." I say *unethical* rather than unrealistic, empty, or unsound because I believe a constant regime of monologic, agonistic writing not only subjects students to go through continual, anxious motions, but also conditions them to disregard the vital roles of introspection and social interaction in academic communication. At the least, they learn to regard writing in this context as somehow exempt from the attention to others and to oneself that one naturally pays in other contexts. This includes listening, responding, and speaking with an authentic voice (Monahan).

A disclaimer and clarification of terms are in order. I acknowledge how conflicted the concept of *authenticity* is—or realness or unrealness (Bitzer 11), or genuineness (Petraglia 19)—especially where human subjectivity is concerned. In fact, authenticity and audience in this context may be largely indeterminate phenomena whose insinuation of essentialness or singularity contradicts their constructedness and plurality in rhetorical situations. However, writers may be more likely to determine (and/or construct) at least a better working "*sense of audience*" if their experiences of motive, purpose, and responsiveness emerge from willful engagement in discourse with responsive others (Park 487, emphasis added). So in speaking of audience, I suggest something closer to interrelationality or transactiveness.⁴ *Audience* can suffice here as shorthand for the mercurial nexus of purposes, motives, and negotiations that circulate in discourse. In speaking of *unethical* or *inauthentic* situations, then, I mean something closer to compulsory engagement in writing contexts in which there exists no interrelationality with

4. Notwithstanding Louise Rosenblatt's distinction between these terms, I use them interchangeably for present purposes (xvi, 26).

others or no desire to engage in such. Under these circumstances, students enjoy little or no opportunity, let alone motivation, to dwell on audience and the related issues they may otherwise try to untangle, such as why they write in the first place, how the implication of readers affects their performance, or what these issues do to influence one other.

Furthermore, *argument* in the CCSS really means a particular brand of argument, which carries certain assumptions about and stances toward audience that seem natural or indisputable. This is argument seeking to change readers through fact-based reasoning that ignores other means of persuasion.⁵ As the CCSS state, “logical argument,” the kind required by these tests, “convinces the audience because of the perceived merit and reasonableness of the claims and proofs offered *rather than either the emotions the writing evokes in the audience or the character or credentials of the writer*.” The Standards place special emphasis on writing logical arguments as a particularly important form of college- and career-ready writing” (NGA Center and CCSSO 24, emphasis added). Constant rehearsal of this kind of arguing may very well teach students that the audience’s “emotions” and the writer’s “character or credentials” have no “perceived merit” (24).⁶

Catherine E. Lamb describes as “monologic” (13–21) the kind of argument critiqued above, and one of her respondents refers to it as “agonistic” (Farrar 493), as have others (e.g., Long 222; Ong 18). Such an approach to discourse foregrounds competition for control and dominance through logocentrism. As the CCSS’s favored mode, this brand of argument comprises the bedrock of what the standards hail as “the foundation for *any* creative and purposeful expression in language” (3, emphasis added). But obviously such a skewed emphasis hardly accounts for the many different kinds of rhetorical encounters with others to be experienced in school, the workplace, and life generally. As Russell Long points out, in “almost every writing ‘mode’ . . . we find repeated examples of workable prose which are not developed upon the assumption of an adversary relationship with the reader” (223–24). Even within the area of argumentation alone, there are many other methods and motives than just logically convincing an opponent of one’s own point of view. These include Carl Rogers’s emphasis on common ground (Kiefer), Kenneth Burke’s collaborative expectancy, Lakoff and Johnson’s argument as dance, Jim Corder’s argument as emergence, Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin’s invitational argument, Cheryl Glenn’s rhetoric of silence, Krista Ratcliffe’s rhetoric of listening, and Arabella Lyon’s recognition and deliberation.

5. See John Edlund’s blog post for a good place to begin learning more about the longstanding, ongoing debate that distinguishes argument from persuasion.

6. In a 2011 speech at a New York State Education Department event, CCSS chief architect David Coleman said: “The only problem with [personal] writing is as you grow up in this world you realize people really don’t give a sheet [*sic*] about what you feel or what you think. What they instead care about is can you make an argument with evidence. . . . It is rare in a working environment that someone says, ‘Johnson, I need a market analysis by Friday, but before that I need a compelling account of your childhood’” (10). Expletive aside, note the nature of the rhetorical audience that Coleman poses in this statement. His first hypothetical entails “care” on the audience’s part; the second involves interaction between an audience and a writer named Johnson. Apart from dismissing personal or argumentative writing, Coleman assumes a foundational value in a writer’s authentic relationships with audiences, yet under CCSS testing conditions, students must write for nobody at all, let alone for somebody with whom they care to engage, as “Johnson” does.

Ryan Hays, an institutional administrator, sees a need to counterbalance what I'm calling the monologic, agonistic mode. He worries that first-year college students lack experience in listening and dialogue across differences because of the ease of living today in "silos" or "bubbles." Hays proposes that "we first have to engage the minds we would change: our own as well as others." To take part in such "real debate" is "to find a sense in which we're in it together," or else, "if an 'us vs. them' dynamic prevails, everybody loses. In this way, dialogue is equally pledge as practice: it urges us to uphold a sense of community above all." A pledge to community, however, does not match—in fact, it somewhat opposes—the Common Core's underlying ideology: "competitiveness and prosperity in the age of globalization" (NGA, CCSSO, and Achieve, Inc. 5) and "workforce training" (Common Core State Standards Initiative 4, 60).

The tests affiliated with the CCSS and other such exams manage to maintain a widespread public misperception that they are paramount measures of some singular notion of *performance*, a fact that makes the writing practices and the stakes involved in these tests seem self-evident and even justified in causing children and teens considerable anxiety. By yoking high-stakes tests inextricably to student's advancement through school and thereby to the successes that presumably follow, our culture affirms for its young people that the kind of writing done for these exams is the most important kind. What does and does not count in this context becomes apparent to students as quickly as the tasks determining these values become rote and resented. Writing thus seems to students not to entail engaging with authentic, responsive interlocutors because of a shared sense of exigency, but rather, sweating out a quick defense of a decontextualized literary interpretation that will be evaluated by an unknown reader who may turn out to be a machine (see Human Readers).

A similar teleology affects new primary and secondary school teachers these days, whose job security may have more to do with high-stakes test scores than with whether students can improve their abilities to conduct frequent low-stakes writing, engage in peer review, treat genre markers as indicators of social activity, conduct independent research, transfer their writing knowledge to digital environments, communicate ethically and across differences, or even just enjoy writing meaningful texts. These are all practices that will ready students for college composition that are not effectively engaged by standardized tests, though the Common Core Standards' introductory language acknowledges few of them (7). Nor do high-stakes writing tests engage students in the eight "habits of mind" that professional organizations in composition studies nationally endorse in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*: creativity, responsibility, engagement, metacognition, persistence, curiosity, openness, and flexibility (Council). It is not hard to understand, then, why a 2014 Gallup pole found that 72% of the 854 surveyed U.S. public school teachers did not support standardized tests as measures of student performance, and 89% objected to linking CCSS-aligned scores to teacher evaluations.

Along with readiness for college, career readiness is the other grand principle the CCSS and its high-stakes tests strive to uphold. But just as the values of actual college writing instructors are misrepresented by such tests, it seems the needs of employers of college graduates may not be well-represented either. According to a 2014 study sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities that annually surveys

400 organizations hiring new college graduates, the postsecondary learning outcomes rated as most important to employers are, in order, effective oral communication, working effectively with others in teams, effective written communication, ethical judgment and decision making, and critical thinking and analytical reasoning (Hart Research 4). By putting so much stock in standardized exams that mischaracterize written communication and ignore collaboration and ethical decision making, our test-obsessed culture seems not to prepare them very well for entry into the professional world.⁷ After all, how effectively can one communicate, either orally or in writing, without establishing an authentic relationship with one's interlocutors or paying close attention to them? How can one work well with team members and treat people ethically if one has been conditioned to address others primarily as anonymous sounding boards for monologues that lack emotions and credible ethos?

The problem I have identified here will not be overcome easily; that effort will require advocacy at the political, public, and institutional levels. But teachers' greatest influence is still arguably exerted in their classrooms. For this reason, one of the many potential pedagogical steps we can take to counteract the systemic mistreatment of audience by high-stakes writing tests is to introduce students to the basics of audience theory and encourage them to employ felt sense as an ethical rhetorical gesture, which is what the next sections of this essay address. These steps may or may not help students on high-stakes tests, but they should help students to break out of test-based routines once they reach college.

Audience in Composition Studies Theory

Formal theories of audience go back to at least Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and have sustained a consistent area of scholarly inquiry for thousands of years. The subject has generated enough attention to make impossible a comprehensive review of the literature produced in composition studies even since the 1980s. In fact, audience may be one of the most disputed concepts in the field, partly because the subject overlaps with the concerns of a number of schools of thought, each with its own agenda and point of view, including recently, social constructionism, genre theory, and activity theory—to say nothing of wider applications in linguistics and philosophy that sometimes find their way into writing studies scholarship.

What will suffice for present purposes is a quick tour through some major trends concerning audience in more recent composition and rhetoric theory. My position is that students brought up on constant high-stakes writing tests ought to learn about and accept the complexities and significance of audience theory in order to mindfully engage in their own holistic musing on and transacting with audiences. First of all, teachers can make students aware of the audience for which they have been unwittingly trained. The ones who read their tests, students may be shocked to learn, are often temporary hires

7. Today, high-stakes tests and their attendant high-cost preparatory courses play significant influences on the placement into schools, programs, and even jobs for many Americans. Consider the respective 2010 and 2014 *New York Times* reports on a burgeoning “test-prep industry for 4-year-olds” (Winerip), and on businesses screening post-undergraduate job applicants by their SAT scores (Dewan).

with no teaching experience, recruited on Craigslist for \$12 an hour to score a per-day quota of Common Core-aligned tests that must meet a designated distribution of outcomes on a six-point scale (DiMaggio; Farley; Ravitch; Rich). Students will see that this situation does not reflect the rich variety of dynamic relationships that writers and audiences share in other contexts, including in the activities of *college and career*.

When writers write, they usually address audiences who are not present or not interactive with them in the given moment. In fact, even the physical or responsive *presence* of a reader far from guarantees a writer accurate awareness of that reader's responses to a text. The absence of immediate or accurate information about the reader has caused a great number of enlightened minds to speculate—collectively and inconclusively—about whether the rhetorical audience is singular or multiple in person or perspective; real or not real, or to what degree, or how to determine realness; active or passive in the making of meaning, and if active, then collaborative or antagonistic, or to what degree; outside or inside the text; and, to introduce a key set of terms, addressed or invoked. In 1984, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford introduced the field to their addressed/invoked framework, which accounts for competing sides of an ongoing debate about whether the audience exists independently or is constructed by the writer in a rhetorical situation.

Aristotle is the champion of the audience-addressed school of thought, with his ample classifications of types and states of human beings, to which rhetors should refer in making identifications and issuing corresponding strategies toward a desired effect. As the theory is popularly received today, if a given readership appears inclined toward logical reasoning, for instance, then one does well to appeal to them with logical evidence. Or if the occasion calls for sympathy or outrage, then one does well to appeal to their emotions—and so on. A good deal of writing instruction has conceived audience along these lines, and likeminded scholars have followed Aristotle's lead in providing their own taxonomies in support of the audience-addressed view. For example, Ruth Mitchell and Mary Taylor offer their "audience-response model" for application to "all writing for all audiences," represented as a cyclical process of writing, feedback, and response in which audience functions to "challenge" writing into this circulation of give and take (250). Mitchell's and Taylor's model promises to classify a text "according to its effects, not according to its conformity to extrinsic standards" (250-51). Shortly after that model appeared, Fred R. Pfister and Joanne F. Petrick published their "heuristic model," a checklist for writers offered as "a comprehensive probe of [the audience's] basic social, educational, and ethical identities" meant to help writers grasp the influence of readers' relationships to them and to the subject of their composition (216). If one belongs to the audience-addressed camp, one considers (consciously or not) the reader to be determinate enough for the tailoring of a persuasive text that will yield intended effects.

Another school of thought considers the rhetorical audience to be an unreachable entity whom writers invoke by strategically leaving them textual cues to follow or assigning them roles to perform in such a way as to yield intended effects. The best known representative of the audience-invoked point of view may be Walter Ong, whose 1975 article declares all audiences to be fictions created by writers out of an inability to know or interact with the absent reader. In this way, the writer is different from a speaker: "He is writing. No one is listening. There is no feedback. Where does he find his 'audience'?"

He has to make his readers up, fictionalize them” (11). One of Ong’s examples analyzes the opening sentence of Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, in which the author invites readers to play the role of “companion-in-arms” by means of specific usage of definite articles and demonstrative pronouns: “In the late summer of *that* year we lived in a house in a village that looked across *the* river and . . . *the* mountains” (emphases added). The reader presumably knows which year, river, and mountains these are and/or that what matters about them is not their facticity but the feelings they “recall” through the sense of already having been there with the author as his “boon companion” (12-13). Twenty-five years earlier, Walker Gibson (an admitted influence on Ong) proposed the similar idea of the “mock” reader, a fictionalized version of oneself who plays roles posed by texts in order to experience them in certain ways. Both theorists suggest that readers will generally play along with roles assigned to them, as long as the writer has convincingly constructed them.

We can imagine exceptions to both the addressed and the invoked approaches to audience. For example, sometimes a writer cannot determine very much about an audience to whom they must write, such as in composing a statement for the famously inaccessible U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, or in emailing a complaint to a major corporation’s headquarters. Also, it is not uncommon for a reader to resist or reject the role assigned them by a writer. For example, some readers would not wish to play the part of Hemingway’s bosom buddy. Scholars have noted that assignments such as *Make an argument and support it with evidence* often ask students to write to no one in particular or to no one authentic, given that the teacher as default reader is quite unlike nearly any other audience. A teacher is paid to be a “watchdog” (Reiff 418) and a critic of a given composition (Long; Miller). Jasper Neel claims that most writing done in response to such assignments (or, I would add, to high-stakes tests) does not effectively engage readers, making these texts “nearly impossible to read” (94-5). Joseph Petraglia criticizes writing of this kind as “pseudo”-realistic and “unauthentic” because no genuine reader is engaged—and no one is actually persuaded by the argument (21).

Alternatives to the addressed or invoked binary were soon developed. Ede and Lunsford argue that writers perform *both* of these actions: addressing what they know of real audiences outside of the text and invoking roles for imagined ones within it, while establishing themselves as readers of their own texts during revision. Additionally, readers play an active role in this “creative, dynamic” scheme, “whereby writers create readers and readers create writers” (169). Ede and Lunsford conclude: “In the meeting of these two lies meaning, lies communication” (“Audience” 169). James Porter proposes a variously collaborative or communal writer/reader relationship, in which constructions of these “blurred” roles are subsumed by the discourse community of which each is a part (114). Mary Jo Reiff synthesizes a number of other theorists (cf. Park; Rafoth; Selzer) in deconstructing the addressed/invoked binary and, along the way, critiquing Ede and Lunsford (421) and Porter (411), whose pat solutions to the binary seek too much to “stabilize” or “subdue” the audience rather than “enlarge and complicate our understanding of this concept” and “encourage students to see that writing often entails a negotiation among various and multiple readers” (422). Reiff cites compelling examples of detailed, heterogeneous constructions of audience in workplace writing (414-21). This collective discussion contradicts the vague, homogenous approach to audience taken

by CCSS writing tests in supposed alignment with students' prospective academic and career needs.

So it seems that after millennia of theorizing on the subject, scholars still cannot definitively identify the nature and role of audience in rhetoric, let alone agree on how writers can most effectively engage readers. If, as the aggregate of modern audience theory suggests, readers are multiple, changeable, heterogeneous, constructed, participatory, or in any number of other ways unstable or unknowable to some degree, then a rhetoric tailor-made to audiences seems impossible to muster or manage. I suggest, then, that writers would be well-served to develop their abilities at guess work, trial and error, and seeking out and responding to feedback. They should also practice engaging with difference in significant ways, opening themselves up to possibilities of connection, and accepting their participation in an ongoing mystery. In other words, I want young writers to be aware of and to accept the audience's indeterminacy and—when a genuine desire occurs in them—to do their best to engage with readers anyway, no matter how little may be known about them. A key takeaway from audience theory is that although audiences may be variously indeterminate, writers can and do intuit and develop mutual relationships with them. As Lyon defines what she calls recognition, these are "acts where two people understand a connection between them—not a connection of dominance, identification, or projection, all of which deny difference, but simply one of a shared communicative act" (53).

This relationality is where the concept of felt sense can be of use.

Felt Sense

Felt sense is a term that psychologist and philosopher Eugene Gendlin coined to refer to a bodily awareness of meaning that comes prior to language—and I would add: or otherwise incidental to language. As the theory goes, some knowledge exists within one's body in the form of feelings and sensations apart from one's conscious and linguistic understanding of it. A felt sense might originate in impressions of the internal or external and past, present, or future. It is not an emotion but an embodied perception of one's interaction with the world. This perception is initially something unclear or vague that exceeds one's descriptions but which can eventually emerge and be known explicitly. Since the 1960s, Gendlin has developed and taught a process by which he has clients concentrate deliberately on their felt sense. In this process, called *focusing*, a person pays close sustained attention to the pre-lingual, inchoate sense of a feeling. Words are tested to see if they match the felt sense, until the person arrives at a tangible internal shift in which language emerges that feels right. Gendlin takes care to specify that "felt sense is not a mental experience but a physical one. *Physical*. A bodily awareness of a situation or person or event" (*Focusing* 32). Some examples I have used to explain this concept include the feeling of a blocked word or name on the tip of your tongue, or a lingering sensation that you have forgotten something until the unknown content finally emerges, or knowing that you have used an incorrect word but not being able to explain why it isn't the right choice. How does one know—on one's own, without resources—that an imprecise word has been chosen among a number of synonyms, for example? "It's just

a feeling,” one typically says in such an instance in which one doubtless possesses the knowledge in question and yet cannot fully account for that knowledge.

Relatively little rhetoric/composition scholarship focuses specifically on the concept of felt sense, though the subject is tangentially connected to a somewhat broader body of work (e.g., Cunningham; Doherty; and Mancuso). The phrase “felt sense” has become familiar enough for casual referencing among composition scholars, which is not uncommon since the field’s affective turn. Regular readers of *JAEPL* may be about as familiar with felt sense theory as anyone other than psychologists and philosophers who use Gendlin’s work. For these reasons and for space constraints, I will make quick work of accounting for the literature on the subject in composition studies. Most work on felt sense pertaining to written communication is attributable to Sondra Perl’s writing on the subject, and nearly all of it is primarily pedagogical in nature. Beginning in the 1980s, Perl began to adapt Gendlin’s theory (“Understanding”) and eventually developed her Guidelines for Composing exercise, which she disseminated in 1989 (Elbow and Belanoff) and 1994 (“A Writer’s Way”), and expanded in 2004, including an audio-recorded version. Additionally, in 1995 Steve Sherwood explained applications of felt sense in the Writing Center; in 1996 Linda Miller Cleary investigated felt sense’s influence on the roles of gender, purpose, and audience in student writers; in 2001 Randall Popken theorized connections between felt sense and students’ genre acquisition processes; in 2002 Robbie Clifton Pinter explored links between felt sense and listening; and in 2003 M. Elizabeth Sargent described her teaching of felt sense in relation to invention and metacognition.

Perl’s Guidelines consist of a series of questions focusing on felt sense, meant to help writers mainly during the invention process of composing, such as generating ideas, developing a subject matter, or getting in touch with the feelings at the edge of one’s thought. In summarizing the estimated stages of the Guidelines exercise, Perl notes first that “Felt sense occurs—is located—in our bodies,” then we can “dispel” this sensation’s murkiness by paying close attention, and then the process will culminate in words “that will help us express” the developing feeling and put us “on the right track” (*Felt Sense* 4-5). Perl and others speak of a relieving “A ha” moment when one’s felt sense emerges in the form of language (i.e., the culminating “right track”). Early in his career, Gendlin explains the idea of arriving at a so-called “that” in beginning to address a problem through felt sense; this inchoate idea is something to attend to, an identifiable point of reference, or “a grip on” one’s felt meaning that allows one to begin focusing (*Experiencing* 74). Later, the idea of “that” becomes symbolized graphically as “.....”, which indicates what Perl describes as “a space that is open but not blank,” which contains “all that awaits implicitly before words come” (*Felt Sense* 50-1).

As concerns one’s felt sense of *the audience*, however, this “A ha” experience might not occur if the audience is in fact indeterminate in nature. If posed by the genuine (i.e., irreducible, unsubsumed) otherness of an audience, the open space in one’s felt sense graphically represented by “that” or “.....” may need to remain *indefinitely* open. Yet language must continue to come forth into the space of (or posed by) the audience if verbal communication is not to cease. Clay Walker has theorized an ecological agency emerging from similar conditions, which he imagines as “feedback and feedforward

loops between ourselves and the world in which we act . . . emphasize[ing] potentiality or unpredictability over intentionality" (9).⁸

Sustaining ongoing contact with one's felt sense would be an advisable practice to engage in for learners of rhetoric who seek to maintain abiding, non-appropriative relationships with their audiences. That is to say: not considering one's "grip" on words the culmination of a discrete intention but rather just one of innumerable related points within ongoing discourse. Indeed, Gendlin's and Perl's theorizations of felt sense call for recursive attention to one's developing feelings and continuous revisions of the corresponding language for these feelings. But the idea of recursiveness seems not to get its due in pedagogical applications of felt sense theory. Compositionists have tended to apply felt sense primarily as a method for eliciting conscious knowledge out of unconscious embodied experience, or in other words, for deriving language from feeling and then moving on, for example, by employing felt meaning to generate topics for writing and then writing about them. The intention in such cases is to eventually arrive at—or *to shift attention to*—language per se. That's the outcome as well as the point at which writing takes over, and the focus on feeling subsides. Many students and teachers have benefited from this application of felt sense.⁹ But I wish to expand upon it.

My approach is neither as scientific nor philosophical as Gendlin's is, and it also varies somewhat from most pedagogical uses of felt sense. Perhaps it can be called rhetorical, which neither discounts it from pedagogical classification nor positions it very far from the philosophical. In short, I see no reason to limit the process and function of focusing so that one experiences a feeling, then focuses on it, then arrives at language, and then moves on. The relationship between feeling and language may also operate in the reverse order, or by a different arrangement, or by means other than linear sequencing altogether. For instance, in focusing on felt sense, the experience of feelings and emergent language may coexist in balance, or emphases may oscillate between them, or their nature may change in process, thereby prompting a different but related direction. In other words, felt meanings and the language generated from/for them by focusing do not necessarily correspond to an orderly process of evocation, and in some cases there may be considerable back and forth before arriving at a resolution.¹⁰ For that matter, in at least some circumstances, no amount of emergent language will settle the matter of audience indeterminacy with finality.

Probably few felt-sense practitioners would admit to seeking such an orderly process of focusing on feeling as that just described. In fact, a noted early description of felt sense by Perl characterizes the phenomenon as prone to "break apart, shift, unravel, and become something else" ("Understanding" 365).¹¹ Yet for all its potential chaos, felt sense still seems to be celebrated by writing teachers mainly as a stepping-stone toward

8. Editors' note: see Rysdam and Johnson-Lull's discussion of "feedforward," this volume.

9. I am included in both categories. Like many other composition instructors, I use Perl's "Guidelines." I first experienced the exercise as a graduate student in Professor Perl's class as she was refining the Guidelines for her book.

10. Insert here any preferred metaphor: loop, spiral, Möbius strip, tangent, fractal, et cetera.

11. Both Jeffrey Carroll (66) and William Strong (25) quote this passage, otherwise making minor reference to felt sense.

achieving a more orderly subsequent state, namely, some form of sensible verbal expression. In other words, focusing on felt sense is often seen as a temporary condition, a means to an end, something one does first rather than maintains throughout writing. Elbow calls felt sense “a kind of blueprint for a precise meaning” (Perl ix), which suggests felt sense is different from the meaning itself (i.e., the structure that the blueprint plans out). Sargent calls felt sense one of the “tools” in her student “writers’ tool bag” (57), which suggests felt sense is different from the thing that is built with the tool. Sherwood calls felt sense a “faculty” used “to cultivate and finetune [a student’s] ear,” which suggests felt sense is different from the mind’s ear itself (12).¹² Anecdotal accounts of classroom usage of the Guidelines for Composing suggest that achieving functional written language is indeed the desired end product of this process that begins in one’s feelings. This seems to confirm the notion of a presumed sequence as described above: feel first and write second. Note, for example, the directional emphasis on order in Sargent’s subtitle: “Felt Sense in the Composition Classroom: *Getting the Butterflies to Fly in Formation*” (emphasis added). Readers know what she means to suggest by the metaphor, but butterflies do not fly in formation. This fact partly accounts for the beauty of actual butterflies and for Sargent’s appeal to figurative ones. If people convert their figurative butterflies into something orderly, logical, or definitive, then these converted feelings lose the status of butterflies, just as actual butterflies lose their appeal when they are pinned and mounted. Luckily, feelings during writing do not have to be pinned down.

The great value achieved by attending to one’s felt sense in the context of rhetorical situations exists in both the written product of this process *and* in the experienced feelings themselves. In other words, the language produced by dwelling on felt sense is only one of the uses of engaging in the practice. Other benefits include gaining a deeper sense of one’s feelings for their own sake and for their relevance to a communicative context, as well as for perhaps developing a corresponding non-verbal capability through ongoing practice. This last point can be thought of as a fluency in embodied rhetoric. Such a capability would be especially desirable where the indeterminate audience is concerned since the *aporia* of audience is arguably irresolvable, yet communicators need to engage with/in/across it anyway. So other people are always in some respect *other* (i.e., different), and no amount or quality of language can fully fill this gap (i.e., make them same). But if one still continues to communicate with these others, then one may wish to develop a workable sense of audience relationality. So, ironically perhaps, one finds the other *within* oneself or, better, senses the breaking down of such geographies into a state of engaged openness. It would seem advisable to generate an explicit awareness and acceptance of the fact of indeterminacy, which involves both verbal and embodied fluency.

To rephrase the point again, at least insofar as audience indeterminacy is concerned, remaining alert to one’s felt sense over the full course of a rhetorical encounter seems preferable to merely attending to one’s feelings at first and then downplaying or disregarding them once language has begun to flow from them. The nature of audiences and of one’s perception of them will often shift during communication, even while addressing hypothetical readers. Therefore, one’s feelings and corresponding language will also

12. These characterizations stray somewhat from Perl’s Guidelines. She writes: “Seen from this [mechanistic] angle, the Guidelines are another tool But when they are connected to felt sense, they offer us a way to examine larger issues of composing” (*Felt Sense* xvi).

shift. So writers should remember that dwelling on felt sense can help them to achieve both verbal and embodied knowledge, and that the value of felt experience lies not only in how it helps them to find a right topic or word to begin their composing, but also in experiencing through the body a continuous sense of something beyond conventional awareness. This is an experience that is somewhat separate from language, even if it eventually or partly yields to language. Both Gendlin and Perl acknowledge this aspect of felt experience in terms of the "edge" of meaning, where something inside and unknown may come into articulation. Gendlin refers to this coming to words from the edge of meaning as "carrying forward." I wish to add to this concept the idea that where indeterminacies of audience are concerned, one can constantly return to one's feelings so that the *direction* of one's "carrying" may be "forward" only in terms of endless circular revolutions.¹³

To emphasize the simultaneous and ongoing nature of this dual felt and verbal phenomenon, I replace Gendlin's term *focusing*, which may highlight the endpoint of the process in cognition, with the term *dwelling*, which insinuates the sustained return to physicality I describe above.¹⁴ *Dwelling* suggests a spatiality that seems appropriate for emphasizing continued feeling, an indefinite thing—as distinguished from *focusing*, which seems to bring about a final point in reasoning: once something comes into focus, one stops dwelling; one has focused. The difference might be likened to that between the imperfect and preterit tenses. Both of these experiences and their respective descriptors are necessary, to be sure, but the indefinite experience of feeling deserves its due compared with the greater attention paid to rational verbal outcomes of felt sense exercises. My interest here is in keeping the focus on feeling as well as on "linguaging" (Perl 60), so as to draw attention to the recursive rhetorical relationship prompted by audience indeterminacy.

Toward this end, the phrase *come to terms with* will be instrumental in making my example case from the myth of Orpheus in the next part of my discussion. This phrase conveniently maintains a concurrent dual interpretation, as just specified above: one literal, "come to terms," as in *to arrive at language* presumably after an interim or process, and one figurative, "come to terms," as in *to accept*. The former of these interpretations suggests the verbal product of dwelling on felt sense; that is, conceiving words after working through an experience of speechlessness. The latter interpretation suggests the physical products and processes of dwelling, which correspond to the notion of embodied fluency. The following section of the essay interprets a well-known mythical/literary text in order to provide a compelling example of a communicator who struggles to come to terms (in both senses) with audience indeterminacy. This character's circumstances arise from having been displaced from conventional, routinized assumptions about rhetoric and audience, specifically by experiencing stifling uncertainty about his auditor's receptiveness, state of being, and presence. This interpretation demonstrates the complications of choosing suitable approaches to audience and should inspire contemporary

13. Again, or loops, spirals, Möbius strips, tangents, fractals, et cetera, metaphorically speaking.

14. See Michael Polanyi's related notion of *indwelling*: "When we learn to use language, or a probe, or a tool, and thus make ourselves aware of these things as we are of our body, we interiorize these things and make ourselves dwell in them" (10).

rhetors to seek awareness and acceptance of audience indeterminacy, and not to fall back on rote behaviors, by dwelling in their felt sense.

Orpheus and Audience Indeterminacy

To demonstrate the application of felt sense to audience indeterminacy, I turn to the myth of Orpheus, regarding this character as a rhetorical agent. Orpheus's method of engaging his audiences favors certainty over ambiguity, sameness over difference, singularity over plurality, and competition over collaboration. His method resembles the standard argumentative essay assignments common in high-stakes writing tests, and his mythical experience sheds light on why writers should explore broader and richer approaches to rhetorical situations.

The Orpheus myth provides an apt conceit for presenting my case since this character is well known to be a persuasive genius who nevertheless fails to come to terms with his most famous expressive challenge. I propose that we instruct writers to be mindful not to repeat Orpheus's regrettable overreliance on certainty, sameness, singularity, and competition, but to dwell on our felt sense as a preferable or supplemental means of accessing more diverse and appropriate rhetorical approaches. As did this tragic mythical figure in his moment of utmost crisis, contemporary writers may find themselves engaged with audiences who are partly or mostly indeterminate to them, with considerable stakes on the line. So it can help students to remember what Orpheus failed to grasp: that not every communicative occasion calls for the same approach, despite the false consistency suggested by standard high-stakes argumentative essay prompts. Instead, a greater awareness of one's felt sense in rhetorical situations might help to negotiate the audience indeterminacy that is inherent to them.

Orpheus's tale incidentally allegorizes—or *rhetorizes*—the condition of a writer whose intentions are mainly or only predicated on monologic, agonistic argument. In the myth, whenever his rhetorical task is certain, same, singular, and competitive in nature, Orpheus's persuasive powers remain dominant. But when the context for rhetorical engagement suddenly becomes uncertain, different, pluralistic, and collaborative in nature, then the great poet's language tragically fails him. This distinction offers opportunities for exploration and instruction on the nature of audience, the significance of felt sense, and the corresponding aims of (teaching) composition. Writers should be aware to avoid defaulting to such single-minded argumentative rhetoric as Orpheus constantly employs.

The most common version of the myth goes as follows. After the untimely death of his young wife, Eurydice, Orpheus employs his remarkable argumentative powers to rescue her from the afterlife. He charms his way into the underworld and convinces the gods to release her from death, but they set a condition on this unprecedented deal: Orpheus cannot look backward during the couple's ascension from the underworld. Nearing the surface, in a moment of panic, Orpheus doubts Eurydice's presence and famously turns around only to see his wife fade away into the darkness below forever. Afterward, Orpheus's rhetoric fails to convince anymore. He wanders around mourning for seven months, neither able to argue his way back into the underworld for another rescue attempt, nor to negotiate a confrontation that leads to his own death.

Orpheus is an accomplished argumentative rhetor whose tactics seem to work because he always succeeds in convincing audiences (e.g., even inanimate objects in nature, as well as the various guardians of the underworld). But this is true only as long as the situation calls for monologic, agonistic rhetoric (i.e., changing the guardians' minds, controlling rocks and trees). The quality of these outcomes is measured in terms of appropriative intentions: they are meritorious achievements only because *Orpheus gets what he wants*. But convincing others of one's intentions is hardly the only reason to engage in rhetorical exchanges, nor does success in this aim often occur in the non-mythical world. Inevitably, Orpheus encounters a situation that confounds his usual intention and method, just as students will encounter rhetorical contexts that call for other kinds of writing than the argumentative essay, and other reasons to communicate than passing a test. Such situations call for different and deeper awareness of the nature of the communicative act. Orpheus's challenging encounter is primarily characterized by doubt, plurality, and audience indeterminacy, all of which render ineffectual the mythical character's singular intentionality and competitive tactics. We certainly do not want the same to be true of real world writers for the sake of insufficient engagement in authentic rhetorical situations.

The most important part of the Orpheus myth to the present reading is what Helen Sword calls "the turn," the moment when Orpheus looks back without a word and loses his wife forever, left to mourn his now-double loss of her. It can be said that in this unprecedented moment of speechlessness Orpheus has lost his senses, or his *sense of audience*. He never asks his wife if she is there behind him during the ascension, nor does he express his feelings of doubt to her. It does not occur to him to collaborate as such. In fact, Orpheus does not ask a single question of anyone throughout the entire story. One key effect of an interrogative rhetoric is to include others in the discourse as legitimate participants in the making of meaning, instead of merely as passive recipients of one's arguments. In so doing, the other might be engaged as truly other rather than as merely an instrument for gratifying one's own self-oriented worldview.

One can infer (or project) a possessiveness in Orpheus' regard for his wife, as in Virgil's telling: "he looked back toward *his own* dear Eurydice." Then Eurydice, already fading away into the shadows, laments: "alas not *yours to have*" (Anderson 490, 498, *emphases added*). There is nothing unusual about a couple referring to each other in such terms as one's *own* or *yours* to have (e.g., marriage vows that specify "to have and to hold"). But if taken for its rhetorical implications and coupled with Orpheus's denial of Eurydice's alterity and agency, the turn demonstrates at least an appropriative rather than collaborative emphasis in the exchange between the spouses. A collaborative approach might have included an exchange of dialogue and the terms *our* and *ours*, instead. W. S. Anderson also notes these pronouns: "Orpheus tried to make Eurydice 'his' rashly and prematurely; therefore, she has ceased to be 'his' forever" (30). Overeager to claim his victory, he fails to comprehend (and to claim) what he would have won had he taken a more appropriate rhetorical stance. That is, a relationship, which is better understood in terms of interaction than of acquisition. Even if Eurydice's life had been restored, Orpheus would still not have *possessed* her; he would only have earned opportunities to collaborate with her as a spouse, largely through verbal communication.

Orpheus's rhetorical error at the point of the turn denies Eurydice any chance to play an equal—or for that matter, *any*—role in achieving her resurrection. In terms of ethics, Orpheus has reduced his wife's significance to merely a negative role opposite himself, ironically even as he seeks to rescue her from death. The turn represents the mistake of denying (or ignoring) an audience's agency in a rhetorical situation—a misapprehension of otherness as well as an overemphasis on self and sameness. We can and should learn from this example, and expect better from students and ourselves. Orpheus is not wrong to feel anxious during the ascension, just as writers are not wrong to feel insecure about appealing to their audiences. But Orpheus lacks the rhetorical flexibility to explore these feelings with his wife rather than resorting to his monologic, agonistic routine. He is so intent on conquering opponents that he misconstrues his own feelings as adversaries, as if he were losing a battle to his doubts. But in fact, these feelings are an opportunity to build community because Eurydice must also have been feeling anxious. The point of the husband's endeavor was to come together with his wife, so his rhetorical stance should have been open, engaging, and interrogative. In other words, dialogue with Eurydice rather than his wavering assumption that he had won his argument with the gods would have been the appropriate means of communicating in this case.

We can interpret the moment of the turn as a missed opportunity for Orpheus to have dwelled on his felt sense in *coming to terms with* an indeterminate audience that included Eurydice as well as the gods. In his moment of panic, this hero may have been more heroic to have paused, breathed, and become aware of his feelings, allowing them to exist, dwelling at their limits, letting language emerge naturally from that source, and returning intermittently to this practice. If Orpheus had only dwelled as such on what was bothering him, on his felt sense of that moment and his intuitions, then he would likely have discovered a solution to the crisis that did not include the need to look at his wife. Even with her dying breaths, Eurydice manages to speak to Orpheus: "alas not yours to have." Bringing her back again is something he never manages to do, despite his ability to sing of his wife's loss for seven straight months after her death. While it may be fitting to be eulogized in death, Eurydice would likely attest that it is better to be spoken to in life. But to a rhetor such as Orpheus, who has learned to objectify audiences in order to win monologic arguments, this difference does not register.

All audiences, visible or not, are unpossessable, unknowable to some degree or one way or another. Someone as accomplished with language as Orpheus is should have been aware of this, yet his panic at the turn reveals the opposite of awareness. Dwelling on his felt sense could have eased the husband's worrying considerably, or reminded him to ask Eurydice a question, or yielded a number of creative expressive alternatives to turning around. But he had not developed a sense of his feelings (let alone that of others) when confronting audiences whose interests also matter in an exchange's outcome. Eurydice does not require convincing at the point of the turn, nor is she apparently mute. Indeed, as an allied interlocutor, she could have assured him of her presence and even corroborated the difficult conditions of their ascension (or pointed out their temporary status), had Orpheus informed her of his feelings. Unfortunately, he did not.

Conclusion

Students brought up on the CCSS's high-stakes writing tests may misconstrue audiences as passive recipients of monologic, agonistic arguments in academic contexts and the workplace. This conditioning may convince learners to narrowly regard the power and purpose of rhetoric only in terms of attaining preconceived outcomes of one's own, reflecting an ethic that minimizes or dismisses the inherent differences among people. Student writers must learn that other people cannot be *gotten*, per se, through discourse. Audiences are not theirs to have or make same. Though a reader's attention can be engaged, there many different modes and reasons for doing this, all of which involve active participation on the part of the reader, who necessarily occupies a different point of view than the writer's. Preparation for this inevitability ought to be a central part of rhetorical education, which must entail more than just training in a single form of argument. As Ede and Lunsford suggest, it is often preferable to cooperate with the differences one faces in communicating than it is to combat them by arguing for sameness ("Collaboration" 363).

This lesson can be effectively taught by referencing Orpheus's tragic oversight, to help students learn and remember to dwell on their felt sense in accepting audience indeterminacy. If Orpheus's true goal was to help restore Eurydice to her own being, rather than as a condition of his being—which is to say, if he could attend to the collaborative rather than the appropriative dimension of his rhetorical engagement with her—then the uneasiness that Orpheus feels at the moment of the turn would not necessarily be unusual or unbearable to him. For if he had ever before dwelled in the felt sense of his wife's otherness, then the experience at the point of the turn would not have been especially foreign to him. He would already be familiar with the uncanniness of engaging others who are accepted as truly other. Orpheus can be forgiven for his good intention to save his wife, but we must learn from his error that on a rhetorical level, our interlocutors cannot and need not be saved from their difference. His wife's first death is unavoidable; she is mortal. Eurydice's second death is attributable to her husband's folly. It represents his refusal to accept and engage her difference.

Students come through the high-stakes testing obstacle course without becoming insensitive and competitive in all acts of expression. But many seem to hold low expectations of their written rhetorical encounters in academic writing and to possess little regard for audiences in that context. High-stakes tests are not the only cause of this problem, but as the most unified, consistent, and prominent measures of writing quality that are presented to students, these exams play a significant role. One way to estimate this impact would be to employ and compare an alternative mode of pre-college writing assessment whereby, for example, students reflect on a body of compositions they chose to do, identifying the effects this work had on others as well as the strategies they used to accomplish those effects. Such a method would probably call for students to communicate with others about their portfolio and analyze the feedback, which would make for a kind of autoethnography of their lived rhetorical situations with a socially-constructed and dynamic point of view. Such self-assessment should help students to become increasingly aware of the wide diversity of audiences, purposes, and tactics that they would encounter in other disciplines, in the workplace, and in their lives generally.

Postscript

Because I do not want to taxonomize what should be a unique, personal, and spontaneous practice, I hesitate to provide specific instructions for evoking students' felt sense of the rhetorical audience. But this essay's readers may want guidance along these lines. The following questions are adaptations and additions I have made to some of the Guidelines for Composing created by Sondra Perl (36-42). These questions can follow on Perl's introductory instructions and focusing techniques in the same way the originals do (34-5).

Who is on your mind? Is there a person or a collective audience you've been thinking about lately? Who else are you thinking about? Are there memories or future projections of audiences that strike you as interesting or compelling? Who else are you overlooking, not just specific people but types of readers, moods they may be in, expectations or biases they may have? Ask yourself: "Which one of these readers or audience types draws my attention right now? Which one could I engage through my writing for now, knowing that they are not actually my audience, or if they are, that there is so much of their experience of my topic about which I will not know?" What things do you know about the situation in which you are engaging your audience? How do you know? What things do you not know?

Ask yourself: "What is the nature of my energy associated with my sense of an audience?" When you imagine yourself engaging that audience, where do you locate that energy? Is it in your hands, in your head, or heart, or stomach; floating in front of you; a combination; or somewhere else? However you describe it, wherever you may locate that connecting energy, be aware that you will not know the whole of your audience's impressions. Go to the place where you sense the edge of this reality and dwell there, sitting calmly, breathing naturally. How does that make you feel? What would it mean for you to accept the incompleteness of your sense of audience? What would it take for you to do that? To whom can you appeal, or where can you go to ask for feedback, knowing that this will be a partial, temporary, and not necessarily representative collaboration with your audience? Why would someone want to read your composition? Why wouldn't they? How does that affect you? What can you do about that? What is likely to change? Ask yourself: "How is my mind affecting my sense of audience? How is my body affecting it? How about my spirit? My environment?"



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TEACHING & LEARNING

Introducing Feedforward: Renaming and Reframing Our Repertoire for Written Response

Sheri Rysdam and Lisa Johnson-Shull

In a paraphrase of Kenneth Burke, William Covino writes, “Language creates, and so every utterance is always a magical decree” (91). It is no mystery to composition professionals that words matter: they can create and they can destroy, and wielding them effectively is the centerpiece of our work. As composition teachers, our task is to demystify the writing process for students and invite them to appreciate and manage the many-layered complexities of written discourse. Doing it well deserves our full attention. One of the many ways we inspire our students and demystify the writing process is in how we respond to what they say when they write. Another way we demystify the process is in addressing how what they say might be better crafted for improved audience reception. Unfortunately, evidence suggests that teacher response to student writing is not as impactful or inspirational as we might like. In fact, it may be so negative as to be harmful. In a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Don’t Be Cruel,” Thomas Batt writes,

To be sure, many students do not work hard on our assignments or listen carefully to our instructions. But antipathy is unlikely to motivate them to do better; on the contrary, it may convince them to give up. What’s more, mangled syntax, disordered thinking, and frequent error happen to be hallmarks of a novice writer learning a new discourse. If we incorrectly assume they reflect a lack of effort or character—and base our feedback on that assumption—we do our students a disservice and risk inflicting real damage.

In the article’s side bar, Batt adds this conjecture about his experience: “The power of negativity may explain why students entering my first-year composition course have such a bleak attitude toward writing.” This conjecture is consistent with what we have both wondered and what we have found in our research on responding to student writing: response is not only frequently negative, it is frequently cruel. Like Batt, we agree that we can expect better outcomes when we are impeccable in this process and more intentional with our words (“From Cruel to Collegial” and “Taken at Our Word”).

However, providing guidance for the complex endeavor of writing is, like writing itself, a many-tiered and multi-layered process. Writing a good essay is intensely complicated. It requires the ability to integrate several skills and cognitive processes simultaneously (Bean; Stiggins). In order to write a successful essay (particularly at the college-level), a writer needs to:

- Comprehend information about an (ideally) inspiring and challenging topic
- Narrow the focus of the topic relative to the length of the essay
- Grab the reader’s attention

- Organize the information in a way that is logical and coherent to the culture of the readership
- Wield a substantial and varied (and properly spelled) vocabulary
- Summarize and synthesize pertinent information
- Understand the implied warrants operating in audience expectations for what constitutes convincing evidence
- Identify the need for (and have the ability to apply) citation conventions
- Construct solid, sensible and correctly punctuated sentences

Depending on the challenges of comprehending a particular concept, and of the limits or possibilities for expressing that understanding in various forms or genres for various constituents, audiences or stake-holders, writing *always* has the potential to be a challenge regardless of how experienced a writer is (Bereiter and Scardamalia; Colyar).

Teaching someone to integrate these tasks well requires a significant investment of time, patience, intelligence and creativity. It requires a response repertoire that reaches across a broad spectrum of conventions and concerns. It requires a teacher to exercise both a spirit of growth and encouragement as well as brandish an attitude of discipline and pruning. And it requires the wisdom to know when to do each or either of these things.

Unfortunately, despite the magnitude of its difficulty and importance, conversation about teacher response to student work has gotten short shrift in our scholarly discussions about writing instruction. Practical discussions that demonstrate agreement about what works and what doesn't in writing response are sparse, if not entirely absent. Data reporting what teachers actually do when they respond to student work is scant, and there is little theoretical continuity enabling us to position the conversation beneath a pedagogical North Star. Referring to the assessment work of Brian Huot, Asao Inoue writes, "Through a look at the literature on response, he [Huot] notes that the field has no formal theory of response" (20). If teacher comments help transform the lead of student prose into the gold of publicly suitable discourse, this alchemical potential is entirely compromised if we have no processes that ensure agreement on best practice, provide no administrative support for the adherence to best practices, and offer no legitimized places for teacher comments to be viewed and assessed as public performances (as student work is).

In order to navigate for ourselves this disorienting landscape, and perhaps clarify some of this confusion in the form of general protocols for practice, we set out to do four daunting tasks:

1. Gather information illuminating "real" teacher commenting practice in action (including conducting our own research)
2. Compare that information to best practice ideals
3. Develop some guiding principles for a sound pedagogy of response that unifies the disparity between the real and the ideal
4. Map our way to a theoretical North Star from which to steer future best practice behaviors

In the spirit of this journey, we offer our discovery of the concept of *feedforward*, hidden in the discourse of other disciplines and in UK conversations about composition.

We suggest “feedforward” as a staple in our vocabulary and a fundamental principle in our repertoire of response. Complementing the time-honored practice of feedback, feedforward is a response practice aimed at moving past an obsession with error or awkwardness to provide articulate guidance for future performance. In the service of bringing the concept of *feedforward* into our disciplinary discourse, we first explore some of the historical, pedagogical, and theoretical contexts that both support and problematize the potential of putting the approach into practice.

Response Matters

In her 1987 book on responding to student writing, Sarah Freedman opens with a quote from a 1903 English textbook: “The...question, How shall written work be criticized? is one of the most important in the whole problem of teaching English. *Upon the value of the criticism success in teaching composition finally depend*” (142, our emphasis).

Freedman suggests that how we respond to what students write is what matters most in teaching writing. The fact that she uses a turn-of-the-century textbook quote to say this suggests that it has mattered for a very long time. Tackling the same topic in 2001, Fife and O’Neill agree, stating, “The important response, the response that counts, is the written comment to the student draft” (302).

Yet despite the fact that these scholars suggest that the teacher’s comment on the student draft is the *most important* act in the teaching of writing, little in the professional literature consistently confirms this, or gives good guidance about what those comments should say (or what effect they have on student performance). Lynn Goldstein writes, “There is relatively little research that has examined the relationship between comment form and the effectiveness of student revision, and the results of such research are mixed” (76). Goldstein’s assertion is supported by the results of a 2014 Turnitin-sponsored student and faculty perception survey about feedback practices. Turnitin’s study shows little agreement among teachers, or between students and teachers, about what constitutes effective feedback for improvement (“Instructor Feedback”).

There is also no professional consensus that the conversation about teacher comments is even a central concern of the discipline. While Fife and O’Neill claim that “Improving the effectiveness of teachers’ comments on student papers has been a continuing conversation in composition studies for decades,” (300), Lunsford and Connors say that they see the conversation has been neglected. They write, “Given that writing evaluative commentary is one of the great tasks we share, one might think it would have been one of the central areas of examination in composition studies” (200). Our exploration supports Lunsford and Connor’s perception that the conversation has been neglected. A prime example of this neglect is the list of instructional interventions found in Graham and Perin’s oft-cited *Meta-Analysis of Writing Instruction for Adolescent Students*. Although the central question of their analysis is “What instructional practices improve the quality of adolescent students’ writing?” only two out of the fifteen investigated classroom teaching interventions even glance off the subject of teacher or peer response (452-453). Applebee and Langer’s 2013 book *Writing Instruction That Works* doesn’t even mention teacher response as an instructional strategy. In the “faculty should” section of “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement” (*College Composition and Communication* 1995),

nothing specific relative to good teacher commenting practice is mentioned, despite the fact that the statement suggests that listening carefully and responding thoughtfully to student words is important (435).

Dana Ferris has appealed to the profession for more studies that consider the effects of feedback within the total context of teaching; her appeal is but one out of many from scholars who lament the thin body of research in this area (315). However, contextualizing commenting practices, while vital, is also problematic. Fife and O'Neill found in their study that the interpretation of teacher commentary on portfolio papers was confounded by the fact they had "little information on how the comment functioned as part of the class" (301). In addition to the comprehension of context issues, the problem of access to teacher comments on student papers compounds the research. Teacher comments are found only in one place—on papers that belong to students. Ironically, even this assertion is contested as there is no professional agreement about who actually owns teacher comments—the student or the teacher. Consult your local Institutional Review Board for their opinion on this matter.

Claiming that teacher comments are the "most hermetic of academic genres," Thomas Batt further complicates the conundrum of accessibility by reminding us that not only do practices of teacher commentary generally remain hidden, but the people making most of the comments [adjuncts and graduate students] are also the most isolated from the professional conversation, and consequently the most under-trained in writing response (207). Nancy Sommers notes that many writing teachers admit that "they had been trained in various prewriting techniques, in constructing assignments, and in evaluating papers for grades, but rarely in the process of reading a student text for meaning or in offering commentary to motivate revision" (154).

The flimsily demarcated genre of teacher comments and the lack of any training in providing feedback results in little usable information to package and present to those who most often assign and respond to student writing (graduate students and faculty who may not yet be specialists in composition, Patchan 125). Teacher commenting practices remain unregulated and largely invisible to everyone but students, Writing Center practitioners, and the rare researcher who studies commenting practices. Therefore, few authoritative places exist from which to notice and influence the mishandlings that might occur in the genre.

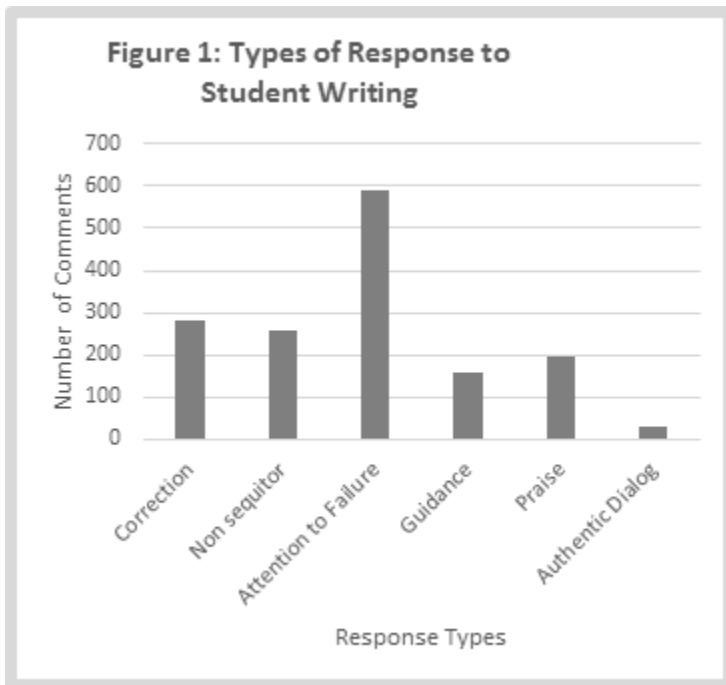
The time is ripe to introduce new terms, define old terms more precisely, create a clearer set of rules for engagement (a sort of Geneva Convention for writing response), and blend an aligned theoretical perspective into the conversation on response. Having a solid theoretical frame, some premises about use and abuse, and a more nuanced response vocabulary can help us create a stable foundation for research on teacher comments.

Best Practice in Response

The scholarship on writing response in English Composition suggests that best practice is governed by magnanimous rhetorical values: praise-oriented; dialogic (i.e., asking genuine questions); aware of strengths and weaknesses; aligned with assignment expectations; dependent on a hierarchy of concerns that are focused, organized, and evidence-based (see Daiker, Haswell, Straub, Speck.) Yet our experiences as tutors and administra-

tors in writing centers tell a different story about what teachers actually value when they write comments to their students.

Inspired by our 30 collective years of working in writing centers where we regularly see written teacher commentary on student papers (and the ways that students interpret that commentary), we set out to determine if what we were seeing in the writing center met status quo for teachers across our institution. We first wanted to establish, quantitatively, the incidence of certain kinds of comments that teachers made on student papers, so we might later compare our findings to what we knew about professional best practice. In 2006, we conducted an IRB-approved content analysis looking at almost 1000 student papers to see if the patterns we saw as writing center practitioners were born out in a more systematic study. We filed papers approved for research in our institution's required Junior Writing Portfolios. We used a six-feature code (six main types of teacher response) to look at patterns of teacher commentary. Our results revealed teachers to be three to four times more inclined to use corrections and nonsense markings in their written responses than they were to offer students praise or guidance for improvement (see Figure 1).



As a follow up to this study, in 2010, we conducted a related study in which we took six response types—Assignment, Focus, Organization, Support, Proofreading (AFOSP) and coded them for use in a peer-feedback situation, whereby students, after having been taught a response rubric (see Table 1), provided written feedback to the essay of an anonymous peer—much like a blind review.

Table 1: AFOSP Assessment Criteria (Writing Center Hierarchy of Values for Responding to Writing)

Assignment

- Your writing demonstrates that you have understood and addressed the expectations of the assignment.

Focus:

- Your essay sets a clear context for the development of your main point.
- The introduction clearly explains your purpose; the body “flows” logically in support of that purpose; the conclusion provides a sense of closure
- Your essay continues to tie back to the main point throughout.

Organization:

- Your essay is structured with transitions and cohesive paragraphs.
- Your essay has a clear structure (e.g., beginning- middle – end) and the strength of the components is consistent.
- Transitions connect thoughts and paragraphs consistently and carefully.
- Paragraphs function consistently as units of thought and advance argument.
- You avoid redundancy or unnecessary repetition of ideas and information.

Support:

- The paper provides evidence of search, selection, and source evaluation and the relationship of the evidence to the main point is clear and convincing.
- Adequate story or anecdote is provided and supports main point.

Proofreading:

- Your essay uses proper word choice, syntactically and grammatically correct sentences, proper spelling, format and citation.
- Word choice is precise and manages to express ideas clearly.
- Clauses and sentences are grammatically and syntactically correct and comprehensible.
- A rare mistake or typo may be present. Spelling is largely correct and provides little or no distraction to the reader
- Expected format is followed.
- Citation is present and used correctly.

The results of the research demonstrated that despite sustained instruction in a rubric over the course of a semester, students inclined toward using mean, punitive, and even incorrect comments when giving feedback to their peer (Rysdam and Johnson-Shull “The Ink We Leave Behind”). Had the students over-learned this kind of response from teachers? While we felt validated that our systematic studies reinforced our anecdotes from our writing center experience, our main concerns had to do with the bad news our results heralded. If the results of our content analysis were representative of standard practice (if, in fact, most of teacher commentary is fixing mistakes or offering fragmentary snippets of un-prioritized and under-explained abbreviations of information), how were we to help faculty see and change those entrenched practices? And, in our peer-review study, if students have the idea that taking personal, picky potshots at an anonymous peer is acceptable behavior in the genre of the written comment, what interventions into the negative trajectory of their commenting behaviors might we suggest?

Realizing the limitations of our studies, we inquired into the work of other scholars to see if there were similar studies that obtained analogous results. We found that Stern and Solomon had conducted a similarly-timed content analysis investigating the use of

three primary “best practice” principles of effective feedback: feedback that was positive; feedback that addressed only select areas directly tied to the assignment’s learning goals; and feedback that was revelatory of patterns of strength, error and weakness. By and large, Stern and Solomon unearthed comparably depressing data as our own studies revealed. They conclude in their study that faculty they studied did not provide feedback consistent with effective best practice principles (38). In their study, Stern and Solomon also noticed that while faculty might tend to provide ample feedback on mechanical writing components such as spelling, grammar, and word choice, they were often deficient in providing more meaningful feedback. They write: “The lack of written comments (either positive or negative) for the students’ support/evidence for claims, paper structure/organization, voice and creativity, was perplexing at least. For the most part, students needed to improve in these areas, yet there were no comments telling them so” (38).

In her 1982 article “Responding to Student Writing,” Joyce MacAllister writes about the need to eradicate three beliefs that create common inconsistencies in written response practice:

One is the belief that instructors should write a lot in the margins and between the lines. Another is that instructors ought to know and use a lot of specific grammatical rules and grammatical terms if they want to comment effectively. A third is that the most effective responses to student writing are instructor-written comments on the final copy. All three beliefs are false. (59)

Haswell, in the same era, also argues for a reduction in the amount of grammar-focused commentary traditionally written on student texts. He writes, “In reducing the amount of teacher comment on the page, it helps to avoid the mental dazzle of information overload” (601). Haswell encourages a re-thinking of traditional notions of response noting, “It is a disturbing fact of the profession that many teachers still look toward the marking of a set of compositions with distaste and discouragement. Reasons are obvious, not the least being the intuition that hours must be put in with little return in terms of effect on the students and their writing” (600).

Lunsford and Connors discovered in their 1993 study that teacher editing marks and corrections on student papers were so prevalent that it all but derailed their research from its original intention of focusing on rhetorical comments. The readers they employed in the review claimed that it was impossible for them to ignore the propensity of teachers to correct student mistakes. They write, “There was, they [the readers] said, a pervasive tendency [for teachers] to isolate problems and errors and individually ‘correct’ them without any corresponding attempt to analyze error patterns in any larger way” (217).

Two decades after the Lunsford and Connors study, Lunsford and Lunsford conducted a repeat study that “confirms that the rate of student error is not increasing precipitously but, in fact, has stayed stable for nearly one hundred years” (801). They also found that while students still made mistakes with similar frequency, the types of mistakes had changed over the years (801). The most notable aspect of both the original study and the follow-up is how clearly the focus of the studies reinforces the persistent trend to define students in terms of the mistakes they make rather than in terms of the feats they accomplish.

These studies, in conjunction with extant literature on commenting best-practice, illustrate a long-standing disconnect between what scholars have historically suggested as best practice, and what teachers seem to continue to do. Perhaps the most conspicuous thing we noticed is despite consistent pleas in late 20th century composition scholarship to praise and offer guidance to better motivate student improvement (Daiker and Straub) and to moderate the correction of mistakes as a central emphasis (Haswell, McCallister), writing instruction seems to be stuck in a rut of negativity and correction. In other words, despite more lofty intentions, evidence suggests that composition specialists are habituated to pointing out mistakes, correcting them, and defining students largely in terms of their shortcomings (Durst 55).

As we have suggested from our own experience, perhaps nowhere is this culture of negativity more glaring than to practitioners who work in writing centers and have front row seats to the genre of teacher commentary. As Batt suggests, unless you work in a writing center you might not realize the prime location it is for noticing teacher commenting practices (207). Unfortunately, because of the ethics of taking comments out of context, and because writing center practitioners are usually sensitive to the public nature of what teachers perceive as a private correspondence between themselves and their students, writing center practitioners are limited in their capacity to make many empirical or critical assertions that would prove useful to the academic conversation. It cannot be disputed, however, that writing centers provide a unique place where tutors and administrators have the opportunity to eavesdrop on the institution (to use the language of Krista Ratcliffe), and to take note of teacher values as they are illustrated on the pages of student work.

Our collective years in writing center work, in tandem with our more systematic investigations, confirm a discomfiting amount of nonsense, illegible scribble and negativity routinely splattered across the pages of student work. While perhaps not indicative of every institution, this element of teacher practice is rarely owned up to in our professional conversations. Yet unless we are willing to admit, as a profession, that this habituated style of response is a problem that warrants our focused attentions, students will continue to suffer the indignities and inadequacies of unconsciously crafted or reflexively habituated writing responses from teachers, and they will continue to struggle to learn to write well.

Krista Ratcliffe's work on rhetorical listening helps compositionists recognize how we can better facilitate cross-cultural communication by considering listening as fundamental to our repertoire of skills (78). Not only does rhetorical listening assist in communicating across cross-cultural constructions of identity; the concept also allows for an entire paradigm shift in the way we listen to students and their texts—regardless of the positions or locations from which they write to us. While the concept is instrumental in helping us to be more aware of the needs of students who have been historically marginalized by higher education, the concept has profound implications for all students and makes solid sense as a theoretical north star for writing response.

Ratcliffe writes,

[U]nderstanding means more than simply listening *for* a speaker/writer's intent. It also means more than simply listening *for* our own self-interested readerly intent, which may range from appropriation (employing a text for one's own ends), to Burkean

identification (smoothing over differences to achieve common ground), to agreement (affirming only one's own view of reality). Instead, *understanding* means listening to discourses not *for* intent but *with* intent—with the intent to understand not just claims but the rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well. (28)

Listening *with* intent rather than *for* intent, alters the reader's role from one of expecting the writer to always be proving himself or herself in a scripted enterprise of normalized public conventions to one of withholding judgment in favor of understanding. While it is true that (in most schools) the teacher needs to step in at some point in time and make a summative determination of quality, rhetorical listening extends the space for "interpretive invention," prior to wrapping up (or shutting down) dialog with concerns for excellence and the "prettification" of student prose (196).

Reading is like hearing; it can be done with or without truly listening. Only when we listen to student intentions, and not just to their struggles with conventions, can we better motivate students to keep *writing to us*. It is through encouraging students to keep writing to us that we can come to understand what they think, how they think, and how to point to ways in which they might recognize their own need for further study or contemplation. Only through listening in our reading can we model for students how to listen to themselves.

This process of listening and asking good questions enables us to help students become *authorities* of knowledge and the authors of texts (the basic philosophy behind writing center pedagogy). If student words are always marked up or corrected and replaced with better teacher words or better teacher phrasing (or left alone to hang in the air with only a letter or a number slapped on them to establish their overall worth), we will continue to subordinate and silence the development of writer expertise with our own—and no wonder that students won't improve. It is within this professional context that we appeal to our field to break the silence on teacher commenting practices and let in the air of innovation, supervision, and rhetorical reciprocity.

Reframing and Renaming

Let's agree that obsessive editing corrections, snide commentary, nonsensical circles, squiggles, and marginal comments scattered in no prioritized order are not respectful strategies. While we work to create systems whereby the people teaching writing are valued for what they do enough to receive ample training and mentoring, we can heed the simple directive: "If you can't help, don't hurt."

In the spirit of doing no harm in our responses to student writing, and with the intention of transforming our response methods so they are more instructive for students, we suggest teachers consider the work of Marshall Rosenberg on Non-Violent Communication (NVC).

According to Rosenberg, "The first component of NVC entails the separation of observation from evaluation" (26). While there is no reason that teachers need to refrain from evaluating, observation and evaluation provide two very different, important types of information, so they should be separated. Richie Neil Hao establishes the work of Rosenberg as central to the practice of Critical Compassionate Pedagogy, an approach nicely aligned with the social justice intentions of Ratcliff's work on rhetorical listening.

Listening to Observe and Describe

The synthesis, analysis, and critique of information all rely on a foundation of identification and description. Prior to drawing conclusions or predicting implications, we first need to observe. In terms of student writing, what teachers observe in order to later assess is only instructive if students can be shown what teachers see. In many cases description can help students see their work clearly enough to make their own evaluation. An example might be, “I noticed that your opening paragraph has three potential thesis statements in it.” Or, “Out of the seven sentences in your second paragraph, six of them are simple sentences and one of them is compound.” Other observations might have to do with noticing the ratio of facts to opinions or the presence or absence of certain kinds of evidence. Non-evaluative observation is not intended as a passive-aggressive posture to get students to see their mistakes; it is intended to get students to notice their own patterns and habits and, when possible, to adjust those patterns and habits to best address their purpose. It is also intended to position the teacher as someone who notices language usage and can talk about it in descriptive ways without always making a correction or leveling a criticism.

Making detailed observations requires a vocabulary complete enough to accurately describe what is noticed. Wine-tasting offers a good example. Prior to an aficionado deciding whether or not the Chardonnay or Gewürztraminer is “good” or “bad,” the taster must have the language to name the experience of taste (spice, fruit, flowers, wood etc.). In the genre of the teacher comment, we need to be able to describe rhetorical moves rather than smells and flavors—yet a vocabulary rich enough for this complex and nuanced endeavor is currently lacking in our professional repertoire. We need more concept and vocabulary building (and more of a concerted effort to share this vocabulary) in an effort to move faculty away from the deeply entrenched and shallow shorthand of “awk,” “frag,” “huh?” and “confusing.”

In lieu of any large scale and immediate solution to improving our professional lexicon and its distribution to the teachers who need it, the language of non-evaluative observation and description can be rehearsed by individual teachers and peer reviewers using a practice called “Deep Reading” (see Table 2).

Deep Reading asks readers to read for observable features prior to making any evaluative judgment based on those observations. The primary intention of the Deep Reading is to focus the reader on what is present in the text rather than what is missing, and it also challenges readers to find the language to describe the observations they make of a text’s constituent parts. When asked to describe what someone is wearing or how they are ornamented (describing, for example, an artifactual text), we rarely struggle with our descriptions. To describe what one notices in a written text is much more challenging—a reality we have seen over and over again when asking faculty to participate in this exercise. This descriptive naming process is nonetheless crucial to creating and implementing good rubrics as well as designing good comments. It is also vital to teaching students what texts are made of, so they can study the parts and the rhetorical moves they can use to improve their writing.

Table 2: Deep Reading

NOTE: Deep reading is an approach to written response that integrates non-evaluative observation and description. (Handout by Carmen Werder of Western Washington University. 1997)

Instructions

Read the paper, article or document thoroughly. Write down as many objective features about the paper, article or document as you can. What do you notice?

Examples:

- Long or short or varied sentences?
- Types of words chosen—short and concise or flowery?
- Use of jargon or acronyms?
- Multiple or few paragraphs?
- Amounts of verbs, adjectives, adverbs or nouns?
- What is the mode or genre?
- Does it use facts and/or anecdotes?
- What are the intellectual activities employed (memorization, comprehension, application, synthesis, analysis, evaluation, creation)?
- Are there headings or transitions?
- Thesis or hypothesis driven?
- Is it organized chronologically or by topic?
- Lots of quotes?
- Does it deal with a process or a concept?
- Does it show or tell (or both)?
- Is the writing expressive or transactional?

(These observations are to be non-judgmental observations; they are descriptions that record the features or traits of the writing; they do not evaluate those features.)

Discuss the features of the paper, article or document with your group.

SEPARATE PROCESS: Create a metaphor for what the writer seems to be doing with this piece of writing. For example, does this paper, article or document read like the writer is a tour guide showing you the sights of a popular tourist attraction? Does it read like the writer is a commuter driver and is just trying to get the reader from one place to the next in the most expedient fashion?

Listening with Evaluation: Feedback and Feedforward

One of the standard issue terms we use to describe writing response is “feedback.” Writing teachers at our institutions have even begun re-tooling this common noun to emphasize its more active calling as a verb and can be regularly heard saying things like, “I am going to my office to do some feedbacking.” However, in its most literal and limited definition, feedback labels the success or failure of actions that have occurred in the *past*. In our 2006 content analysis, it was clear that the majority of teacher comments across all disciplines focused on locating and fixing mistakes that had already happened, rather than focusing on and offering strategies and solutions for avoiding those mistakes *in the future* (Figure 2).

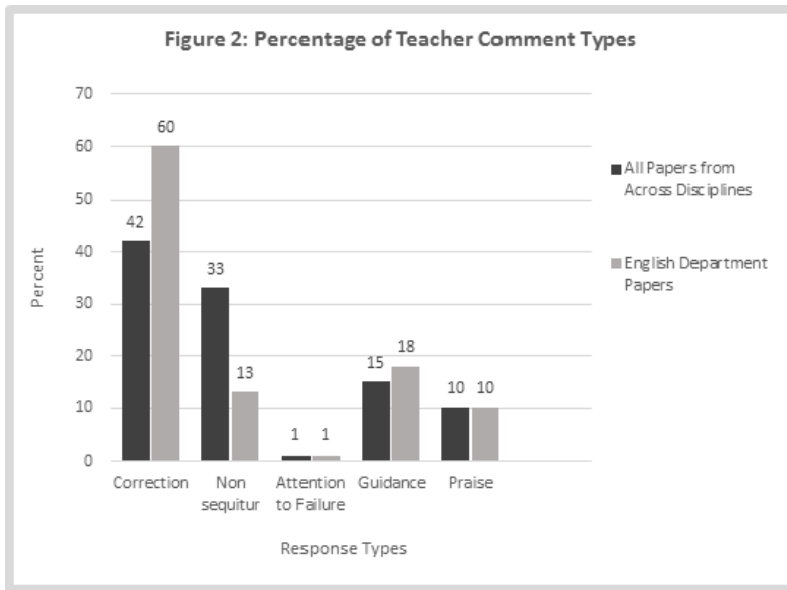


Figure 2

This past-centric tendency to mark mistakes (as compared to referencing handbook pages on grammar rules that should be consulted), confirms what Winifred Hall Harris found in her 1977 study of teacher comments—that a majority (66%) of the 7,855 teacher corrections she catalogued pertained just to mechanics and usage. Interestingly, the data in her study also illustrated an inverse relationship between what teachers claimed to value in student work and the types of evaluative comments they made on student drafts (179). Harris’s unearthing of this inverse relationship conjures up a story we have about a graduate student training session conducted with an interdisciplinary audience of teaching assistants. When asked to brainstorm and prioritize their teaching values, the TAs unanimously agreed that the improvement of critical thinking, an active future-focused endeavor, predominated as a teaching goal for each of them. However, when asked about the hierarchy of values they used in responding to and assessing student writing, their top two values were enforcing grammar rules and making sure students were following directions.

While we wish this incongruity between articulated values and practice added up to just a fluke born of unique instances, our experience has shown us otherwise. But whether we are praising or penalizing, what strikes us as most out of alignment with the values of composition studies is that despite the revision-focus clearly valued in our field, a majority of teacher commentary attends to short-comings in what students have already written and not to what possibilities exist for what they could write next to improve. So while it is a given that feedback is a major staple of our practice, it should surprise us that *feedforward* is not. It is time we establish feedforward a stock term in our professional vocabulary.

Feedforward in Theory and Practice

Jean Piaget used the term “feed-forward” in the field of developmental psychology to identify a child’s ability to master formally similar tasks at different ages, and in cybernetics feedforward is used in “describing a kind of system which reacts to changes in its environment, usually to maintain some desired state of the system” (“Feed-forward”). In management, Marshall Goldsmith offers feedforward as a means to encourage positive future behavior, opposed to focusing primarily on negative past behavior. Although used in other academic fields and contexts in the U.S. (namely management, computer science and human development), the term feedforward has not yet taken hold in U.S. education or in English Composition—even though academic institutions abroad are beginning to use the concept quite regularly (Lunsford, K.). Virtually every article we found on the concept of feedforward in educational assessment was published in the U.K. and Europe (Conaghan and Lockey; Duncan et al.; “Enhancing Feedback”; Murtagh and Baker).

Feedforward is about phrasing our commentary so that it gives students the information they need to take the next steps toward improvement: “Using feedforward, we can concentrate on what the candidate can do to improve their performance rather than focusing on their past performance or their personality” (Conaghan and Lockey 48).

Feedforward does not deny the reality of past or present performance; it simply suggests a direction toward greater success. Feedforward is not about praise (praise is actually feedback since it labels the past), but it sends a positive message because it assumes opportunity and capacity for improvement. With feedforward as a key component in our lexicon, we reduce the possibility that revision will be ignored as a foundational principle of good writing instruction.

The following chart provides examples of how feedforward can be used respond to student writing:

Feedback	Feedforward
“This paper lacks adequate description.”	This paper would be stronger with more sensory vocabulary. When you describe your hometown, I ask myself, “What does it look like? What does it sound like?” I could better experience the place if you described these things more fully.
“This essay is confusing.”	Connecting the sub-points in each paragraph directly to your main thesis will make the focus of this essay clearer.
“This introduction is not very exciting.”	Consider using a hook or a lead that includes more action and storytelling to draw in the reader. Perhaps draw on personal experiences to connect the reader to your topic.
“Too many short sentences.”	Add more sentence variety.
“Voice is too informal.”	Since this is an academic paper, using a more scholarly vocabulary will improve the tone.
“You’ve missed the point of this assignment in that you’ve failed to discover anything interesting or universal.”	Reread the assignment. It asks you to make connections between the class reading and your own experience. Draw more of these connections.

Feedforward and non-evaluative observation offer us new exemplars for commenting effectively. Situated within Ratcliffe's concept of "rhetorical listening" these practices suggest a position of teacher respect for student work that values truly hearing what the student is trying to say, and choosing our words carefully as we offer them guidance. While this process can be time-consuming and labor intensive, we must make the effort to do it if we expect students to understand and accomplish excellence in their own work.

Conclusion

If teachers are truly dedicated to helping students develop authorial voices, some rules that govern teacher response are warranted. While many right ways to respond to student work exist, we need to clearly agree upon the *wrong* ways to do it. We advocate for guidelines that insist teachers not waste precious time on nonsense comments that are only cryptic externalizations of our own thinking. Teachers should refrain from writing mean, petty and humiliating things on student papers (e.g., "This is boring"). Marginal comments should be minimized; and, if other technology is unavailable, comments should be written legibly—never hand scribbled. Comments should rarely be written in anything other than complete sentences, and those sentences should be organized logically by priority and supported with evidence from the text. Perhaps most notably, we need to agree upon who owns the comments on student papers. Many times in our investigation we arrived at an impasse of information gathering because the genre of the teacher comment is, as Batt, suggests, *hermetic*. It is sealed in a space that renders it invisible, impermeable and therefore, protected from change. If, as a profession, we became more overt about the public performance of commentary, teachers might make their rhetorical choices more carefully.

People spend time doing what they love. If we want students to spend enough time practicing writing to improve (and to improve the thinking it ostensibly demonstrates), we must cultivate in them a love for it. This cultivation does not happen through trivial, careless, corrective, and obedience-obsessed commentary. Encouragement comes from careful deep listening. It comes from a desire to understand. We show this understanding by how thoughtfully we respond to what students say and to the evolution of their saying it, *no matter how much time it takes us to do this*. According to the CCC Position Statement on Writing Assessment,

Students who take pleasure and pride in using written language effectively are increasingly valuable in a world in which communication across space and a variety of cultures has become routine. Writing assessment that alienates students from writing is counter-productive Writing assessment that encourages students to improve their facility with the written word, to appreciate their power with that word and the responsibilities that accompany such power, and that salutes students' achievements as well as guides them, should serve as a crucially important educational force. (434)

As teachers and scholars we need to pay attention to the places where we may be unwittingly creating the very problems we have been hired to solve. Only then we can adjust our practices and meet our teaching goals. When we respond effectively to students who are mired in the mess and magic of this complex, challenging practice we call writing, we engage in potentially transformative, world-changing work.



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Autoethnography and Assimilation: Composing Border Stories

Mark Noe

I moved to the Rio Grande Valley in 2002 to take a position as a rhetoric and composition faculty member in the English department of a university there. I'd lived most of my life in Texas, so I was not prone to the culture shock other new hires experienced when they moved from Wisconsin or Minnesota to South Texas—or so I thought.

One sunny afternoon during my first semester, I walked across the street from the university to a mom and pop *taqueria* for lunch. The woman behind the counter spoke little English. I spoke less Spanish. So, I ordered my lunch by pointing to one of the many taco selections on the menu. I didn't recognize any of the words identifying meat choices, so I settled on "*tripas*." When my order was brought to me, I discovered that *tripas* is Spanish for tripe. My plate of tripe tacos had been grilled to a golden brown and had a baked potato on the side.

After my meal—tacos heavily fortified with a fiery green salsa—I found myself more and more bothered, not by the overlooked cognate that resulted in tripe on my plate, but how the baked potato ended up there. I had gone to that *taqueria* rather than the chain Mexican restaurant a block away to find authentic Mexican food. My concept of authentic didn't include a baked potato. I knew that my expectations were at fault—and that's what bothered me.

My story, then, isn't the familiar story of linguistic misalignment, but of cultural interaction, of what has been described as a *contact zone* ever since Mary Louise Pratt coined the term, and the possibility such zones provide for crossing boundaries. The more I thought about that baked potato, the more I realized that in the classroom where I taught, the student population was 97% Hispanic and 95% first-generation college students.

That baked potato shook loose many of my assumptions, not the least of which was my belief that somehow students could be brought to understand our differences the same way I did, and that our mutual understanding would result in a smooth meeting of minds. In contrast, the contact Pratt describes is not smooth. In Pratt's nomenclature, I was inviting students into a "speech community," which Pratt describes as a "discrete, self-defined, coherent entity, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members." According to Pratt, as a concept, a speech community has a "Utopian quality" that paradoxically overlooks difference, which in turn, disguises assimilation (37).

Contact, on the other hand, emphasizes difference, placing various discourses in a space where no discourse stands above the others. In that limited space, no discourse is safe from scrutiny and critique, including that of the professor. Contact thus becomes messy, disturbing, even frightening, putting everyone's "ideas and identities on the line" (Pratt 39). Just as each discourse becomes an ethnicity to be placed under the microscope, in a contact zone each discourse brings a perspective to bear, both on itself and on

other discourses. Each discourse brings something to the conversation, and any authority that might cling to a single discourse is lost in the cacophony, itself a frightening prospect for those of us carefully trained in a single discourse.

But these realizations came later. At the time I was determined to understand my students and the differences between us that had been suggested by something as mundane as that baked potato. I turned to the standard research strategies to try to learn more about the culture my students shared, but which I did not. I started with that cornerstone of academic discourse, a literature review, a move which would allow me to map the social territory of my students without actually entering it, depending instead on the experiences of other scholars. Before long I had a shelf of books with titles such as *Manufacturing Hope and Despair: The School and Kin Support Networks of U.S.-Mexican Youth* by Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar and *Rethinking the Borderlands: Between Chicano Culture and Legal Discourse* by Carl Scott Gutiérrez-Jones. These studies provided insights that I lacked. I learned, for instance, that the theoretical debate over the ethnic labels—Hispanic, Latino/a, Chicano—hardly touched the lives of my students. They tended to use these terms interchangeably, if they used them at all.

I asked students to write the all too familiar “Literacy Narrative,” knowing that this assignment can be an opening into local culture and education’s impact—negative, positive, or negligible—on that culture. At the time, some of my colleagues were experimenting with “Writing about Writing” pedagogies, which I thought might turn the composition classroom into a space where discourses met by exposing the places where they had not met in the past.

In those literacy narratives, one student wrote about being punished in middle school for speaking Spanish in class, or even in the school hallways. English only, his teachers insisted—a paradox, since most of his teachers were Latino/a. Another told about being moved from the highest to the lowest reading group because she pronounced “chicken” as “shicken” while reading a story orally. For some, preparation for Texas-mandated exams, with emphasis on worksheets and grammar drills, took precedence over writing or critical thinking. Still others wrote of taking AP classes, concurrent and dual enrollment classes that were often overloaded with students so the district could improve their numbers with state agencies. Yet, I couldn’t shake the feeling that the exposure provided by these narratives was one-sided. Literacy, a student learning outcome rather than a student’s native discourse, stood above the fray.

I friended first-year composition classes on Facebook, and even spent a harrowing two days with one class on Twitter before I gave that up. On Facebook, I learned that one student, her English tinged with an accent I couldn’t quite place, owned a bakery and gourmet cookie business in Reynosa, just across the border. The product of a private school in Mexico City, her written English was immaculate. Her Facebook page was full of pictures of her European vacations. Another student, recently homeless when his macho father learned he was gay, worried about missing class as he looked for a place to stay every night.

New to Facebook, I was surprised at how open my students were, at how easily they invited me into their lives. On the other hand, on Twitter I was struck by the triviality encouraged by 144 character messages, when one student tweeted that he was at IHop: “Should I order pancakes or waffles?” Later, I realized his inane question hid a deep-

seated need for connection, any kind of connection, the essence of teen angst regardless of ethnicity.

I opened a Pandora account to play music in class when students were writing. Each student was invited to submit the name of one artist to the account. I sought both to create a mini-culture in the classroom that duplicated the popular culture I assumed my students shared outside of class, hoping to gain insight into this strange culture by examining its artifacts. I discovered that the eclectic musical tastes of my students defied such categorizations as much as that baked potato had. They requested *conjunto* and *Norteno* bands—and Lady Gaga, Kanye, George Strait, Metallica, OceanLab, Mozart. One day, a shy young woman in goth from head to toe, along with an incongruous “Hello Kitty” bow in her hair, requested Billy Holiday.

My assumptions of cultural homogeneity were as misplaced as my assumption that an authentic plate of tacos—and *tripas* are about as authentic as they come—should be accompanied by refried beans and rice. My goal shifted, slowly enough that it took me a while to notice that shift, from becoming an expert on my students, to trying to find a pedagogy that would allow us to engage each other across essentializations inherent in an academic discourse that saw all other discourses as an “other.” Pratt’s words rang in my ears: “The lecturer’s traditional (imagined) task” is to “unify the world in the class’s eyes by means of a monologue that rings equally coherent, revealing, and true for all, forging an ad hoc community, homogeneous with respect to one’s own words” (39). The more I got to know my students, the more they resisted my every effort to homogenize them, despite the similarities implied by *ethnicity* as a label.

Like a score of rhetoricians (Bizzell, Giroux, Mutnick, Schroeder, Kraemer), I was troubled by the undercurrent of assimilation that I could not shake from a pedagogy based on teaching academic discourse, the backbone of freshman composition. Yet, I could not see myself clear to entirely abandon academic discourse. I found myself caught between the same rock and hard place as Don Kraemer, who admitted that our discourse is both “critically empowering” and “oppressive” (53). Kraemer reminds us that though we teach what Bizzell refers to as the “discourse of power,” it may be the power for students to achieve social mobility. But it is also the power to change those students in ways they do not fully understand when they take up that discourse (60).

I placed these contradictory concerns alongside emerging voices of Latina/o scholars (Anzaldúa, Villanueva, Sanchez, Mejias, Ybarra) who affirmed Latina/o resistance to academic discourses, and the cost of that resistance. Ybarra in particular made no bones about the way disciplinary expertise is seen by Latina/o students, telling me that those students “see this pattern of writing structure as confusing and view it as a hostile attempt to change who they are” (18). More and more what Ybarra referred to as the “hidden curriculum of assimilation” became visible to me in my own classroom (43). I knew it wouldn’t be enough for me to see the hidden curriculum. I could not solve this problem for my students as though it were a pesky comma-splice in an otherwise well-written paper.

Yet, my standards for a well-written paper were often precisely what hid that curriculum. Sure, I avoided rubrics that focused exclusively on error or strict and often stifling structures such as the five-paragraph theme or the more sophisticated, and thus more subtly constricting Toulmin method. My standards, I told myself, were based on the

newest research from *College Composition and Communication* and *Journal of Advanced Composition*. I sought to draw students into the discourse of the university while at the same time recognizing the National Council of Teachers of English resolution on “Students’ Right to Their Own Language.” Hidden in those standards, no matter how much they recognized students’ rights, was an unwritten rubric thoroughly embedded in the discourse I taught that thoroughly privileged the way academic discourse organized the world (e.g., a clear argument placed early in a paper, the language of assumed objectivity, a literature review that establishes an *ethos* of expertise based on knowledge of the field).

In my quest to come up with a way for my students to see that curriculum as more than “cultural dissonance” (Ybarra 43), I poured over works such as Bartholomae and Petrosky’s *Facts, Artifacts and Counteracts*. Their insistence that students “come forward in the text and push against the emerging structure of [their] own discourse” had a theoretically sophisticated ring, yet looked like a pedagogy for students who already floated comfortably along in the mainstream. In fact, Bartholomae and Petrosky’s pedagogy seemed calculated to create turbulence in the mainstream ideals of middle-class youth. They complain, “When called upon to speak the language of insight and authority, our students generally speak the language of parents, coaches, or other powerful adults: ‘Give it your best shot.’ And, ‘Things will get better’” (34). I knew that denying my students the language of parents, coaches or other powerful adults—in other words, their cultural discourse—was to deny them any identity other than the one I privileged.

Out of the questions that whirled through my head, I developed what I would eventually come to refer to as a pedagogy of “transculturation” (Noe 17). I first came across that term in an article on punk music in Latin America that described punk as a “crucial part of the process of transculturation in Latin American popular music today. This is a hybrid, mestizo music with such a capability for mimicry and adaptation that, by seizing and absorbing the diverse music of Latin America, it creates a new tradition of music” (Esterrich 40). Later I found a more nuanced definition in the writing of Juan Guerra, who describes transculturation as “a notion grounded in the idea that members of historically excluded groups are in a position to cultivate adaptive strategies that help them move across cultural boundaries by negotiating new and different contexts and communicative conventions” (299). A classroom environment where students could cross cultural assumptions—mine and theirs—was precisely what I wanted. At the same time, I was less sure about the positivism assumed by transculturation as a natural effect of cultural interaction. Torn between attraction and unease, I searched for a pedagogy that could:

- Satisfy the rigor that Bartholomae sought;
- Mitigate the assimilation worries I shared with Kraemer; and
- Provide students a way to cross discourses that they saw value in crossing, as well as re-crossing, straddling, even rejecting.

About this time I came across a link to Sarah Wall’s “An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography.” Curious, mostly by the un-academic implication in the title, that the writer was willing to admit that she didn’t already know everything there was to know about her topic, I followed that link. What made Wall’s narrative resonate was her uncertainty about the veracity of autoethnography in the social sciences. Even

her definition of autoethnography as “an emerging qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalized style” (1) sounded like an attempt to justify the genre in the face of resistance from the discourse of her discipline. This tension between her autoethnography and her disciplinary discourse mirrored Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of autoethnography as “a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (35).

As I read Wall’s, and other academic autoethnographies, I realized that though I had started out studying my students, I ended up studying myself. Somehow, I had backed into a journey of reflexivity. As John T. Warren warns us, I “tended to focus more in the academy on what we believe, considering less on how what we believe got to be that way” (140). I was so busy studying others I forgot to look in the mirror occasionally. Warren writes about the need in our profession to occasionally step back and reflect, looking at ourselves in what he calls “performance auto/ethnographies” that “build from our educational experiences (as both reflexive teachers and critical ethnographers) and craft reflexively rich, performance-centered scholarship that has the power to meet, through the body, through the poetic, our vision of what education should look like” (142).

Though I found writing my own autoethnography revealing, my original interest was in the possibility autoethnography had for students to “craft reflexively rich, performance-centered scholarship” that could meet our scholarship head-on. I began experimenting with this genre in first-year composition to see if it had the potential to satisfy the constraints I had set for myself. Though autoethnography tends to disrupt assumptions, even about itself, I found that most autoethnographies shared three attributes that gave the genre potential:

- As Pratt notes, autoethnographies are often, *mixed genres*, appearing at times, “anomalous or chaotic” (36). The challenge posed by mixing genres requires the rigorous writing so important to Bartholomae. An autoethnography might be created by sampling, remixing, re-envisioning, or parodying various genres without respect for their original purposes. Such a transcultural text requires more attention, more rigor, than either academic or expressionist genres can achieve independently. In order to combine several genres in the same assignment, students have to understand what each genre brings to the project and what each leaves out, often by bringing those genres into contact, and conflict, with each other.
- Though Pratt describes autoethnography as a “response to or in dialogue with” mainstream discourses, in autoethnography, indeed all transcultural conversations, the *writer initiates the conversation*, often by challenging a hegemonic discourse that is silent, that has no interest in that particular conversation (35). When a student writes from his or her perspective, that perspective is grounded in that student’s ethnic experience (widely defined) rather than mine or academic research that has a tendency to assume an authority above student experience. As the initial speaker, the student maintains some degree of control over the direction the conversation, even when outside research is brought to bear. Student-initiated discourse mitigates, though does not preclude, the assimilation that troubled Kraemer, nor the rejection noted by Ybarra.

- When writers initiate the conversation, that is, respond to or enter into dialogue with mainstream discourse in autoethnography, they tend to write *about transitional moments* in their lives, often weaving various genres into a narrative that questions assumptions about identity, ironically from a subjective position; these narratives serve less to fix identity than to locate their identity in, and between, cultural discourses.

Mixing Genres

My story, as autoethnography itself insists, is only one perspective. From the student's perspective, autoethnography has a different profile, one in which mixed and unfamiliar genres take the forefront. When students walk into a first-year composition classroom and the instructor writes *Autoethnography* on the whiteboard, they are immediately faced with the unfamiliar. Their expectation that they will continue in genres that have become comfortable in high school is disrupted.

In response to standardized testing, which has become the only assessment that matters in Texas, most of my students have been exposed to some form of creative writing in which they are given free reign. They have also been carefully trained in restricted forms, most often the five paragraph theme. They have learned through painful experience, as did Derrida, never to "mix genres" (57). In the ecology of standardized testing, mixing genres is the unforgivable sin. On the other hand, while autoethnography makes use of creative self-exploration and restrictive, academic forms, it indiscriminately mixes those genres. It is precisely within the schizophrenic tension caused by mixing genres that autoethnography exposes—even as it makes use of—each genre or discourse as one "version of reality." When more than one genre must compete within the same project, any claim that this is "the best way of knowing and communicating" reality is weakened (Berlin 766).

Those writers who have explored autoethnography *through* autoethnography write about the dialectic energy of clashing genres so regularly that it comes close to being a governing rule of that genre. In her first tentative autoethnographic writing, Sarah Wall found that "the relentless nudging of autoethnography against the world of traditional science holds wonderful, symbolic, emancipatory promise. It says that what I know matters" (3). Rahul Mitra describes mixing genres as an elaborate textual dance: "I do so via a performative lens, believing this to be the best way to illustrate the dialectical mode of doing/being in the research process; thus, I intersperse portions of personal narrative with academic writing and reviews of literature" (3). Tami Spry pushes past surface labels for genre and notes how combining genres mixes the self and the text: "Autoethnography can be defined as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts. Autoethnography is both a method and a text of diverse interdisciplinary praxes" (710).

Each of these writers brings different genres into close proximity: traditional, or "positivist" science (Wall), academic writing and literature reviews (Mitra), interdisciplinary praxes (Spry). In each, these genres are juxtaposed against the personal. In order to capture the same tension, I designed assignments that mixed three genres that bring student experience into focus from three distinct perspectives:

- personal experience or narrative
- field work or data in the social sciences; standard ethnography
- academic writing based on bibliographical research and critical thinking as defined in the humanities

Each of these genres, taken individually, has much to say when brought to bear on a single object of study. When they are brought together in the same writing project they bring their various perspectives to bear *on each other*, often contradicting each other. Such contradiction itself has heuristic power, presenting the writer with a new challenge: the necessity to analyze and evaluate each discourse in order to come to an understanding that has not been dictated by any of these discourses individually.

Students must combine these genres, which are familiar individually, in ways that question how they've done them before—so that they contradict each other internally and intentionally. It is in this breaking down and recombining that autoethnography is an effective introduction to academic discourse for Hispanic students, allowing them entry into the academic without first requiring acquiescence (or in other words, assimilate) to its norms.

The way students can use autoethnography as a tool for transitioning between discourses was brought home to me when I read one student's essay, "Living a Farce." I was struck by the writer's awareness of the hybridity of her own writing, and how she used that hybridity to move between genres in order to develop an idiosyncratic concept of audience against a standardized, even calcified, norm of academic writing. In one passage, she enters into conversation with Wall, noting: "Wall insists that the author, 'relates the personal to the cultural' . . . 'through their own lived experiences'" (6). For Wall, the value of autoethnography is that it disrupts the objective eye of science, using the personal to explain aspects of the writer's culture that can be experienced, though not observed. The writer of "Living a Farce" has another goal. She redefines "cultural" as the ethnicity the writer shares or does not share with the reader. She does so in order to initiate a conversation within that ethnicity: "Just as important as it is to relate the personal (the author) and the cultural (the reader), a writer will not fully get the audience to understand what he/she is trying to convey until the cultural becomes personal for the reader, not just personal for the author."

This writer reverses the polarity of autoethnography, which until reading her paper I had seen as an *alternative* academic discourse, but an academic discourse nevertheless. In my mind, and in my pedagogy, academic writing involved teaching students how to become disciplinary experts writing for other disciplinary experts about their ethnicity. In "Living a Farce," this writer combines academic writing with other genres, not in order to explain personal insights about her culture to me, or to explain academic insights into her culture to those who share her culture (surely the most assimilationist move), but in order to initiate a conversation within and between cultures for the one audience that she wishes to reach, her classmates. She writes,

I have chosen to pinpoint the way Mexican roots dominantly pressure a sexually abused Mexican-American woman to keep quiet about her abuse with the understanding that my audience will be fellow students from the Valley, most of which are Chicanos. With that in mind I want to use my personal experiences and those of others to reach my readers, because both my sources and I have in common our heritage . . . I want to

take Wall's words and "ask the reader to emotionally 'relive' the events with the writer" (6) but not just my event, but their own events and personal experiences with Mexican roots and values.

I have to admit to being delighted by the way this student twisted academic discourse out of my hands. I'd always been enamored of academic discourse because I frankly liked the way it explained the world. The world made sense to me when viewed through an academic lens. I had to resist seeing the moves that the writer of "Living a Farce" made as errors, or a misunderstanding of the academic discourse she'd read. I could not simply tell her, "No, that's not it" (Bartholomae and Petoskey 34). From the student's perspective, she had nailed it. This writer made me realize how often we, writing teachers, have limited the way students may enter the academic arena, as outsiders entering our "exemplary culture" in order to speak to us in our language (Bartholomae 479). The writer of "Living a Farce" will have none of that. In a few phrases, she has made me the outsider. I cannot "relive" in the sense she uses Wall's term, even as she uses my discourse to speak to others who share her experiences, inviting them to relive those experiences with her. I can objectively assess her, which is always the final assimilative move of academic discourse. But I can only do so from outside her discourse—and as all such moves do, I will simply silence her through any judgment I make.

Initiating the Conversation

As "Living a Farce" illustrates, given the opportunity, students can find ways to turn the various genres that make up autoethnography to their own purposes. However, in order for students to take advantage of that opportunity, they need to initiate the conversation.

Before students take on the academic role of theorist or researcher, students use autoethnography as a method for writing about their experiences that goes beyond the monologic model of expressionism by writing about their subject position within a social or cultural group. To make students aware of the many groups they already belong to, I assign short perspective assignments that might include literacy narratives, stories of personal experiences, or a description of a community of experience. Even a list of the various ethnicities students belong to helps them recognize that identifying discourse is simply a way of noting that language-use is embedded in culture. Soon, students begin to recognize that their stories, however personal they may have been when they first wrote them, are narratives written by members of communities that explore issues and questions of interest to that community. Thus, in contrast to Kenneth Burke's familiar metaphor for academic discourse, the autoethnographer does not join our ongoing conversation, listening until he or she "has caught the tenor of the argument," which requires a certain degree of discursive assimilation (111).

Admittedly, there are two ways of identifying this new conversation and the way students enter it: either students initiate the conversation, or they recognize the many conversations that they are already a part of. Though the second description is more theoretically sophisticated, or at least theoretically preferred, I have chosen to identify this critical step as *the student initiates the conversation* to emphasize that this moment is made possible by the sequence of writing assignments we do—the student writes about

the various conversations, or discourses, or ethnicities, that he or she is already a part of *before* inviting academic discourse into the conversation. When students initiate a conversation that the academic genre must then be invited into, academic identity is recast as just another persona that can be sloughed off as easily as it is assumed.

The writer of “Challenges for Migrant Students” opens with a narrative that is embedded in the personal and the cultural in order to explore the challenges of his experience, where he is now, and how he got here:

“Levantate ya es tiempo!” were the words my mother would yell out every morning as I would drag my tired, sluggish body out of bed. Being a migrant student had a lot of rough challenges. One of the toughest challenges for me was waking up early in the morning, since I was so tired from the hard labor we had done the day before. We would wake up at six in the morning every day to help my mother make breakfast, and then we would pack our breakfast and head out to start picking in the field at seven in the morning.

As expressivist as this opening sounds, the writer uses a familiar experience to stake out a subject position open to ethnographic exploration. Often, narratives such as this one may sound clichéd to professors accustomed to, and enamored of, the objective voice. It certainly did for me the first time I read it. The challenge was to listen, to get the tenor of this unfamiliar conversation, and see what this student can do when other voices are invited in. The writer of “Challenges for Migrant Students” finishes his story with a conclusion that is as possible to read as clichéd as his opening:

Fortunately for me becoming a migrant student made me who I am today. Working in the fields made me look at my education in a whole different way. I am now thankful to wake up, go to school, and be able to sit in a classroom with air conditioning and learn about new things instead of working hard in the fields. I know I have to become something in life because I don’t want my own children to have to go through what I went through as a child and young adult.

This conclusion may borrow the familiar “language of parents, coaches or other powerful adults.” Yet, the experience is not borrowed; it is embedded in a cultural milieu that is marked by a continued tension between the need to hold onto cultural norms, most often centered on family relationships, and attain the socio-economic promise that education promises. Throughout this paper, the writer refers to his extended family, noting that his uncle “didn’t get an education, and his two oldest sons are in their mid-20s, and both of their occupations are migrant farm workers.” He writes about his nuclear family, how he “didn’t want to follow in their footsteps,” but “wanted to have a more secure lifestyle by getting an education.” He draws other migrant students into the conversation. These students tell similar narratives, about how they have been “given the chance their parents didn’t really have which was to improve their working conditions so they wouldn’t have to go back to the fields their whole life.”

As conventional as this story may first appear, it focuses on experience in a pragmatic sense, that is, as a means of bridging “ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience)” to see if they “help us get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience” (James 30). The pragmatic narrative goes beyond the expressionist focus on individual experience and its potential to explore the aesthetics of experience. In autoethnography, the writer’s experience comes first, not in order to voice an authen-

tic identity at the “center of the universe,” but in order to make sense of the complexity of experience, eventually including a variety of discourses in that experience (Elbow 497). This narrative voice provides a personal perspective that all too often gets silenced by academic voices, but is itself complicated by the necessity of focusing on the self as member of a community. Students write about the personal, not as an end in itself or an aesthetic purpose, but as a way to initiate a conversation from a perspective that professors all too often ignore.

Experience as Transition

The theoretical questions that gather around assimilation, identity, and discourse, and the possibilities transculturation has of rewriting those terms has influenced my pedagogy and eventually fueled my interest in autoethnography. Consequently, I was surprised when I noticed a common thread in student autoethnographies that had not been part of my theoretical framework. My students were writing in response to the prevalence of autoethnographies to bypass the standard narratives of identification, the narratives I had come to associate with expressionism, in order to tell stories of transition. While I hesitated to see the prevalence of transitional narratives as an Hispanic trope, Ed Morales, in *Living in Spanglish*, is less cautious, arguing that Hispanics *experience* rather than *theorize* the post-structural. “Latino culture,” he insists, “is constantly evolving both north and south of the border.” That evolution “involves an increasing, if nonsystemic, proliferation of identities that allow us to choose from an array of guises, accents, class mannerisms, and racial solidarities” (19).

The Hispanic students I teach write about a wide array of experiences that emphasized the transitional nature of identity—as a returning veteran, a migrant farm worker, a single mother returning to school, a first generation college student. These students are adept at recognizing the cultural implications of these and other identities they inhabit, and how identity subtly shifts as they move between various cultural norms. Transition narratives open the conversation in ways that theories of assimilation, identification, and transculturation do not. As useful as these theories were, they assumed the hegemony of one voice over another, fixing the identity in that voice.

In an analysis of “The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez,” Américo Paredes contrasts Latino narrative with Anglo, writing that the corrido was “a personification of the spirit of border strife” (205). Richard Flores adds to Paredes description of the corrido, that “the Mexican hero is not the individual historical figure” . . . “but embodies the larger, collective figuration of the local community” (170). Heroes are “no longer individual personas, but discursive figures who are derived from the social and cultural world of the corrido’s authors and audience” (170). Such narratives, derived from the Latino community, often resist fixed identities through what Tara J. Yosso identifies as “counterstories” and Carmelo Esterrich and Javier H. Murillo refer to as “transculturation.” Rather than telling the story of a counter-identity, a fixed identity in opposition to Western *presence* critiqued by Derrida, these counterstories create multiple or hybrid identities that not only resist politically, but culturally, the imposition of identity through transition narratives in which identity is in flux.

The writer of “Metamorphosis,” signals that she is going to write explicitly about transition—in her case, transitions she experienced in response to the complex interaction of traditional gender roles, cultural knowledge, and education. She emphasizes the ways the demands of academic discourse and her own cultural knowledge stretch her identity in new and sometimes uncomfortable directions by telling her story in first and third person simultaneously:

As I’m sitting in the kitchen table writing, the housewife in me keeps looking over at the pile of dirty dishes that need to be washed, and at the half eaten breakfast that my son failed to throw away and just left on the counter. This relentless housewife does not understand homework deadlines; she does not understand that there is life outside the home, and her constant screeching in the back of my mind is making it difficult to concentrate on what I need to accomplish in this paper.

Though the “I” in this narrative resists the “consuming traditional housewife” who “constantly tries to shove my personal needs into a secret emotional bin once cluttered with insecurities, regrets, self-pity and dead dreams,” the writer paradoxically invites academic discourse into the conversation in order to defend that traditional identity even as she leaves parts of it reluctantly behind. First, she questions the either/or dichotomy of feminist theory that sees motherhood as “‘imprisoning’ rather than a choice that promotes and embraces strong family values” (Hurting 250). She then shifts her perspective to the dominant Hispanic trope of *machismo*, arguing that academic expertise, which objectifies Hispanic gender, must share the blame for her identity crisis:

But it is the [academic] studies which are based on traditional views that often provide a distorted portrait of Mexican American fathers (Saracho 224), and give the term *macho* or *machismo* a negative connotation. A *macho* is viewed as a strong tough, virile “he-man.” Quick to anger, who responds violently to any insult, challenge or dare (Kinzer 302) but mainly as *mujeriego* and *borracho*.

She looks to another Hispanic women, also torn between tradition and education, to question that expertise:

And although the term macho may have different meaning to many people, Gloria Anzaldua gives or depicts a beautiful and honorable picture of what being macho meant to her. In her book *Borderlands* she states “For men like my father, being ‘macho’ meant being strong enough to protect and support my mother and us, yet being able to show love” (105).

In her conclusion, she indicts popular American culture, and the tendency of Hispanics to desert the good along with the bad in their own culture in order to buy into that other culture:

Before writing this paper I thought that feminist views were causing women in our culture to lose important values, but as I read different articles and books, I noticed there was only one thing that was consistent. I also saw it in my own writing and at that moment is when I found the reason why our values may be dying. Negativity is what’s killing our culture, and affecting our marriages. We have joined the rest of society in the blame game and walk around with a victim mentality to justify our actions. (“Metamorphosis” Spring 2012)

The writer of "Metamorphosis" illustrates the potential autoethnography has to bring a variety of perspectives into productive interaction. By mixing genres and perspectives in a conversation this student explores the often difficult transitions she has experienced, particularly in response to education.

The plurality of identities in "Metamorphosis" and other autoethnographies my students write bypass the model of academic discourse in which they must assume the subject position I inhabit in order to be heard. Instead, their writing enters into conversation with a variety of discourses, including my own, and make space within those discourses for students to assert, explore, and sometimes switch, subject positions. Far from being assimilated by academic ways of knowing, they assimilate that discourse into their own experience. As a means of working within this complex meta-discourse without necessarily resolving it, autoethnography emphasizes rather than disguises difference. Many Hispanic students, already living in the tension between ethnicities, find the tension created by mixed genres familiar, if not necessarily comfortable. They then find ways to come full circle and grapple with identity, transition, change, and issues that are central to their experience.



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“When Do I Cross the Street?” Roberta’s Guilty Reflection

Irene A. Lietz

Introduction

Critical pedagogues in composition have long struggled with the difficult dance between challenging students to growth and learning and scaring them into retreat, even resistance, to their curriculum. This is particularly true when the curriculum involves themes related to identity-threatening issues such as race and racism, particularly for White students who, as racial identity experts note, may feel threatened, guilty, or in denial (Helms 50; Tatum 106). As the pedagogy has matured, critique and discussion of its goals and strategies has shifted from defense against charges of politics in the classroom (Hairston 698) and willful ignorance of student’s pragmatic goals (Durst 111) to closer study of aspects of critical pedagogy in rhetoric. Key among these are Ratcliffe’s seminal analysis that essentially asks what resistance looks like in the classroom, generating a list of eight kinds of resistances that, she argued, students could learn to recognize in their responses so that they could get past them (138–39). A little later, Trainor’s study provided rich description of predominantly white suburban high school students resisting critical pedagogy—challenging the field to consider the role of such students’ emotional attachment to and investment in color-blindness as well as other aspects of the citizenship curriculum that is the cultural norm. This article is also not an apology for critical pedagogy in composition. Instead, I would like to provide an application of the work of Ratcliffe and Trainor, but then begin to respond to some important next-step questions. For me, after reading Ratcliffe and Trainor, the question remains: What does the teacher *do* with student resistance? Should we just back away in deference to a student’s ‘pragmatic goals’ and protests of discomfort (Durst 111)? What are the ways that the instructor can draw the student through her resistance, help her get to the other side of cognitive dissonance (Harro 16), guilt (Tatum 105–113), and shame (Probyn 56) so that she can fully engage in a new critical understanding of the identity issues that shape and sometimes distort the rhetorical contexts and methods of her writing? Can our critical rhetoric of identity help students move past resistance to self-authorship (Magolda 69)?

In this article, I walk through an IRB-approved case study and discourse analysis of one of my student’s interviews that names her various triumphs and resistances, as Ratcliffe has defined them, while also considering their emotional aspects, as described by Trainor’s work. I also examine possible motives for her resistance, as theorized by Helms, Tatum, and Harro. Finally, using Brown and Gilligan, Magolda, Winans, and Lu, I discuss where the student’s particular experience seems to fall short of a sense of accomplishment and identity resolution for her, including a self-critique of my version of the pedagogy that points to some suggestions for strategies and institutional supports for teachers and students engaged in this kind of identity pedagogy.

Studying the responses of this student, here named Roberta, can contribute a case in point of the “local pedagogy” of our particular campus, a small, predominantly female liberal arts university in southwestern Pennsylvania (Winans 256). Specifically, Roberta

was a member of a race-themed writing class that sought to teach the classic modes of writing combined with critical race theory to encourage students to make a personal connection to their mainly expository writing and elevate it to higher levels of critical thinking, beyond the tired high-school level and talk-radio rhetoric. Roberta was one of five students I interviewed right after they finished their first-year race-themed writing class with me and again as seniors before they graduated. The project was intended to examine the effects of race-themed composition on their writing and their racial awareness.

I will first explain the motivation for the course's focus on race, then describe Roberta's comments from the first-year interview, followed by her comments from the senior interview. Then I will engage in some analysis of what I think is happening when these two interviews are viewed back to back. While I seem to have more questions than answers about Roberta's experience of the class, the details of her story offer clues to understanding the sources of her fears and apparent self-censorship, as well as hints of the kind of support such students and their teachers need. Roberta's interviews also raise questions about what we can fairly expect of or hope for students—and teachers—in a critical composition class. Ultimately, Roberta's story, as unresolved and unclear as it is at times, provides additional information about the struggles our students experience in critical pedagogy, particularly in studying racial identity, and it points to possible directions and questions for the future uses and study of this kind of learning and teaching experience.

Why Focus on Race in Particular?

To understand the context for Roberta's interviews, it's helpful to examine the rationale for doing this kind of class at all. This critical pedagogy focus grows out of the theory of Freire, Shor, and others. Using some of Freire's own words in the introduction to the foundational text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Shaull writes that Freire's liberatory work positions education as a vehicle to "'the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (15). Later picking up the theme of the role of education to help students explore their world and their relationship to it, Winans further notes that studying race specifically "helps white students develop a personal investment in their work that serves as a basis for their thinking more critically about how race affects the lives of all people and how it structures the world in which they live" (255). Multiple studies show that diversity experiences promote gains in critical thinking—at least for white students.¹

Our class was structured to be a beginning identity and diversity exploration by requiring that students write all of their first-year essays with a focus on some aspect of race experience, using readings, such as McIntosh's famous essay sometimes known as "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," the PBS series, *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (Adelman), Tatum's "*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*" and their own secondary source research as references. My hope was to accelerate an in-depth

1. The effect for African American students are not as clear, perhaps due to the small size of the study samples (Pascarella et al. 257-259).

writing experience of a single topic, reminiscent of the Harvard study on student writers' growth over a four-year college career (Sommers and Saltz).

The class pedagogy is built on the assumption that writing should not only prepare students for their subsequent writing experiences but also contribute in significant ways to students' growth and development as people. To that end, though controversial, unpredictable, and complex, talking about race is intended to help us advance intellectually, socially, and emotionally, to ask "questions about race and racism, but, more important, to help others move beyond fear, beyond anger, beyond denial to new understanding of what racism is, how it impacts all of us, and ultimately what we can do about it" (Tatum ix). That requires courage, Tatum affirms, because a new understanding of racial identity inevitably upsets the old identity. Thus the resistance that others, including Ratcliffe, Trainor, Banning, Fox, Rosenberg, and more have also described in English, rhetoric, communication, teacher training, and other kinds of classes.

Regardless of whether the theme of a class is race, as mine was, or another topic, they all are vehicles for teaching the purpose and the potential of writing. Critical pedagogy enables us to engage students in high-stakes writing assignments to teach them the power of writing; without that, we are selling students and writing short.

The worthiness of the outcomes, however, doesn't make it easy. Moreover, for a white woman raised in a white suburb who has come to an awareness of my own racial privilege relatively late in life, the race-themed composition class has pushed and pulled me into both identity and pedagogical adventures I neither anticipated nor was prepared for. I believe many of the questions that Roberta's experience raises for me are both unique to my positionality as a white female teacher, but also typical in some ways of the challenges faced by any well-intended teacher of critical pedagogy. That was my motivation for this study and this article: to share what I have found but also to present the dilemmas we as individual teachers and members of the profession must confront and ultimately resolve if we hope to gain these ideal outcomes. I believe Roberta's journey has much to tell us.

Intellectually Excited but Emotionally, Morally Outraged

Roberta looked alive from the first moment of class. She engaged with everything, comfortably revealing her surprise at the idea that racism still exists. She readily confessed what she hadn't realized and didn't know, willing to take in new information if it was reasonable and supported by evidence. In fact, it was the rational evidence that often carried the day with her; her emotions and passions followed, sometimes in spite of herself.

Though the course was racially themed, its primary purpose was to teach first year composition. This pedagogy is particularly well-suited to helping students learn to state a thesis or judgment, identify appropriate support, and organize the argument suitably for a particular audience. Four of the five interviewed, including Roberta, affirmed that the course helped them to build stronger arguments. Roberta named this process "critical thinking." She was intellectually stimulated by the course's expectation that she build an argument or "deeper conclusion" rather than "just facts." For example, to her profound surprise, the evidence of a racial bias in the sentencing guidelines for powder

and crack cocaine possession led her to consider what other factors might maintain racism in the current legal system, but with a caveat that reveals her own bias:

Even the fact that the crack-cocaine laws get such a harsher penalty than just powder cocaine, it doesn't necessarily mean that the people who made the laws were trying to be racist. They probably just viewed it as such a more dangerous drug, and that's why they did that. But the fact that there's such a racial disparity in the people being prosecuted and stuff, and that that's just getting ignored, even after multiple recommendations from the United States Sentencing Commission, and other various groups. I guess that that's what I found was the racist part of it.

Roberta found the evidence so compelling in itself and the authority of the U.S. Sentencing Commission so obviously persuasive to a reasonable person that she felt forced to conclude that people who are maintaining the current guidelines are operating out of racism rather than an exculpating lack of information. But here is the rub: her excuses for the responsible lawmakers as operating out of concern for the greater danger of the drug indicates the kind of denial that Ratcliffe references:

Denial emerges when students or teachers refuse to acknowledge the existence of an idea or action. Denial also emerges when students or teachers acknowledge the existence of an idea or action but refuse to acknowledge any accountability—individual and/or systemic—for any privileges or obstacles afforded us by (the history of) this idea or action. (138)

This denial is more fully described in a study of Master's in Counseling students who "expressed thoughts that argued against the anxiety provoked during discussions regarding racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism by stating that those injustices did not exist" (Watt et al. 96). Roberta's response also rings of "deflection," i.e. shifting "the focus... toward less threatening targets, such as a parent or the school system" (Watt et al. 98). Exactly what threat was she experiencing? It seems to be the threat of needing to put less trust in the people in charge, realizing the kind of authority she had so long trusted, may not be trustworthy in their reactions to the known injustice of the disparate sentencing.

If I use Harro's cycle of socialization as a theoretical lens, Roberta was caught in the classic clash between institutional and cultural socialization, the ethical/moral training she had also received, and the factual evidence of defacto racism in the disparate drug penalties (16). Her cognitive dissonance carried her swiftly into denial that the lawmakers' failure to fix the sentencing guidelines could be anything but innocent or even civic-minded. Why? As Magolda summarizes in her own work on self-authorship, Laughlin and Creamer found that students who do not encounter much complexity during their college years (often associated with having identity privilege in race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation) "make important decisions through reliance on external authority" rather than on thorough consideration of multiple perspectives (72). For students like Roberta, who do not have to deal with the complexities of an identity that is challenged by the dominant norm, "[T]heir confidence to make decisions independently was more likely tied to commitment to unexamined choices rather than an internally generated set of criteria, and that one's relationship with an authority figure was more important than the person's own expertise in decision making" (Magolda 72). In addition to a developmental attachment to authority, Magolda's longitudinal study also illustrates the con-

nection between self-authorship and time to move beyond the academic emphasis on the intellect and incorporate emotional learning. As one of her study subjects explained, “In the college classroom there is a focus on intellect and not necessarily the feel of what is going on. It is a much more controlled environment. What you learn after college is how out of control the environment is. Life is about dealing with those particular out-of-control situations” (70).

In other words, while a rhetorical recognition of denial as a kind of resistance to critical pedagogy is helpful, adding an interdisciplinary dip into student development theory on self-authorship helps us characterize Roberta’s ready absolution of the legislators as a call for patience with students’ natural stages of letting go of authority and growing emotional complexity. Seeing Roberta’s denial through a self-authorship lens also shifts at least some of the responsibility from her shoulders to the teacher and the curriculum. Trainor’s work, discussed later in this article, points to deficiencies in our understanding of and approaches to the emotional gaps engendered in our school systems. Magolda’s work addresses pedagogical innovations to directly and pragmatically link self-authorship with the kinds of rhetorical outcomes we hope to see in Roberta and her classmates.

From a psychological perspective, Lyn Miel Brown and Carol Gilligan contend a person’s unwillingness to hold accountable those in whom she has placed trust may be because such action may conflict with the self-image she is cultivating. Brown and Gilligan described this dilemma in the case of their research subject “Neeti,” who sought to develop “a conventional, authoritative voice... modeling herself on the image of the perfectly nice and caring girl” (39). Perhaps we are seeing this ‘nice girl’ side of Roberta when she couldn’t dare to believe that the lawmakers might have deliberately crafted a law with racist effect; that would open a Pandora’s box of other issues that would need to be re-examined, even as she most likely struggled with a myriad of other first-year college student identity issues. Instead some students, and I include Roberta in this group, choose to silence themselves, to modulate their voices, as Neeti had, and “muffle” their resistance:

We know that women in particular, often speak in indirect discourse, in voices deeply encoded, deliberately or unwittingly opaque. As white heterosexual women living in the context of twentieth-century North America—as women whose families in childhood were working-class and Jewish, respectively—we know from our own experience about certain strategies of resistance, both the danger of an outspoken political resistance and the corrosive suffering of psychological resistance. (24)

Though she appeared to me, her teacher, to cope with the vicissitudes and vagaries of the race-themed course better than many of her peers, her resistance, even as benign as it might appear in her essay and in class discussion, signals a struggle with the concepts of the course and their inherent challenges to the adult identity she was developing.

When Roberta spoke to me about the lawmakers’ rejection of the Sentencing Commission’s recommendation to fix the disparate drug penalties for crack and powder cocaine, her voice rose with emotion. She was angry that they were falling short of her ethical standard, when even she, a first-year student, could see the injustice of the status quo. Probyn’s work on shame and writing offers another possible insight to Roberta’s confusing resistance to the call for action inherent in the class pedagogy, that Roberta’s passion for justice sets up her later shame about her expressed inability to do more

than put words to paper about it, as I will discuss later. Probyn comments that while all writers fear being exposed as incompetent or a sham, "The crucial element that turns sham into shame is the level of interest and desire involved. There is no shame in being a sham if you don't care what others think or if you don't care what you think. But if you do, shame threatens. To care intensely about what you are writing places the body within the ambit of the shameful: sheer disappointment in the self amplifies to a painful level" (131).

Roberta's strong orientation to justice was expressed in her commitment to a theology major, so the intellectual puzzle of how lawmakers could resist evidence of racial disparity also spoke to her sense of moral (dis)order. Gesturing in frustration, she questioned the opaque logic of their actions. In other words, she had all the precursors to feeling like a sham and experiencing shame at her later inability to go as far as she sensed she should in implementing social justice change.

The Personal Is Political

As Roberta reflected on her growth in her writing and understanding of racism, Roberta displayed admirable courage in moving from the romanticism of brainy, provocative research and logic that appealed to her sense of justice to amazingly open and honest critical analysis applied to her own life, including the personal pain of acknowledging her own possible racism. She bravely narrated just such an experience in a frank story about walking down the street at night as an African American approached and the resulting internal debate about whether or not it is racist to cross to the other side:

One of the examples that I was thinking about, was, if I'm walking down the sidewalk, and there's someone walking towards me, what differs in the fact that I don't feel safe? [I]f it's a White man walking towards me —if it's an adult male—he's bigger than I am, no matter what. If he had some sort of bad intentions, you know, he could still easily overpower me. And so could a Black man walking towards me.² But when do I cross the street? Do I cross the street for both of them because I don't trust them just because they could overpower me, or is it because it's a Black man? Does that make him more subject to causing the crime? That's what I realized: just because he's walking down the street. He could just be just on his way to doing something whatever, like going to the gym. Who knows? He's not doing anything bad, but in the back of my mind you still kind of think that, that maybe I trust him less than I would trust a White man. And that's just not fair to think that way at all.

Although any woman, regardless of her race, might express fear in a similar situation, Roberta suspected that at least some of her concern was based on racial criteria, whether she wanted that to be part of her psyche or not. So she was also afraid of the racism she had acquired. This may be key to understanding her ultimate hesitance, discussed later, to take any more definite step toward an active anti-racism commitment as part of her own racial identity.

Roberta also somewhat shamefacedly confessed her own fear of difference when she revealed that the whiteness of her teacher (me, in this case), contributed to her sense of

2. Editor's note: in this essay, the author capitalizes both Black and White to reflect how and when students used them as racially-marked terms for groups of people.

safety in telling that story on herself. She feared being misunderstood and committing a social faux pas, attesting to the phenomenon that Espinosa-Aguilar notes in her analysis of student resistance, that “students may not believe that our contestatory classrooms are truly safe environments for the expression of their views” (155). On the other hand, other researchers have noted that students “often mention that the homogeneity [of some all-white classes] makes it easier for them to talk openly about race” (Winans 260). As a white student with a white teacher in the privacy of my office, Roberta felt safe enough to admit that she questioned her own sincerity and ability to live with integrity as a racially aware person, even as she later argued the necessity of her generation taking up the anti-racist torch.

Ultimately, in her first-year interview, she admitted that while the course “opened my eyes to a lot of things,” she also felt “I’m just one person and that I can’t have an effect.” But then she went on to give a rational response to herself: “You know that’s not true. I vote, you know, and I’m just one vote. And if I thought it didn’t have an effect, why would I even go to the polls to vote?” But her commitment seemed hesitant, perhaps something she wished she could believe when she said, “I don’t know what I would do to stop it [racism] other than to stop it in my life and have that be, like, an example to others.” Then she backed away almost entirely, referring to my teaching about racism: “But to take such an active role as you are, it just seems like would be overwhelming. It seems really ideal to want to do something to stop it but I don’t think I could live in the Cultural House.” The Cultural House is a nearby university living option open to all students that the class visited for an interracial dialogue experience. Roberta explained how she didn’t believe she could sustain such attention to race and racism beyond our class experience, such as living at the Cultural House: “Just having to deal with it all the time, I guess, having to think about it all the time. I don’t know, maybe . . . I’m not sure. I don’t know if I would pursue racism education further. Not that I didn’t think it was interesting, but . . .” Then she stopped talking, waiting for another question from me, the interviewer.

At that moment at the end of her first year, Roberta looked burned out and defeated, confessing she was glad to be done with the course and its topic. I had hoped when we met again to talk in her senior year that she might have resolved some of her dilemma and perhaps found other support for doing what she felt was important but could not muster the ongoing energy for. In other words, I was looking for some confirmation that the experience of researching and writing the facts about race could help move students from being a bystander to being an agent of social change, as all good critical pedagogy intends. But the picture in her senior year was very mixed.

In that senior interview, Roberta said she felt she had changed over the course of college, that through our first-year class, some women’s studies classes, and her theology major she had acquired new understanding of oppression and prejudice. But she had not returned to the topic of race very much for the rest of her college career. She noted the silence in the curriculum about race at our university, saying that if a student didn’t want to talk about race, she could avoid it easily.

As at many predominantly white schools, she noted no hostility on campus, but she sensed a level of racial segregation. Black and White students sat separately in the cafeteria. She wasn’t sure she would feel welcome at the Black students’ table although we

didn't talk about testing that reality. Admittedly, it was not her fault that the curriculum or co-curricular experiences apparently did not engage her in further racial identity development, but she seemed relieved that no one challenged her insularity.

Having moved off-campus after her first year, she found more racial "intermingling," as she called it, in the neighborhoods in the university district and the east side of the city where many students lived. She had observed differences in the way the police treated student parties, noting how they "busted" two Black guys for being "trouble-makers" but only confiscated beers from the White underage girls, telling them to turn down their music and sending them home without any arrests. She relayed these stories with a knowing, resigned air, as if she had traveled a long way from her own pre-college White suburban experience in which she had trusted the police to be unbiased.

Roberta's critical awareness was strong enough to make her question her own assumptions, though she couldn't always resolve the conflicts. In her senior interview as she talked about whether she noticed race in her life, she told a story about how her Asian co-workers at a local restaurant reacted to her long-time Black friend:

When it comes to people when I hang out at work, I definitely notice our cultural differences a lot more. A lot of them were born in Indonesia or Burma. They have a lot of different ways of doing things. I'm always surprised like sometimes even they will say something. My one friend who is a Black guy, he lived next door in my junior year and then he moved a block away and so we hang out all the time. He came into the restaurant one day and they all said, 'Why are you hanging out with a black guy?' I don't know. I didn't think of it that way because we have a lot in common: he listens to the same kind of music and he's really good friends with my roommate, too. So I don't know. Sometimes I can notice the difference really easily and sometimes it's not a thing at all. Maybe it's because I've only been working for 8 months so that's kinda new, and he's a friend that I've had for three years now. I have a more comfortable relationship with him but sometimes [race is] more noticeable than others.

Roberta's story is signatory of a person in process of changing her social identity. With interesting complexity, she was clearly aware of the racism in her co-workers' reaction to her friend. But she hadn't noticed the assumption in her words that "even *they* will say something," as if members of all minority groups were homogenous in their racial awareness. Her co-workers' challenge to her relationship with her Black friend apparently triggered a subconscious insecurity: she questioned her own motives and defended the friendship as colorblind. Even as she relayed the story, though, she seemed to be suspicious of herself and her feelings, wanting to dismiss race as a factor in their friendship but aware of feeling social pressures to be simultaneously colorblind and yet critically aware.

She insisted that she had changed since our first-year class, noting her efforts and duty to see "the absolute value and dignity of each human life. As a White person, I'm trying to see that in everybody." She defined her identity in terms of personal action, saying, the class "has made me identify racism, acknowledge it, which changes it. Being around difference has changed me." She confessed,

Even though I don't want racial thoughts, I still have stereotypes. The more I know, the more I can stop myself and try to make a difference. Eventually it will be my generation in charge. No good comes from blindness. Maybe you're not personally doing it, but we

need to change the institutionalized racism. Our generation is a lot farther along but that doesn't mean all is fine. If it's part of society, we have to acknowledge it.

In other words, action was part of her credo, but as she said that, I wondered if being an astute observer of racial inequity sufficiently met her criterion for action in her mind.

Roberta epitomized for me the White student—or teacher—who believes it important to call out racism when she saw it and to name the evil among us so that we have some hope of someday eliminating it. Yet she seemed to be treading water in the same racial identity she described in her first year, i.e. she could not imagine herself acting against racism in any public way. If her major in theology did not expressly require a class that examined some aspect of racism, then she felt no compulsion to seek out ways to respond to the institutionalized racism that she was still confident existed: “It just didn't come up. I didn't get to take much outside of my major. My history class was of dystopia and utopias, so it wasn't actual history. So that also depends if I'd taken regular history like the civil war and race relations.” And though in her senior year interview, she said that her racial attitudes had profoundly changed and that the class had impacted her life in a major way, (although her concept of “history” still seems somewhat conventionally narrow), she apparently felt no more prepared than in her first-year interview to take action on her new-found attitudes. She almost shrugged her shoulders at me, as if the matter were out of her hands.

In many ways, Roberta seemed primed and ready, at the edge of an active commitment. When presented with the fork in the road between taking the responsibility to “Change, raise consciousness, interrupt, educate, take a stand, question, reframe,” and the alternative “Do nothing, don't make waves, promote the status quo,” she seemed ready to move in the direction of change (Harro 16). But she didn't feel she could go there, and I continue to wonder why.

The Emotional Gap

Without being overly critical of either Roberta or myself, I now believe that she and I, as well as the rest of the White people in the class, were caught in the gap between what we came to see as a necessary revision of our White identities and our emotional attachment to our past image of ourselves. We wanted/want to see ourselves innocent of the taint of racism because we are good, well-intentioned White people. We want/need to stay attached to families, friends, neighbors, schools, churches, communities, and institutions that maintain our White privilege, even as we want to abandon our White privilege. Intellectually we've made the shift, but emotionally we have not, leaving us guilty and conflicted.

On this point, there is much to learn from Trainor's study of students in an all-white high school English class. Trainor might point out that my course focused on the logos of composition and racism in U.S. society but did not address the gap between the intellectual complexity of what we were studying and the pathos of simplistic dictums for the value of hard work and a positive attitude. She describes this dilemma so vividly: students are emotionally attached to the hidden curriculum of good citizenship, independent achievement, hard work, stiff-lipped perseverance over adversity, equal opportunity, and deliberate color-blindness to avoid any hint of racist preference. This

narrative, she argues, is often reinforced by teachers' unwillingness to directly confront the dominant narrative as incomplete and limiting, which reinforces that difference and critical thinking are alien values that threaten our way of life and the happiness and harmony of our communities. Trainor generalizes this experience in our high schools, a claim that my students' early responses to the race-themed curriculum would bear out. Their responses are almost uniform as they talk about how they were taught to not notice color and that, while there were social cliques, everyone was treated equally, including the occasional student of color who was almost always a standout athlete, well-liked, and widely accepted.

Roberta's high school experience in a suburb of Cleveland was no different. So it could be that Roberta's struggle with the gap between her expressed belief in racial equality, but her fatigue in examining lived race critically, was a form of fallout from courses like ours that do not directly help students cope with the emotional gap between their carefully constructed color-blind identities and conflicting information from Others' lived experience. We need to work harder to bring together the intellectual and emotional experiences engendered in our writing classes, particularly when critical pedagogy successfully brings students to new awareness that seems to demand some public social remedy on the part of members of the dominant groups.

But that leaves many questions unanswered. Roberta had "challenged the essentialized notions of identity that are often caught in the dichotomy of innocence and guilt," as Winans calls for our pedagogies to do (Winans 258). She knew she was basically a moral person who could also fall into stereotypical thinking as a result of the "smog" of racism in our society, as Tatum describes it (6). She knew her classmates were seeing the world too narrowly when they provided their interracial friendships as evidence of their own lack of bias. She did not flinch at the questions posed by her Asian co-workers that challenged her own long-time friendship with a Black man. And she readily recognized her potential privilege in the differential treatment received by other partying white students given police reprieves that nearby black students did not enjoy. Her worldview was complicated and nuanced, which should have helped her navigate treacherous waters of a guilt/innocence dichotomy. But the evidence of her interviews would suggest that a student's intellectually nuanced view and a teacher's pedagogical strategies that both recognize the emotional legacy of racism in our schools position us to "stand under" others' views or localize the pedagogy (see Trainor 140, Winans 262, Ratcliffe 28-30). That is, as laudable as these attitudes and strategies seem, they do not take us far enough yet.

By distancing herself from the reactions of her classmates, Roberta tried to establish repeatedly that she was not racist, that she was a good White person. But then, what is a good White person? Is thinking differently enough? At what point does thinking need to commit externally to some action, such as the interruption of jokes in the "backstage" of same-race groups, as Picca and Feagin have described ("Introduction" x). Isn't it necessary, as Lu and Horner conclude, that "we can use experience to not simply affirm our state of being but to raise questions about that material being, to critique and bring about changes in the conditions of our existence, and in turn, to transform our experience" (261)? Roberta seemed to have difficulty moving beyond her particular material experience to "politicize" it, as Lu and Horner call for, as a way to make it transformative (261). In another article, Lu refers to Anzaldúa's metaphorical "border-

lands,” the potentially transformative space between the known and the new world or knowledge, where static awareness can move to a more active consciousness: the painful struggle to birth new understanding “enables a border resident to act on rather than merely react to the conditions of her or his life, turning awareness of the situation into ‘inner changes’ which in turn bring about ‘changes in society’” (Lu “Conflict” 888). But Roberta claimed that this kind of movement from the personal to public action was “too overwhelming,” a position too hard to sustain, which left her caught between the rock of racism and the hard place of an activist, anti-racist, white identity.

Perhaps in trying to establish a place for herself in academic discourse, Roberta may have also fallen into the gap between home/society, her past experiences in talking about race through the lens of colorblindness, and the pressure of the class to adopt an anti-racist identity. This identity conflict is similar to that again described by Lu, in which she tried to reconcile the conflicting discourses of her progressive and Western-educated home with the contrasting worker identity of 1950’s revolutionary China, as taught in her school (“From Silence” 445), a conflict that ultimately silenced her. As a result, Lu struggled in her reading and writing, believing that she was supposed to keep her two worlds discrete, an impossible task as she strove to establish a unified identity for herself. In this same article, she later explained how she might have worked her way between the two conflicting discourses to a stance of her own, but could only do that with more study and more exposure to other voices that could show her how to negotiate this new identity.

Roberta did not have the advantage of additional study in writing or talking about race. She did not find allies, models, or mentors in our class or in the rest of her college experience. Like the others in this study, Roberta reported very little additional experience in racial dialogue beyond our class. This is in no way her fault, but a failure on the part of my curriculum perhaps, and even more I believe, our university, as I will discuss a little later.

Remaining Tensions

The unfinished and incomplete nags at me, and I contend, at other white students like Roberta who accept the challenge of engaging with an anti-racist critical pedagogy but find it hard to commit to activism. In addition to the emotional and intellectual gaps discussed earlier, there are so many unfinished projects and loose ends in this kind of course-based project. What does one do, for example, with the residuals of having been raised white in a world that privileges white? When prejudiced thoughts emerge unbidden and uncontrolled, how does a white person—student or teacher—continue to justify herself without some accountability for her racist thoughts, in spite of herself? By the end of the course, it was clear to Roberta that there was more work to be done; the disappointment of the course for both of us was that she did not see a way for her to sustain herself in that work. What’s more, at this point in my evaluation of this project, I believe it is naive to expect to make greater progress than this in a single semester, especially in a first-year course.

Perhaps that is a harsh evaluation of what we were involved in. Granted, we deserve credit for having conversations and exploring territory that the majority of white Amer-

ica avoids. But it's hard to find the line of "well done" or "good enough" when the African American students who have been involved in this course in other semesters are clearly more inclined to respond, "Really?" After all, how long can people of color wait for us to figure this out? The costs of not figuring this out are enormous, overwhelming, and unacceptable.

In response to those who maintain this is too hard or too political, particularly for first-year students, I ask: even if it is an unfinished product, if we can guide these students with disciplinary integrity in a process of learning to write in ways that bring them to greater relationship with others different from themselves while increasing their own self-awareness and voice, shouldn't we? If this kind of course can be a vehicle of social change or greater civil engagement, shouldn't it be? In fact, without obligating every teacher to be a critical pedagogue, don't we agree that we have a responsibility to open pathways for our students towards greater skill *and* inter-personal competency, whatever the pedagogy or methodology?

To me, Roberta's story demonstrates several things. Using a race-themed pedagogy does indeed prompt growth in writing and critical thinking, as well as deep student engagement in real-world issues that impact students' personal and professional lives. However, it is not without its complications or unresolved questions. For example, what are we to do when even our best students and teachers who are honestly struggling to create change are unable to sustain an anti-racist project longer than one sixteen-week course? What obligation does the white student or the white teacher have to recognize the need to act for the sake of greater justice? What level of accountability do we hold for student outcomes that do not result in revised world views of their privilege? How do we respect our white students' developmental pace of learning and their free choice to be who they believe they should be, while we also try to lead, encourage, support, and even prod them and ourselves into action, and help them (and us) move beyond perpetual guilt?

I believe the even more pressing questions lie within our institutional structures. How can we—our institutions of higher education—claim to prepare students to live competently in an increasingly diverse society yet leave students and teachers to struggle in isolated, one-shot, short-term experiences that have little hope of a satisfactory or effective end? Especially among those schools that profess social justice and civic engagement as desirable core curriculum outcomes, as mine and many do, how is it ethical to leave students (or teachers) hanging untethered, blowing in the wind, without mechanisms of support, such as scaffolded diversity experiences, robust diversity in student enrollment and faculty employment, more substantial dialogue on campuses among speakers and topics that challenge privilege, particularly white privilege, more courageous institutional self-assessment of assumptions, assignments, policies and procedures that effect *de facto* racism, and more?

The difficulties that Roberta faced are symptomatic not only of her courageous battle with white socialization, but they also provide a clarion call for us all to do better by her and all of our students, as well as by her teachers who are currently operating largely in isolation.

We cannot and should not back down when we encounter resistance from students because it is merely a reflection of the work we have yet to do. I am grateful for the

Robertas of our world who are willing to learn with us and grateful for this professional community that believes in the importance of this work. And I continue to hope that as we come to understand the kinds of responses we get from our students, we, as a profession, can eventually puzzle this out in more complete and satisfactory ways.



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Toward a Poetics and Pedagogy of Sound: Students as Production Engineers in the Literature Classroom

Karen Lee Osborne

Introduction

Most discussions of successful efforts to engage students in multi-modal discourses and prepare them for adapting to digital formats have focused on composition and creative writing classrooms. Cynthia Selfe, Lev Manovich and others have called for aural, visual, and other multi-modal approaches not only because of diverse learning styles and ever-changing technologies of communication, but also because these modes are important to different communities and cultures (Selfe 616). In literature classes, even if we use multi-modal assignments, the focus on writing critical analysis though a creative practice may seem more distanced from the generative aspects of “making” in a composition or creative writing classroom. This distinction, with its blurry edges, echoes the debate among digital humanities theorists between theorizing and making. I would argue that literature classrooms in the 21st Century are spaces ripe for exploring multi-modal experiences that mix up the critical and the creative, theorizing and “making.” Literature classrooms can incorporate more of what Amanda Stirling Gould calls a “makerspace learning environment” (26) so that we not only think about, but “think with” the media we use (Hayles, *How We Think* 24). Leading digital humanities scholars contend that

[t]he social, political, and ecological challenges of the 21st century demand significantly more than textual analysis or recitations of inherited content. These problems (and opportunities) will need people trained to create synthetic responses, rich with meaning and purpose, and capable of communicating in a range of appropriate media, including but not limited to print. (Burdick, Drucker, Lunenfeld, Presner, and Schnapp 25)

One of these media is sound. Compositionists and others have foregrounded aural-ity and vocal-ity as key to 21st Century approaches to writing. Scholars of language pedagogy and performance studies have written extensively about the importance of listening. Many theorists and poets have discussed the importance of sound to poetry in particular. In this essay, I will draw on such backgrounds to discuss an assignment I developed for my literature class, “Introduction to Poetry.” Using the open source recording software Audacity, teams of students worked in collaboration, reading aloud poems by a range of poets, recording the readings, enhancing them through recording software, sharing them with the class, and finally, engaging in critical reflection. In such a “makerspace environment” students experience their own discoveries about poetry (Gould 26). The process and resulting productions markedly improve students’ understanding of how sounds—including silences—function in poetry. The collaborative process engages students in the kind of deep listening that understanding poetry requires. It affords students the opportunity to engage with new media in order to experience voice in poetry as *other*, as a multidimensional, fluid construct.

Background

Columbia College Chicago is an urban, generous admissions arts and communications college. "Introduction to Poetry" is not a poetry workshop. It is one of many courses students can take to fulfill the Liberal Arts and Sciences Humanities/literature requirement. Like other literature courses, it focuses on close critical reading, analysis, and cultural contexts. I teach it with the understanding that most of the students do not have any particular knowledge of or enthusiasm for poetry when they take the class. Although some are familiar with hip hop, rap, and performance poetry—and Chicago has a thriving performance-poetry scene—the learning outcomes emphasize close reading and analysis, tending to privilege print text. However, I want my students to experience poetry both as print text and as phonotext.

Working closely with sounds helps students to understand the multiple ways in which language creates meaning. In addition to Cynthia Selfe's focus on aurality as a kind of cultural imperative, Erin Anderson calls for expanding "frameworks of orality (speech) and *aurality* (sound) to include questions of vocality (voice), as a peculiar category of sound that attends speech but also exceeds it, and as a mediated material that pushes the boundaries of human embodiment and agency." Garrett Stewart has noted that even when we read silently, we can attend to the phonotext (239). Charles Bernstein has argued for a "poetics of sound. Words [must be] returned to a sonorousness that does not require the validation of fixed images, of sight and insight, nor deny its common roots with visibility" (160). Susan Stewart suggests that we must experience the poem as "spoken sound" because sound is "feeling" and that is how the poem produces "transformations." When read aloud, the poem becomes "a living, breathing thing" (41). Drawing on Louis Zukofsky's definition of poetry as "an order of words that as movement and tone (rhythm and pitch) approaches in varying degrees the wordless art of music," Jed Rasula suggests that in the physicality of words' sounds, poetry claims its embodiment (285). But words are not the only resources of embodiment that poetry uses. Sound poets and performance poets include pauses, gestures, intonation, breath, pitch, emphases, and other techniques in their embodied practice. When we engage students in the study of poetry on the plain, old fashioned page, it is helpful to draw on vocality as embodied practice. This understanding of vocality, as Anderson defines it above, is quite different from older notions of "voice" in poetry and is consistent with postmodern theory's interest in destabilizing notions of subjectivity.

Just as we encourage students to approach literary texts with an openness to multiple interpretations supported by evidence, so we may invite them to think of the ways that language itself—and not some notion of a person behind the poem—creates sounds and meanings in the poem. As Octavio Paz wrote, "*the poet disappears behind his own voice*, a voice which is his because it is the voice of language, the voice of no one and of all. Whatever name we give this voice-inspiration, the unconscious, chance, accident, revelation—it is always the voice of *otherness*" (160). When my students record themselves reading a poet's poem aloud, they are engaging with *an-other* voice. Their own embodied voice adds an element of *otherness* to the language. By adding their own vocal reading of the poem's words, students are in effect stepping into that "otherness" that Paz described, becoming co-creators of a new vocal event.

As reader-oriented theory and visual culture theory both emphasize, every encounter with a visual, oral, or written text is a new event. Each encounter, each reading, is both distinct and imbricated in context. The words of the print text are fixed on the page. But each time someone reads that poem aloud, the same “statement” is uttered anew, and a new phonotext is created—a Bakhtinian “utterance” that both responds to previous utterances and takes on its own meaning and power. “Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance . . . is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another; the listener becomes the speaker.” (Bakhtin 68). Sound recording technology takes this intersubjectivity further. As Erin Anderson observes, “what we hear in digital voice is not a reproduction of the voice itself . . . but rather a representation of a voice-event” (*enculturation.net/vocality*). Recordings of poems confirm that sound is possibly the “most elusive” aspect of poetry. We forget that “each time we read the poem it sounds itself differently” (Tedlock 221). The temporal nature of each “reading” exists in tension with the relative permanence of the recording.

I am interested in what happens when students record themselves reading poems aloud, giving their own embodied voices to the poem, when they listen closely and deeply to each other’s readings and then manipulate the recordings to create distinct voice and sound events that are not merely transparent mirrors of the poem. In the first recording, the mediated voice of the student inhabits the supposed “voice” of the poem’s print text, destabilizing not only notions of the literature classroom as a purely analytical site where students only read and write about texts, but also notions of authorship and identity. The remixed recording produced by the student sound engineer complicates these notions further in a newly mediated representation; here, the listener “becomes the speaker” (Bakhtin 68). Both readers and production engineers practice a deeper, more active listening that blurs boundaries between textual analysis, recitation and creation.

Listening

When we listen to poetry, Nick Piombino contends, we must “actively participate” in the poem’s thinking, becoming co-creators of meaning. The poem’s “aural ellipses” become a kind of “holding environment within which the gaps among thought, language, and sensory experience *must be bridged by the listener*” (70, italics mine). Unfortunately, “[n]ot only is listening becoming a lost art, but there are fewer and fewer opportunities for students to learn not only how to think but also how to listen” (70).¹

1. Piombino writes, “the aural ellipses of the contemporary poem ensure that there will be spaces for invention on the part of the listener, and that the reading of the poem will not only be the public presentation of ideas, but will function as a medium for what is otherwise incommunicable between one mind and another. This is all the more important in contemporary life where there is so much talking and so little listening. Not only is listening becoming a lost art, but there are fewer and fewer opportunities to learn how to listen. Listening to nearly any television or radio talk show will prove this in a few minutes. At the same time, this avoidance is understandable, given that we live in a world that pounds everyone constantly with excruciating emotional trauma, much of it frequently presented in the media in an almost unbearably blaring and glaring manner. It should be no surprise to anyone that under these circumstances the failure to communicate, or the wish to find ways of avoiding communication, are pandemic. In such an environment, a key survival skill is the ability to sometimes turn off the external environment—to not listen.”

We take for granted that we know how to listen. Yet it's hard to truly grasp sounds in poetry by listening passively to others read or to a teacher explaining how sounds work. I suggest that my students experiment with reading a poem aloud as though they do not know English, just to listen for the sounds. It can be a challenge for native speakers to defamiliarize the language in order to hear it as sounds. When I designed the recording assignment, I sought to encourage such defamiliarization. When you prepare to record yourself reading, you begin to listen deeply. What seemed like something easy at first—all I have to do is read this poem aloud and record it—becomes more challenging in the doing. In my Audacity recording assignment, students practiced listening to themselves and to each other. This deeper listening helps them to hear the aural ellipses as well as the sounds of poetry and to more actively participate in the poem's thinking (Piombino 70). Because the software is free, the assignment can be used in almost any class with occasional access to a computer lab or can be adapted so students record at home.

Methodology

I have often used the textbook *Western Wind*, despite its reliance on well-known and widely anthologized poems, because it is easy to supplement with more recent poems, and its discussions of craft are among the most helpful anywhere.² I use handouts of poems by poets who visit campus or who visit my class. Students work with *Western Wind*'s scale of vowel sounds and frequencies, the groups of consonant sounds, and effects. I caution students against reductive applications of sounds and meanings. The book can be a little too neat in its claims. Specific consonant sounds don't always convey a particular meaning. But the text shows how the accumulation of sounds throughout a line or groups of lines can be more significant than we may consciously realize. Having poets visit class or playing audio or video recordings of poets reading their work dramatizes this. My students collaborate in pairs on the book's exercises and explain to the class how sounds work in selected lines of poetry. At the beginning of every class, a student plays a YouTube video of a favorite song and then discusses how the lyrics contain examples of metaphor or other aspects of poetry we studied. Students recognize that the music creates much of the experience. It is more challenging for them to hear the music

Later, discussing Clark Coolidge's poem "These" from the collection *Space*, Piombino writes, "[T]he reader is encouraged to try sounding out these words internally or aloud. A few minutes of relaxed experimentation should make it obvious that it is nearly impossible to focus on listening to these words without attempting to fill in the gaps. Although the end result of the experiment will probably not lead to a grammatically clear sequence of statements, specific and identifiable sound images will emerge. The poem provides a sound and visual structure for innumerable possible variations. It is in this sense that this work is so apt as a holding environment within which the reader may co-create his or her own version of the poem while sounding it out within the aural ellipses of the given text. To read and particularly to hear this type of work read by the poet encourages the listener or reader to participate actively in the performative aspect of the work. The reader or listener is invited to become a participant in the creation of the poem's overall aesthetic context and its meaning."

2. All poems mentioned in this essay are in the text *Western Wind*, except for those separately cited.

that is inside language itself, in the sonic characteristics of vowels and consonants and near rhymes and other effects that the poems produce.

In summer 2014, our department purchased enough unidirectional microphones for a classroom of students and installed Audacity open source recording software on all the computers in one of the labs. I took a workshop with my colleague Ryan Trauman on using Audacity in writing classes and knew immediately that I wanted to try it in my literature classes that fall. Because Audacity is free, I encouraged students with home computers to download and install it if they did not already have recording software such as Garage Band. But students do not need to do anything outside of the recording and editing sessions in the lab. I give a brief demonstration in our regular “smart” classroom before our visits to the lab. I also create a demo recording of myself reading Louise Bogan’s poem “Night,” with a background track of Chopin’s Prelude in E Minor on the piano.

For the second track, I simply recorded myself playing the piano using the voice memo feature on my phone and then imported the file into Audacity. I am an intermediate-level pianist, and I have terrible performance anxiety whenever I am asked to play in front of friends. I would not have been so bold as to play in front of my students, but somehow, recording a background track for a great poem allowed me to risk being a bit more vulnerable. My students saw that I was willing to take risks along with them. My demo voice track was full of flaws because I didn’t do much editing. It showed that I am no expert and that if I could figure out how to do it, then they could. I also edited a student recording and played another piece as background. Students saw that I had paid careful attention to the reading and had given some thought to the second track, thus demonstrating the kind of deep listening I was asking them to do. It was also a way of showing the respect for students’ work that we want them to show each other. I ascribe to what Ryan Trauman has written of his approach to risk and experimentation in using new media technologies:

Sometimes I underestimate the workload or complexity of assignment[s]. . . . And in other instances, my students make it clear that I hadn’t challenged them nearly enough in putting these writing tools to use. But rather than see these mistakes as failures or shortcomings, I work to foreground them for my students as a practice of experimentation. As an instance where I can learn as much from them as they are learning from me. . . . The more I learn from them, and the more they see what they have to offer my own growth as a teacher and writer, the more willing they are to join me in that spirit of experimentation, risk, and reflection.

During the first part of the assignment, each student practiced reading a chosen poem aloud in the days before the recording session. I suggested they select short poems that could be read in about three minutes because sound files are large and longer recordings are difficult to upload. They listened to recordings and to visiting poets. They discussed what they noticed about poems after hearing them that they did not notice after reading the text. They noticed such elements as shifts in pace, tone, and volume, as well as pauses. For example, after listening to a recording of Dylan Thomas reading “Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night,” students noticed how his voice grew softer and more plaintive in the final stanza, a departure from the harsher tone and louder volume of his voice in the earlier stanzas.

The purpose of the students' own reading was not necessarily to "perform" in an exaggerated sense but to demonstrate awareness of their chosen poem's nuances, the power of its language and sounds. Pacing, pronunciation, dynamics, and tone all could be elements of their individual readings. I wanted them to inhabit the language of the poem, to transform the language through the "otherness" of their own voice. At the first visit to the lab, each student recorded a reading of the poem they chose, saved it as an mp3 or wav file, and then uploaded it to our online course site on Moodle. Their partner could then download the file and work on it at home or in our next two visits to the lab. Some students spent much more time outside of class working on their edited files. The production engineers used such enhancements as pauses, noise reduction, pacing, dynamics and fades, as well as adding tracks including sound effects or musical accompaniment. They wrote production notes reflecting on why they made the choices they made in editing the files. Later, the class listened to the recordings and discussed them.

Results

As the teacher, I could not predict what kinds of readings or recordings the students would produce. And the readers who turned their voice tracks over to their partners could not predict what their partners would produce in the final recording. That risk is part of the messy, unpredictable spirit of experimentation that Trauman describes. Students discovered that the insights of a collaborating partner can be invaluable in multi-modal projects. These teams of readers and production engineers created a newly embodied text in recorded sound. You can listen to some of these recordings at: https://soundcloud.com/kosborne-22547485/sets/poetry_recordings_literature_classes.

Students had at least two opportunities to practice deep listening in the assignment. First, they listened carefully to themselves as they practiced reading before recording the poem they had chosen. Then they listened to their own recording before making initial edits or starting over before saving a file for their partner to edit. Recording raises the stakes and creates a kind of circulation anxiety. As readers, because they knew their classmates would listen closely to their recording, the students took pains to truly engage with the language. But the most powerful listening happened when students edited their partner's files. Research on language learning shows that listeners who have "a real need for understanding, because it is associated with their other goals (social, educational, professional, or personal), will be more highly involved" (Kemp 386). This applies to the listeners in my literature class as well. The production engineers had a specific goal, and they were motivated to pay close attention to the first recording. As one student said, "Of course I had my own vibes about what the speaker in the poem was trying to convey, and I appreciated hearing another person's take on the poem. JB's reading was very strong." Students often decided to go back and re-read the print text of a poem after hearing another student's voice track: "I read the poem multiple times to see where I wanted to change effects, and the more I read it out loud, the more I found things we've learned

in class coming out at me. Connotations of words stuck out, and the vowel sounds/frequencies played a role in my manipulation of CS's voice."³

After listening deeply, and often after re-reading the poem, the production engineers worked with the tools in Audacity to bring forth a meaningful co-created text. They decided what to add, remove, enhance, modulate, or adjust. More was at stake for them than just their own success or failure. They wanted to enhance their partner's embodied voice recording. In nearly every example, the production engineer improved the original voice track.

Aural Ellipses: Making Space(s) in a Makerspace Environment

Although some students may be experienced performance poets, actors or readers, most tend to speed up because they are nervous. Student editors usually added spaces to the original track or slowed down the tempo, providing the silences that help to enhance sounds and that allow a line of poetry to sink in on the listener. Understanding words as resources of embodiment—but not the only resources of embodiment—is central to creating a more multidimensional experience of the poem when we make recordings. CJ, for example, wrote that for his partner's reading of Dickinson's, he "spaced the vocal out over a long span of time. I think I nearly doubled the length of the original file with the use of silence."

NP found that a few lines in his partner's reading of Brandi Homan's "Wichita" had "too much" space, so he trimmed these spaces "ever so slightly." Yet also in this recording, he decided to slow the tempo because "For me, 'Wichita' is a throwback poem to a time when things were slower-paced. . . . So I decreased the overall speed of the poem by 10 per cent. After a few listens, I was convinced that this was a great fit. It makes the reader sound older and wiser when reflecting back on her mother's past." But NP wasn't done. Because for most of the reading he was hearing his partner's voice at a slower tempo, "I felt I should add a few tracks of her at normal pace for comparison." He copied the final line of the poem into two separate, staggered tracks, creating a "round" or "canon-like" effect, "as if to emulate the end of a movie flashback before its return to the current setting." The main track "slows in linear fashion, similar to a 'ritardando' in music," which, combined with the other two tracks of the final line, "lets the listeners know that the poem and the flashback are done."

Other Aspects of Editing the Embodied "Voice-event"

Even with fairly good unidirectional microphones, novices will often hold the mic too close or in a position that emphasizes plosives and stops and overwhelms other sounds. Accordingly, students such as CJ—with a bit more recording experience and the technical language to express it—used compression to "help minimize the peaks and valleys and produce a more rounded sound." As he worked on his partner's reading of Hart Crane's "My Grandmother's Love Letters," he decided to "raise the overall signal without distortion so the voice comes through more clearly" while the undesired other

3. Initials rather than pseudonyms will be used to refer to students whose production notes are cited.

sounds picked up by the microphone didn't. Then CJ added an equalizer to take out "everything below 200Hz and above about 12.5 kHz. Filtering out the low frequencies minimizes the plosive action, and the high filter takes some unwanted sharpness out. I also boosted 5 kHz to make the consonants more discernable, emphasizing the enunciation of each word." CJ shows that this, too, is a way to analyze and interpret poetry.

Other production editors were lucky with their reader's original voice tracks. BT had a deep, resonant, masculine voice. His reading of Dickinson's "Narrow Fellow" emphasized the "s" sounds throughout the poem. The "s" sounds are there in the text, for example in the line "His notice sudden is." BT's reading of "grass" drew out the "s" sound so long that it performed the snake's slithering, making the snake's *otherness* palpable. BT's embodied vocality of masculinity recontextualized the poem. In BT's reading, the poem becomes more than the witty punning of its title. BT's confident, clear enunciation and deliberate pacing, enhanced by his sound-production partner's adjustments to the tempo, liberated the poem from the image many readers have of Dickinson's speakers, based on oversimplified, narrow notions about the author. BT's rich bass brought out the poem's deeper currents, destabilizing Dickinson's identity, and an unexpected wildness came through.

Another producer edited her partner's recording of Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, "My Mistress' Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun," using the de-essing tool on the word "mistress." She also "fiddled with" the word "damasked" because the reader had not pronounced it clearly. In the end, she wrote, the edits of "'damasked' didn't work, so I tried to quiet it a bit." She added pauses, slowed the tempo of a few lines and adjusted volume: "'breasts are dun' became softer as did 'in her cheeks' and 'ground' while 'Her lips red' became louder." These adjustments show that while it is not always possible to make a great final recording from a flawed voice track, working with such challenges generates valuable experience in thinking with—and not just about—new media and its impact on helping students learn about poetry.

Sound Effects as Resources of Embodiment in Editing the Voice-Event

Brandi Homan's poem "Wichita" is a wonderful poem for teaching sounds. I provided a handout of this poem earlier in the semester, and we worked closely with Homan's use of consonant sounds, vowel sounds, and other matters. The speaker imagines the day her parents met. The poem begins with a scene of the speaker's mother riveting, "gunning metal into metal" at the Boeing plant in the early 1960s. In one recording, the editor added the sound of a loud machine accompanying the word "riveting" and a motorcycle revving to accompany that description at the end of the poem. Another student used the "fade in effect to suggest trying to start a motorcycle engine." Sometimes students discovered it was wise to resist adding obvious sound effects that merely echo the sounds already being performed in the language of the poem, and instead they added less predictable effects that amplified or even contradicted the meaning. For example, TG edited the line "Her tan cowboy boots pointing/ upward," using the "invert" effect. "This is a play on words," TG wrote, "because instead of the pitch pointing upwards, the invert effect points the pitch downward. The cowboy boots are actually pointing downward if you listen closely."

I enjoy assigning Lee Ann Roripaugh's prose poem "Imprint" for its powerful imagery and sounds as well. The fact that it is a prose poem helps students to understand the many resources within a print text for sound beyond such obvious indicators as line breaks and rhyme. They must listen closely for assonance, alliteration, vowel frequencies, consonant types, and other sonic nuances. In one recording of "Imprint," production partner JH used the equalizer and other tools. He filtered out lower frequencies. He adjusted the volume manually for each line and added "some plated reverb" to "fit the tone of someone sitting at a window, thinking out loud to themselves." Another student producer added a range of effects to his partner's recording of "Imprint." His production notes demonstrate the kind of active listening it takes to truly hear a voice track in order to make decisions about how to enhance it with sound effects:

The plosives in 'Ping and Pinch' and 'leaf prints' all created a dynamic emphasis on the sounds. The S's in 'Japanese Beetles,' 'Toy's Stutter,' and 'Rescinded' , , created a watery-sounding atmosphere that I tried to enhance. I tried to emulate these sounds as best I could with sound effects and still capture the essence of the poem. When it came to certain visuals like the beetles and cicadas in the beginning of the poem I searched for sounds of metallic stuttering or crawling to draw the reader in and allow them to visualize better the storyline of the poem. The goal of my editing was to create this movie type atmosphere so that the reader can literally feel the sounds of the words and imagine better what the narrator is saying. For example when he says 'chilled rain' I added a sound like ice cold rain hitting a surface. One of my favorite effects is the fade under the phrase 'The imprint of your body fading...too quickly...from my bed....' This was a great way to get the reader to visualize the fading of the imprint with the fading sound effect enhancing the words.

Production editor AJ added sound effects ranging from water flowing to footsteps to the recording of Naomi Shihab Nye's poem "Famous." His editing helped to dramatize each of the poem's scenes effectively without seeming superfluous or gimmicky. "Famous" explores otherness as it critiques our obsession with celebrity by re-contextualizing the word "famous" not as mass adulation but rather as the intrinsic value of everyone and everything. In this poem, perspective is all. "Famous" is in the eye of the beholder. Everything and everyone is other, and the poem's short stanzas list of vivid examples: "The river is famous to the fish" and "[t]he loud voice is famous to silence" and "[t]he tear is famous, briefly, to the cheek." The poem is often pointed in its connotations of value: "The boot is famous to the earth/more famous than the dress shoe, / which is famous only to floors." By the end of the poem, the speaker announces her own desire to be famous, but not in the way most of us would think. Her aim is to be what she thinks we should value instead of our attraction to being "famous."

I want to be famous to shuffling men
who smile while crossing streets,
sticky children in grocery lines,
famous as the one who smiled back.

In these lines, the speaker emphasizes the intersubjectivity and reciprocity that we can construct in language, and those emphases require active attention (or listening) to others. She wants to be famous "to" shuffling men, not to millions of people, and not, we

could add, to CEOs or kings or presidents. The “shuffling men” and “sticky children” are the others we too often do not pay attention to, do not see and hear. She sees them and will be “the one who smiled back” at them. In the final stanza, the speaker announces that she wants to be famous

. . . in the way a pulley is famous,
Or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,
But because it never forgot what it could do.

Pulleys and buttonholes do things; they function. Everyone has value and a function. We don’t need to be or do anything “spectacular.” If we pay attention, if we listen, if we live as though we value our connection to others, then we, too, can be “famous” to someone or something—and that’s the only fame that matters.

The fluid reading AJ’s partner did transformed the poem’s celebration of otherness into an even more lyrical experience. AJ’s editing heightened the echoes of “s” sounds and enhanced his partner’s intonation, amplifying idea shifts in the language. In his edited version, we heard “the boot is famous to the earth, /more famous than the dress shoe” steadily and then he inserted a pause. He lowered the volume slightly and speeded up the tempo a bit in the next line, “which is famous only to floors.” The effect was to make the line sound like more of an afterthought or an aside. In the poem’s final lines, the reader’s voice was fairly soft on the beginning of “I want to be famous,” reinforcing the poem’s focus on attending to otherness rather than becoming lost in self-absorption. Her vocality and AJ’s editing intensified not “I want to be famous” but rather the “to,” specifically the “shuffling men” and “sticky children” with whom she interacts. AJ added sound effects that not only mirrored such elements as the river and the boots and the dress shoes, but also established a relation among the sounds themselves. The poem became an audio world, with each sound relating to other sounds as well as silences embodied the kind of “famous *to*” that the poem celebrates.

Adding Music as a Background Track

When poet Tony Triglio visited our class, he read several poems and answered questions. Both in his demeanor and his speaking voice, Tony projects a quietude consistent with his Buddhist practice and philosophy. The speaker in “Evidence” experiences anxiety and some altitude sickness when he climbs a mountain in Colorado. Tony’s soft voice and understated reading in class worked well in conveying the disorientation at high altitude and the speaker’s imagination of dangers there, especially wildlife that might be lurking. When the speaker finds evidence of other humans in the ashes of a fire, the poem makes no grand claims, but suggests unsettling implications.

SI’s voice-track reading Tony Triglio’s poem “Evidence” was also very clear and effective. The pitch of SI’s voice is only a bit higher than Tony’s, and she enunciated each syllable with an undeniable yet not excessive gravitas. She commanded the poem, reading the declarative sentences with a combination of restraint and stately conviction, increasing or lowering volume to indicate emphasis, as in the lines:

. . . . These are places where,

in the dark, I trust the country road
ends somewhere, clean air to kill for.

She spoke evenly, emphasizing the “s” sound in “place,” the vowel sound in “dark” and “trust” in the first two lines, and in the beginning of the final line, but her crisp enunciation of the “k” sounds in “clean air to kill for” struck us like a sudden stab of power in reserve.

Her production editor did very few adjustments to SI’s voice. But he added a somewhat atonal and low-pitched electronic music track. The low pitch of the electronic music projected the spoken words into sharper relief and co-created meaning by intensifying the sense of isolation and discovery in the scene. The clarity of each action and image spoken by S became significant beyond the surface content of the words. When we listened to SI’s reading of the lines “Everything we do without permission/ feels like theft,” the lines bit into the air and the entire class seemed to sit up straighter in their seats. We had read these same lines in the print text and had listened to Tony read them. Yet the otherness of SI’s voice, together with the electronic music track that enhanced the eeriness of the setting, created a new experience of this poem we thought we already knew.

In another recording of the poem “Wichita,” editor DM wrote that because the poem alludes to Del Shannon’s song “Runaway,” he added part of the song at the end to evoke the “seductive feeling and the longing” as a mechanic looks after a woman who gets on her motorcycle and rides off—“She is the runaway that he’ll eventually chase.” DM also created his own remix of the song, a more melancholy version, for the first two thirds of the poem, before switching into the “more upbeat tones” of the Shannon song at the end. He borrowed some chord progressions and “slowed it down” in his remix. He wrote that “when I changed from G minor to F, I tried to underscore the questioning tone of the [poem’s] line ‘Was it Peggy beside her’ and then I changed back to the other chords” to make it “more of a love song.”

Editors of recordings of “Imprint” also added background tracks. JH added a piano track he composed to his partner’s recording of “Imprint” to reinforce the tone of solitary reflection. CJ’s production editor added a classical music track to CJ’s voice recording of “Imprint” because despite the clarity and evenness of the voice, his editor thought the recording still “lacked the emotion that the speaker was actually feeling. I chose ‘Poem op. 41. No. 4’ by Zdenek Fibich because the song really embodies the love, longing and loss felt in ‘Imprint.’”

Another student composed and performed a guitar solo to accompany his partner’s reading of a Dickinson poem. It worked well because we could hear the music clearly, yet it did not overwhelm the voice track. In other edited recordings, we found the music was almost inaudible when played through the classroom speakers. We learned that it’s a good idea to test your remixed recordings through speakers and not just headphones. But this discussion also led us to think more critically about the importance of finding balance in the voice recording and any other tracks. The students realized it is not always necessary to add sounds. The edited voice recording itself often functioned as a resource of embodiment, defamiliarizing and evoking otherness in the language, creating a sensory experience beyond the printed words.

Reprise

If, as Selfe suggests, “the primary work of *any* classroom is to help students use semi-otic resources to think critically, to explore, and to solve problems,” then the Audacity recording assignment was effective (644). My students and I are not recording experts, nor are most of us musicians, but our participation in the messy, experimental process of makerspace and approaching poetry as both print text and phonotext was instructive. In future classes, I will help students prepare for this assignment by listening to more examples of previous recordings so that we can discuss the specifics of mic placement, tempo, pitch, and other matters. I will prepare students for what problems can arise in adding background tracks. Both readers and production engineers must discuss in greater detail how they think the voice-event of this performance and edited recording adds to our understanding of the poem in comparison to reading the poem on the page.

Chris McRae’s approach to listening in performance studies can apply to almost any collaborative process: “As a musician, I often find myself listening to learn from other musicians. I listen to their performances, to their musical styles, and to their stories. The examples of other performers always serve, for me, as important lessons. I also know that the best way for me to understand these musical lessons fully is *through my own embodied practice*” (273, italics mine).

Like McRae, my students found that the best way to understand how the sounds of poetry work was through their own embodied practice. By listening deeply to others read, and by creating their own readings, my students paid not only the poems but *one another* closer attention. They learned from hearing the *other* in the voice of poetry. While at first apprehensive, they seemed to take delight in working creatively to make each other’s recordings more interesting and effective. Engaging in multi-modal practice to create newly mediated texts changed my students’ relationship to reading and writing about poetry. They wrote stronger critical essays analyzing sounds in poetry as a result of this experience. Seeing literature and writing as “something that emerges from an interaction with tools not only calls into question the solitary author but also allows us to think and write across disciplinary boundaries.” (Brown 133) When students experience poems and language as meaning that requires their own co-creation by listening actively, when they make meaning through their collaborative interaction with the recording tools, they not only are thinking with new media; they are also making deeper connections among writing, reading, listening, and the transformations that each affords.



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OUT OF THE BOX

My Mom's Letter

Robert M. Randolph

I grew up in a poor family. We had an outhouse and a well with a hand pump. The house was heated with a kerosene stove. We did not own a car. My mom did not complete the first year of high school. My dad worked in a mill. It took me years of schooling not to use “ain’t,” or to say “them” for “dem.” We weren’t stupid in my family, just uneducated.

I liked to read and did well in high school, well enough to get a scholarship at a college with a work-study program, which allowed me to work in a factory to pay for most expenses. I read a lot and wrote well, well enough to get a teaching assistantship at a state university, from which I earned an MA and PhD. That was years ago.

At the point of writing this, I have been a Fulbright Scholar twice, been Honors Professor of The Year at a large state university, published individual poems, stories, essays, and a prize winning book of poems. I’ve been teaching at the college level since 1966. Even while working in the post office during the late 70s/early 80s, I taught part time. I’ve taught on campus, on military bases, at industrial sites, abroad, and in prisons, courses ranging from freshman composition to graduate technical and business writing. I am currently Writer-in-Residence and Chair of a Department of English at a college. Reading and writing have been good to me.

In addition to the BA, MA, and PhD in English, I also have an MA in Religious Thought, and an MA in Counseling. In all of that I have not forgotten how I started out. For years I carried around a letter from my mother, about four pages, handwritten, that contained only two complete sentences—the rest was sentence fragmentation. It was a beautiful letter, one of the last she wrote, a loving letter, full of detail about family and friends—written by one who as not stupid, just uneducated.

I believe we all carry the treasure of our individuality, which also involves our individual “voice,” our personal “metaphor bag,” as one of my teachers, the novelist John Gardner, used to say. When working with a student, Dr. Gardner would seem to be chatting aimlessly, until he understood the student’s “metaphor bag,” and then all of a sudden he and the student seemed to have grown up in the same neighborhood, now talking deeply about something.

These days the idea of the world as one neighborhood bears pondering. When I was in Finland as a Fulbright Scholar, one of my students asked me, “What do you Americans want from the rest of the world?” He also asked, “What is your soul in America?” I said I didn’t know, because we are a complex population; but sincere questions like that crop up, with good reason, and deserve answers. What is our idea of community? What are our values?

In teaching I try to create colleagues, others who can engage with informed articulateness in the conversation we all need to hold, in this world neighborhood, to work on pressing issues of the human community. In working with a student, I start with the individual treasure, listen for and appreciate the learned metaphor bag, and then approach traditional (and genuinely profound, at the deepest level) composition ideas like grammar, syntax, organization, writing from both the heart and the head, and following the dogs off into the woods—as Donald Murray says.

I lost my mom's letter, probably in some move from one state to another. I'm glad she wrote it, and I read it, and it mattered in my thinking. Whenever I read it, I felt closer to her, felt her there. That's the idea of writing, making things matter in words, bringing a presence into them.



Final Journals

Robert M. Randolph

Their journals stun me
with honesty. I watch the sun go down.

A dog barks.
Night wind opens a book.
I sit by a simple window, one pane of glass.

The air inside my Aalto vase
forgets its last secret.
I read the journals again.

I am filled with silent tunnels
and always want to be.

In the face of this writing
let trombones play for swans,

let Kansas fall in love with the Verrazano Narrows Bridge,
let all things interconnect with love.

Thank you all, all who do,
for writing from your hearts.



BOOK REVIEWS

Reading Ethically

Julie J. Nichols, Book Review Editor

Readers of this journal need no convincing of either the joys of reading or the challenges of teaching. Nor would most of us question the position that serious reading, serious teaching, and please, let's not exclude *fun* reading and teaching, are inextricably tied to questions of ethics. How does reading interact with our agency, guiding us to moral reflection and action—especially the reading of stories but also the reading of poetry and nonfiction? And how, when we teach, whether we teach literature or other content, do ethical questions constrain or direct us in our interactions with our students?

The four volumes reviewed in this issue address these questions head on. Two of the reviewers, Peter Fields and Walter L. Reed, describe the wisdom of Marshall Gregory, a brilliant author and educator of educators, whose *Shaped by Stories: The Ethical Power of Narratives* was published in 2009 and whose daughter, Melissa Valiska Gregory, collected many of his lectures and discussions on teaching into *Teaching Excellence in Higher Education* in 2013, a year after his death. Both Fields' and Reed's reviews inspired me—an increasingly burnt-out college professor (I will ashamedly confess) whose student evaluations have all too often in the past few years complained about impatience, despite high ratings of knowledge mastery and capacity to assist—to read Gregory for my own benefit. As I took in his calm logic, his appeals to human goodness as well as to sense and intelligence, I wished I had been exposed to Gregory's writing much sooner. Consider his two theses: a) that reading stories has many more complex ethical implications than mere character analysis or plot summary, and b) that every classroom is rife with ethical decisions we teachers are bound, by our commitment to teaching, to consider with deep care. You, too, may feel your attitude shifting, your humility level rising to counteract defensiveness and irritation. Both reviews introduce ways of thinking about teaching, and about engaging with literature, that readers of *JAEPL* will find validating and inspiring. We're lucky to have these excellent accounts of Gregory's work.

The other two reviews are more personal and more literary, but for all that they, too, engage deeply with questions of ethics. The poetry of AEPL's own Laurence Musgrove, whose volume *Local Bird* is beautifully summarized and characterized in Jeffery Taylor's review, looks wryly at the challenges of teaching. Advising students, bemoaning teacherly burdens, describing roller coaster reactions to years of the same predictable questions, the poems invite us to reflect upon and reconsider our stance as professionals working with beloved amateurs. Taylor's well-chosen quotes and apt impressions direct us to Musgrove's wit as well as his wisdom.

Finally, there is Scott Hatch's lyrical review of *The Bioregional Imagination—Literature, Ecology, and Place*, a collection of essays edited by Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty,

and Karla Armbruster. Hatch is a poet and novelist with a deeply bioregional imagination of his own, and his review reminds us that to attend to *place* is to respond to profoundly ethical conundrums, especially in a world where other values often crowd out nature, beauty, and the wild. We who aspire to expanded perspectives on learning cannot afford to turn away from writing that leads us gently back to those values so that we can lead our students in that same prized direction. As with the focus of Marshall Gregory's nonfiction and Musgrove's poetry on teaching, *The Bioregional Imagination* illuminates content and ethical aspects of our profession which, when we remember them anew, benefit both ourselves and our needful students.



**Gregory, Marshall. *Shaped by Stories: The Ethical Power of Narratives*.
Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2009. 223pp.**

Peter Fields, *Midwestern State University*

Marshall Gregory's operating assumption in *Shaped by Stories: The Ethical Power of Narratives* is that stories win us over before we have fully engaged our critical faculties. The overriding problem with that level of engagement is not that we enter imaginatively into the storyteller's universe. Quite to the contrary, the joy of narrative is that our willing suspension of disbelief delivers us to an alternative social milieu where we feel we understand the rules of that world, and the nature and habits of its people, better than we understand the rules and people of our own world. The problem in Gregory's view is that we are so taken-over by story—so willing to accept that story on its own terms—that we tend to forget at first why we so readily dispense with the world we do not fully understand in favor of a given author's vision of people, place, and things:

Human beings are eager for the influence from stories because stories' invitations to *feel* in certain ways, to *believe* in certain ways, and to *judge* in certain ways—invitations that we almost always accept—give us deep pleasure and also operate as paradigms and models that we can use as guides for generating the steady stream of firsthand emotions, beliefs, and judgments that we deploy in order to deal with events and people in real life. Our eagerness for fictional pleasure and paradigms, not to mention the nearly ceaseless engagements we have with narratives, cannot help but render us vulnerable to their influence. (168)

In Gregory's view, we are so actively entering into these alternative worlds because we are fundamentally eager, indefatigable students of the human condition—authors of our own being—and want to know better how to conduct ourselves in the confusing world around us. We are far from escapists. Instead, we have sought a teacher and moral guide. Indeed, avid reading may be symptomatic of a special breed of alienation that can never quite bring itself to give up on the world. Such readers graduate to new levels of story and never return to the same story as the same person because they are learning and becoming more adept at discerning what all stories do, even if some are better and

more reliable at it than others, and that is teaching us the difference between what seems right and what is in truth the right thing to do.

In a sense, Gregory is doing something counter-intuitive for a self-confessed lover of narrative: he is giving credence to the Platonic quarrel with narrative, the tension between the ideal republic Socrates envisioned and the story-telling role of the poet. At times, and rather pointedly, he takes up the mantle of the ethical naysayer, suspicious of the power of narrative to enchant before it enlightens: “Plato was dead right—even though he didn’t have *All My Children* or Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals or *The Little Mermaid* to point to—when he claimed that a lot of narratives pander to fantasy (in the worst sense of losing ourselves in ego wish fulfillment), pride, ambition, and unearned fulfillments” (147). At the same time, he is the irreducible champion of that giving-over to the power of story that the best reading not only entices us to do, but also requires for its best effects, morally and aesthetically, and his argument emerges as advocating a kind of razor’s edge. Nothing is gained from story’s power to shape us, morally and spiritually, if we aren’t available to, and aware of, story’s innate properties of ethical vision.

In his own experience, Gregory describes reading as a growth curve where he becomes better over time at understanding and internalizing the ethical model underlying a story as in the case of one of his favorite novels, Dickens’s *David Copperfield*. Gregory describes how over time he grew into a deeper understanding of his own relationship to the protagonist, an immersion in story and outcome reminiscent of what Bakhtin might have meant by the term “dialogic” (150), especially the dialogue between text and reader. At first, seeing so much of himself in the main character, Gregory confesses that he indulged early on in what he feels is the great desire of most people who are born into, and raised within, a “highly dysfunctional family” (4): both the protagonist in the novel and Gregory himself nursed this deep-down, insatiable need for “unlimited sympathy” (146) at the expense of ethical agency; however, as he grew older, he saw in the same character and story the necessity—and role model—for becoming what Copperfield would have called “the hero of my own life” (qtd. in Gregory 149). For Gregory, becoming that hero of his own story has been of never ceasing importance as a catalyst for throwing off moral passivity: “This sentence has been a touchstone for me in times of confusion and uncertainty, helping me return to a clearer and more purposeful sense of myself. It has played this role in my life because it plays this role in the ethical vision of the novel, which is nothing if not an ethical vision of how David Copperfield becomes an independent and self-knowledgeable ethical agent instead of the frightened lump of self-pitying weakness that he was programmed to be” (149-50).

Gregory, it should be noted, allows us to see how his personal story informs his discussion. From the earliest chapters, he gradually unfolds his growing up as a pastor’s kid in a home and church family supercharged by the passion and drama of Pentecostalism and the prophetic authority of a dynamically-wrought “evangelistic fundamentalism” (8) rooted in the diction and cadence of the King James Bible, and not always in his view was he the worse for it: “[...] one cannot withdraw from it linguistically, no matter how far one withdraws from it theologically. Nor have I any desire to lose the sense I had then that salvation might hang on using or knowing just the right word in just the right way” (8).

But his reading over time of Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* reveals the negative side of that experience. Every re-acquaintance with the story heightened his suspicion of what he felt was its emotional extravagance: "This kind of emotionalism for its own sake was all too similar to the anti-intellectual emotionalism of the Protestant fundamentalism I had been raised in, and I knew all too well how easily it could mask limitless forms of self-aggrandizement, selfishness, and cruelty" (159). Ultimately, pivoting between the two novels over time—between *David Copperfield* and *Wuthering Heights*—Gregory developed his critical model. He came to the conclusion that what we ultimately seek in our quest as readers is that story which offers a valid ethical vision of how life might be lived: that is, a "theory of human flourishing" (163).

Probably the most memorable passages of *Shaped by Story* are those where Gregory helps us understand the power of story to engage us at every cognitive level, implying that story is the way our minds were built to think. One of the most compelling ideas (speaking of "just the right word in just the right way") is Chapter Three's first sentence with its felicitous use of alliteration and assonance: "We find stories useful because they *swallow the world whole*, and in fact the domain of stories may be the only form of human learning other than religion that makes the attempt to encompass the entirety of human life and experience" (31, my italics). The thoughtful reader may find this "swallowing whole" the nexus that brings together, and foreshadows, the various strands of Gregory's argument for an ethical criticism. Here we see how his Pentecostal upbringing entwines with the refuge he found in story and how his ever-maturing capacity for critical thinking enters the picture and insists on rigorous, categorical answers. He realizes that what makes story so captivating is that it completes the world and wraps happenstance into a cause-and-effect universe where actions have consequences and moral decisions matter: in other words, "Stories give us *conceptualized* experience" (51).

The experience the author encloses is comprehensive: "The features of the story that make it so much more compelling than any other form of learning seem to be the following: its capacity for holistic representations of human life; its capacity to embed represented lives into a fully realized context of concrete details; and its capacity to vivify and identify those issues about which human beings tend to be in a perpetual froth of concern [...]" (62). The "*pleasure*" (Gregory's italics) of story is not really so much our willingness to suspend disbelief; the key is our willingness "to *escape* the ego, not to imprison all of the world's wonderful diversity *within* the ego" (54). Therefore, reading itself is the first step of Gregory's ethical vision.



Gregory, Marshall. *Teaching Excellence in Higher Education*, ed. Melissa Valiska Gregory. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 257pp.

Walter L. Reed, Emory University

The late Marshall Gregory, long-time Professor of English at Butler University, was a one-man institution as far as the teaching of teaching was concerned. Over several decades, by himself and in person, he led hundreds of faculty members at various colleges and universities across the country to examine the principles and practices of their own teaching, in frank and open discussion with one another. I'm grateful to have played a role, as Director of the Center for Teaching and Curriculum at Emory in the late 1990s, in getting Gregory to bring his unique pedagogy seminar for college teachers, a moveable feast of learning about teaching, to our campus. For twelve years, right after Commencement, Gregory would come for an intensive two weeks of reflection and discussion, devoted to understanding better what it meant to teach undergraduates in and across our various departments and disciplines. He led us, those of us fortunate enough to sign up for the seminar, to think more deeply and talk more critically about what it was we thought we were doing—hoped we were doing—with the students of all sorts and conditions in our various courses across the curriculum. His was a philosophical pursuit of excellence in teaching, posing challenging questions, assigning relevant readings (from dialogues of Plato to recent columns in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*), sharing humorous stories of his own adventures and misadventures with students in and out of the classroom. Other colleagues and students of these fortunate faculty members also benefited indirectly from his probing reflections on pedagogy; the conversations continued to inform discussions of teaching around the campus after he had left.

Shortly before his death of pancreatic cancer in 2012, Gregory completed the manuscript of a comprehensive, wide-ranging discussion of college teaching, drawn from and informed by his own teaching of colleagues as well as students. The manuscript was edited by his daughter Melissa Valiska Gregory, a professor of English herself, and published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2013. The purpose of this review is to recommend the book to anyone and everyone teaching or contemplating teaching at the college level and hoping to do it well.

The book begins with a funny story about Gregory's awakening to the fact that teaching undergraduate students was disconcertingly different from conducting research as a graduate student. After several stumbling lectures to a class of freshmen on the basics of writing, he acknowledged the raised hand of a student named, he wryly notes, Lee Thundercloud. "After I gave him the nod to speak, he threw a comment at me with deadpan but sulfuric sarcasm, 'Gregory, do you know what the shit you are talking about?'" The teacher suddenly understood that the student was asking him "whether I knew anything about the education he and his peers really needed" (3). It is to this early shock of recognition—that in this sense he really didn't know what he was talking about—that Gregory traces the way he eventually came to teach his classes, the questions he began to raise in his pedagogy seminars, the analysis of teaching topics in his many

published articles, and the book in which he is summing it all up. It was not a once-and-for-all revelation, since the pursuit of teaching excellence is, in Gregory's analysis, a long and arduous process of misdirection and redirection, not a matter of easily mastered techniques. Teaching excellence depends, he argues, on continuing awareness of the difference between the foreground of the intellectual content of the discipline, the subject matter of the course, and salient background issues he identifies. These issues include the fact that "Classrooms are simmering soup pots of ethical dynamics and ethical judgments" (7); that students of college age are not developmentally ready to hear that they aren't as competent as they think they are (8-9); that pervasive narratives about education in popular culture make it hard for students "to take a fresh view of anything going on in their first-hand classrooms because they have participated imaginatively in so many second-hand narrative classrooms" (10); "that human beings tend to forget most of what they learn" (11). These and other problems with pedagogy are the focus of the eight chapters that follow.

It is true that the complete lack of training to teach that Gregory (and others of our generation) encountered in graduate school has changed significantly; most graduate programs these days have put some kind of teacher preparation mechanism in place. But the dynamic background of teaching that Gregory brings to our attention, with incisive observation, engaging humor and persuasive commonsense, is something that our much more intensive training as researchers and publishing scholars still acts to eclipse and obscure. We have one or two "pedagogy courses" in our graduate curricula, compared to dozens of seminars in the fields and sub-fields of our disciplines. My own forty-five years in the classroom, many of them observing the teaching of colleagues and graduate student teaching assistants as well finding my own way, leave me in no doubt about how much we all still have to learn.

Although Gregory's vision is well-informed by the scholarship of teaching, as it has been called, by the findings of cognitive psychology and by the wisdom of humanist tradition (the book includes a 27-page bibliography that is an education in itself), there is nothing arcane, theory-driven or jargon-ridden about his arguments. Although his examples from his own experience favor works of literature, his reflections address the full scope of the liberal arts—whatever we currently imagine them to be. If I were to single out one chapter that I wish everyone would read—and that I intend to assign to graduate students in my own "pedagogy course" next time I teach it—that would be Chapter 4, "Ethical Pedagogy."

For Gregory, the ethics of teaching is not separable from the cognitive skills and habits of mind that teachers, whatever their discipline, hope to develop in their students. "Intellect is intimately entangled with ethos," he argues (77). "The 'who' that any of us is ethically is in large part a function of the 'what' that any of us knows intellectually. The circulatory systems of our intellect and ethos merge with each other all the time and the living blood of influence flows in both directions" (77). Thus ethics is not a set of rules to be outsourced to special workshops on proper academic conduct; rather is it a constant reality of the profoundly social experience of the classroom, where teachers and students are continually negotiating their experience of the reliability of others. Gregory enumerates the unspoken questions students are continually asking of their teachers and teachers of their students. "Are you honest? Are you kind? Are you cruel?

Are you sensitive and fair, or are you a selfish pig and an insensitive butt head?’ and so on” (82). Understanding this ethical, character-forming dynamic of teaching and learning is crucial to being aware of our students’ point of view, intimately bound up as it is with the formal knowledge of the subjects they are being taught.

Gregory identifies four “ethical commitments” that effective teaching depends on: fairness, respect, charity and civility. He elaborates these in persuasive fashion and distinguishes such ethical dispositions from simple emotional affect or “soft, teacherly squidginess” (90). A teacher who regards himself as a drill sergeant can honor these commitments as well as a teacher with a milder pedagogical persona. The good intentions of a teacher are no more adequate than the good intentions of a student if these commitments are not acted out—and corrected when, inevitably, we fall short. Many of us are angry and resistant to the expectations of “students raised in an age of television and social media” that we should be as entertaining as game-show hosts (91). But that is no excuse for us not to try our best to teach them something different.

Like Socrates, Gregory argues not that we are ignorant of these fundamental issues but that we have been schooled by our own schooling not to pay attention to them. He holds out the possibility of a more philosophical, “mixed disciplinary” conversation among ourselves, a conversation that promises to give us “greater command of our most highly prized teaching objectives, and also give our students the advantages of being in the presence of teachers who know how to think actively not just about the complications of their disciplines, but also about the complicated invitations for ethical influence generated by their teaching in everyday classrooms” (93).

I trust my enthusiasm for this line of argument is obvious. There is a great deal more wisdom and a good deal more wit in *Teaching Excellence in Higher Education* than this brief account of it can convey.



Laurence Musgrove, *Local Bird*. Lamar U Press, 2015. 146 pp.

Jeffery H. Taylor, Metropolitan State University of Denver

Laurence Musgrove’s *Local Bird* is 106 short poems divided into seven sections headed by an Executive Summary, a poem aptly titled “Secrets I Won’t Be Taking to the Grave.” Poetry deals in secrets, the secrets of life channeled through the living. Some of these are personal experiences: “I once threw a no-hitter in slow pitch.” Some are dreams: “If I owned a restaurant, I’d play Count Basie all day and serve BBQ for breakfast.” Some are gnomic pronouncement: “Habits are in the body, not the mind.” These three lines form the first stanza and set a fitting tone for the book. These poems are personal, quirky, an offering of individual revelation by a poet comfortable with the

discomforts of mortal skin and wryly serious about not taking himself too seriously.

Reading these poems is like a long talk with an old friend—the familiarity of experience, our commonalities inscribed by individual vision: “Cherry pie is my favorite, but I’ll take whatever’s left” (11). Some of this Executive Summary interacts directly with other poems. The line “In third grade, I had flashcard anxiety everyday” (7) sets up resonance with the poem “The Same” from the first section, Biography:

But making numbers
Come out the same
Is like when I was 8
And she raised those flash cards
Naming us one by one
To stand and answer (16-21)

We recall the revealed secret anxiety of youth and understand the anticipation of angst that colors so much of mortality, especially so much of the traditional classroom. Indeed, the work and hazards of education are much present in this book by a teacher calmly trying to bring some sense of sanity to the profession. Anyone who has read any of Laurence’s *Tex* comics will recognize the humor that challenges our sense of teaching. Truly most of the best poems are in the first three sections: Biography, Teaching and Learning, Reading and Writing, though there are gems throughout and other themes essential to the personality portrayed.

Section four, Here and Now, is mainly about dogs, though the one that isn’t, “An Introduction to Breathing,” is Buddhist wisdom about expelling fear and inviting compassion, things often best learned from pets living in the moment and giving simply and unconditionally. The best of Here and Now is the last, “Recommendation,” which begins “Here’s a dream/ I’d recommend for you”—an ethereal tumbling of confused angst which ends with the companionship of “a small brown dog” and the sun warming both hearts.

Part five, the volume’s eponymic *Local Bird*, consists of eight light lyrics—at least one may assume tunes attached—pleasant plays on old motifs, notably “If You Want Me,” “Barbecuing in the Rain” and the humorously contemporary “Let Me Be Your iPhone Blues”:

Let me be your iPhone, Baby.
Let me hold your tweets.
Slide your finger up my screen.
My pixels can’t be beat. (1-4)

Deeper and more personal, “Old Lonesome’s Way of Drinking Needles,” is less a song than a fading cultural vignette, and “Practice Blues” is part of any teacher’s standard advice.

Which brings us back to teaching—not the book’s only theme, but one of its strongest. Those of us who live this life easily identify with the perennial joys and hazards of the profession characterized and caricatured with mild humor and perhaps a little fatigue. “Exchange” depicts a first-draft conference with the seeming non-student who “has taken the course/ Twice before and failed” (3-4) and is not actually interested in

learning: “But then I realize oops/ He’s standing before a vending machine/ And I won’t take his dollar” (18-20). “Essay” mildly laments that “Since the beginning of time/ . . . / Student writing hasn’t gotten any better/ Nor is it really any worse than usual” (1, 3-4). The droll humor of the end seems pulled right out of my own life: “Also, I was really hoping for an original title/ And just once my name spelled right” (19-20). Similarly, “Why I Don’t Give Extra Credit” inscribes a mock puzzling over the mundanely obvious. Indeed, there is much herein to induce groaning smiles from any seasoned instructor, though the best pedagogical poem, “Poetry Workshop,” well inscribes deep struggle for meaning:

but the writing of your poem
isn’t the job your brain bosses around
much less your hand;
. . .
It’s riding the fast bareback
to see who can hold on the longest.
The horse is bigger than you are.
So is the poem.
And that’s the life you want. (5-7, 15-9)

In a true sense the poetic is the noetic, and this is why we need poetry—life itself, if you want life, is a struggle with meaning and passion, a wrestling of the dream of self and world into the enigma of consciousness. The poem “Only” promises, “If I am ever/ In one of your dreams/ I will wake you up/ If you ask me to” (1-4), and mirror-resonates with the closing stanza of the Executive Summary’s secrets:

If you’re ever in one of my dreams, I’ll be there too and teach you how to fly.
Every book is a bible.
The hardest thing to find is the thing you hide from yourself. (13-5)

Lost in objectivity, what we hide from ourselves is meaning itself. We push it aside in fear of the brutality of facts and a sense of shame that often goes back to something like “flashcard anxiety” and the meanness of modern praxis insisting that the world is one thing only, reality rather than representation. Yet consciousness itself is representation, and on a basic level all representation is caricature, though not all caricature need be satire or parody. Whatever the wry tone of this poetry intends, the caricature of life presented mainly offers common turns of experience with a smile, like the smooth asides of the Jazz player framing the divinity of a deep riff by acknowledging the audience’s participation in the groove and hoping for nothing more than:

after hours
jazz club
applause
. . .
just a little
smattering
of love (“I Don’t Ask” 11-3, 21-3)

Laurence offers us snapshots of his personal Americana with the gnomish turns of a veteran teacher comfortable with the classroom because he has already rejected anything but the most basic sanctity of the scene. A professor ought to have something to profess; a poet should share secrets profound and mundane—or both at the same time whenever possible. Caricature, on any level, works by inscribing the all-too-familiar with a grin, cutting to the winked assent of consubstantial experience—and the fraught hegemony of consciousness. We nod along with shared incumbencies and snort at the inevitably droll. Yet his caricature is never derision, the humor always a shared lesson. That's teaching—helping others refine and enrich their own inscription of consciousness, their own caricature of this mortal coil. After all the struggle with meaning need not always be grief or angst, though both are inevitable as we lose loved ones and at last our own selves. Rather it should be opportunity, a free shot at meaning anything at all, in spite of life's quick entropy. And that's what good poets do—share their locus of reflection, map and play with the polarity of being—even if the casting is but to toss up recognizable experience too probable to be resisted.

If one is to interpret life, it's best to get on with it and hope for the best. I don't know everything Laurence hoped for in this book—but I know some of it, because a sense of whole life is sufficiently sketched for metaphor to find its place and fill a world within the contours. True voice doesn't crave certainty, though it lives in simple surety. Humor ought to resist the sardonic and remain an innocent wink—so we might tell our own being with convention and conviction void of any existential contention but the most basic: minds exist in opposition to each other but also only because of each other. No fear, no malice, nothing in a wallow—just a friend having a turn in the circle. After all, we *will* take most of our secrets to the grave, for all our promises will be cut short, and as Hotspur sees with the eyes of death, “And time that takes survey of all the world/ Must have a stop” (*IH4* 5.4.82-3).

Finally, this is book of mortal poetry, celebrating the irony of our limitations along with the joy of being, and it ends with the hint of its grave beginning:

Time is not
A rubber band
To stretch forever
And ever amen. (“Amen” 1-4)

So Laurence reminds us that “No matter how/ Much we take on,” no matter how much we acquiesce to the demands of doing, life is lived in reflection and meaning, for:

There's no kindness
Time will give us
Until we say amen
To the time we gave
And sing the song
That comes after
We say amen. (17-23)

Lynch, Tom, Cheryll Glotfelty, Karla Armbruster. *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place*. London: University of Georgia Press, 2012. 440 pp.

Warren Hatch, Utah Valley University

The Bioregional Imagination is a collection of 24 essays constituting a seminal and essential critical conversation on bioregional literary art. The editors of *The Bioregional Imagination* quote Robert L. Thayer Jr. in defining bioregion as:

literally and etymologically a 'life-place'—a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries . . . capable of supporting unique human communities. Bioregions can be variously defined by the geography of watersheds, similar plant and animal ecosystems, and related, identifiable landforms (e.g., particular mountain ranges, prairies, or coastal zones) and by the unique human cultures that grow from natural limits and potentials of the region. Most importantly, the bioregion is emerging as the most logical locus and scale for a sustainable, regenerative community. (3)

My bioregion: the Wasatch Front. By great twists of luck, I have just moved into a new office, small, high, but one wall of which is a twelve-foot by twelve-foot south-facing window. A glorious storm of sun warms window boxes full of tomatoes, basil, garlic—elements for a scratch marinara in subzero January. Beyond this microcosmic mud-dauber niche, the great arc of my bioregion spreads to the horizon, a fertile crescent of overlapping alluvial deltas between five and fifteen miles wide and 150 miles long, bounded on the east by the sudden mile-and-a-half upthrust of the Wasatch Range and on the west by the driest desert in the United States—a nearly 500-mile-wide undulating basin and faultblock ridge topography stretching to the Sierra Nevadas. Salt pans and brackish dead seas and occasional alpine islands or more common bone-bare fault block ranges shrivel up from the earth's desiccant crust. Cattle and sheep graze that vast, sparsely grassed, ecologically fragile basin and ridge country. Grazing wars: The Western saga of Saturday afternoon cinema yore mutated into the bureaucratic tedium of a rancher who has gotten behind on his federal land grazing fees, grasping at specious and revisionist familial land heritage arguments—the barbeque-and-beer locus for a fly-on-manure swarm of butt-wagging weekend militia groupies with AR-15s slung across their backs. But this is also the Western saga of overtaken BLM rangers trying to reconcile Federal long-term land policy and local grazing fee-paying ranchers hanging on by their nails to a hard-scrabble day-to-day way of life.

What would a sense of bioregional community and a specific, responsible, and reverentially articulated bioregional ethos that transcends immediate hard-scrabble survival do for that dysfunctional furball of conflicting local and national community interests? It would have to help.

It would have to start with an active, foundational conversation on bioregional imagination; bioregionalism, like all -isms, only becomes real to us through its artistic instantiations, and no viable creative art can sustain itself without careful self-examination and awareness achieved through a thriving critical voice.

The Bioregional Imagination is necessarily far-reaching. And it is a well-edited delight to read. In her review of the collection, Pamela Banting writes, “the influence of Robertson, Thayer, and Snyder flows through many of the contributions like a creek.” I had a similar experience; I think most readers will. All those first friends that we grew up with. Snyder and Berry, Leopold and Stegner, the iconoclastic Moabite Abbey—their voices are carried here into new country on the spreading and intertwining alluvial braids of literary conversation.

It would be inattentive to consider the essays in such a far-reaching collection to be of equal competence and insight. Any extensive survey of an academic field will turn up a few writers tending toward pretentious dullness cloaked in the feathers and robes of academia, to paraphrase Steinbeck (82)—which in a way validates this collection’s extensiveness. But the essays are mostly solid, often brilliant, and even those that nod fill an essential role in the progression of the collection.

The essays in *The Bioregional Imagination* are preceded by the editors’ excellent introduction to bioregionalism and organized into the following lyrical progression: Reinhabiting, Rereading, Reimagining, Renewal—summarized briefly below.

Reinhabiting

Essays on living in-place and restoring damaged environments. “In these efforts to create or re-create a life-place, stories, writing, and publishing projects play an important role. . . . The [essays] . . . show theory emerging from lived experience” (17).

Rereading

Essays on “bioregional literary criticism These place-conscious readings of texts explore the complex dynamics of language systems and ecosystems and of . . . the more-than-human communities in which . . . we are embedded (17).

Reimagining

Essays “expanding the bioregional corpus of texts by coupling bioregional perspectives with other approaches or by challenging bioregionalism’s core constructs” (17).

Renewal

Essays on “pedagogy within the context of English courses, beginning with local habitat studies and concluding with musings on the globally connected environment of the World Wide Web” (17).

The end of the collection includes a bioregional reading list that significantly extends the conversation on bioregional thought. It also includes a well-crafted index (an index!—so useful in such a comprehensive survey).

In the Introduction to *The Bioregional Imagination*, the editors address various potential limitations and critiques of bioregionalism. For example, they discuss the tension between rural and urban in Charles’ pastoral “Where You At?” bioregional quiz and the urban rejoinder, “Wha’ Happenin” by Bennett et al. Of course, the tension between perspectives is mostly good-natured and humorous, but also, the different perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive; furthermore, they inform each other. And I think

that is the point of bioregionalism—a sense of dwelling shared, enriched, and as a nexus of communion.

To extend this idea, here is a final example: the editors discuss the tension between global and local socio-environmental concerns, in which bioregionalism is identified primarily as “local.” Perhaps our inclination to dichotomize lies in the analytical DNA of western culture; I wonder if a Zen-like logic structure might be more useful. That is, rather than representing the local in a dubious dichotomy between global and local, wouldn’t bioregionalism be much more usefully and accurately posited as a nexus?—bioregionalism as a contextualized and wholistic commons of shared narrative between global and local communities? If you want to understand the universal, study the microcosmal (contextualized in the bioregional ethos), for in sharing the narratives of how to dwell in specific bioregions, we begin to understand their global contexts. The romantically and pastorally grounded poet Leslie Norris used to give his elementary school children a task of bringing a stone in from recess and writing down seven concrete, specific adjectives describing the rock—nothing metaphoric, nothing symbolic. But none of them could ever resist metaphoric trope, and most only lasted three or four words. Only one child ever got to six, and on the seventh word said, “My rock is like a world.”

A final thought on *The Bioregional Imagination*: On a July day in the mid-1990s, I stood on the Hayden-Agassiz ridge of Northern Utah’s Uinta Range with my sons, eleven and eight years old, surrounded by that twelve-thousand-foot above-treeline country of rock and sun, of light and wind. The Hayden Bell tower, our goal, loomed a few hundred vertical feet above us by way of a couple more jungle-gym chimneys and forgiving traverses. Below us, spruce and fir forests filled the lower Uinta basins to the horizon. “Lothlórien,” my older son said. A knot registered under my ribs. A new and nearly undefinable pall and Koyaanisqatsi-whisper of death hung across those high pure forests. Maybe a slight tinge of gray. Maybe a slightly larger percentage of dead conifers among the thriving forests. “You ought to look at these forests carefully and try to remember them,” I said. “I think they will die, and you will want tell your sons about them when you bring them to stand here.” This must be a little of what it feels like to be a prophet, I thought.

Pine sawyer beetles thriving in the lengthening summer seasons and warming winters. Drought resulting from shifting weather patterns. In the decades since then, those forests have nearly died—joining the many dead and dying great conifer forests throughout the Western United States. (See Hillary Rosner and Peter Essick’s “The Bug that’s Eating Our Forests” in *National Geographic* April 2015 for a contemporary account of this phenomenon.)

You have heard the same whisper in your own bioregion, in its own specific language of pain and loss. The science is overwhelming: the great challenge for our generation and for our children and their children is the challenge of sustainability, of environmental stewardship. But (1) humans seldom make rationally and empirically based decisions. And (2) we do act on emotion, and art—the specific and sensory narrative artifact, Silko’s world made of stories (88)—is the gateway to emotion. And finally, (3) any thriving artistic tradition cannot be achieved let alone sustained without a self-awareness resulting from being enfolded in and conversant with a thriving literary criticism.

Hence the necessity of this seminal book.



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CONNECTING

No “New Normal” Needed

Helen Walker, “Connecting” Editor

The poems and narratives in this space have always represented a deliberate move away from the form of the traditional, documented journal article. Poetry has more white space, fewer words, more feeling—and perhaps less persuasion. Narratives raise more questions, give fewer answers—they are about the tacit knowledge embedded in story, rather than the stuff of explicit claims or easy proofs.

We’ve long questioned the classroom scene of the towering expert behind the podium, separated from students by distance and power. Sheryl Lain’s poem “Hey, Teach!” raises a simple question in reply—“Do you love me?”—which becomes a pathway to new questions about the students we teach. Following up, Matthew Ittig captures a classroom moment of student-centered learning in a carefully designed workshop that highlights how one student reader explores her changing point of view—and by example, how she encourages her classmates and teacher to join her.

While it’s still “normal” to walk up and down the hallways of the academy and hear lectures hammering students with material soon to be recited on multiple-choice tests, Laurence Musgrove’s “Writing Program” not only reminds us of what can happen to the students who fail those tests, but also advises us that our responsibilities do not end when those students fail—because remarkably, their hunger to learn does not go away. Julie O’Connell’s short piece on why she teaches Frederick Douglass’s slave narrative follows, powerfully reflecting upon how it impacts her so-called “developmental” students. And in turn, Leslie Werden’s classroom scenario responds to Musgrove’s poem and O’Connell’s reflection by offering some thoughts about how a little chaos can not only transform what students like to read, but also how they read it, so that they gain valuable insights on their own.

I was about to end the above paragraph with the following sentence: these poems and narratives give us glimpses of teaching and learning that represent the “new normal.” But I stopped myself, recalling that the *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* does not document the normal. Instead, its authors challenge the normal, asking readers—as Donna Souder-Hodge does—to find new ways to teach things that we would rather avoid, such as the Holocaust, so that the important lessons of history are not lost, or much worse, “normalized” as material to put into one more lecture, or one more standardized test.

Furthermore, the co-written piece by Tonya Cochran, Rasha Diab, Thomas Ferrel and Beth Godbee portrays us as professionals changing our personal learning practices as well, so that in these collaborators’ words, “we mix ourselves together, breathe air

into each other's work, and inevitably become together the fertile soil from which we all grow."

The poems and narratives of this volume of *JAEPL* tell of living learning, of teachers loving the students and colleagues surrounding them, each a testament that no "new normal" can replace the old without turning what we do into rote and prescription. Indeed, the authors in the pages to come remind us that together, we can, we will, and we must do better.



Hey, Teach! Do You Love Me?

Sheryl Lain

Do you love them,
These brassy busybodies,
Awkward children
Of our species,
Their split hooves tapping rhythm down
The corridors of youth?
Do you love them without apology for such a potent word
In this pabulum setting?

They crash themselves
Recklessly on the shores of experience
With airy nonchalance
About the scars.
Cloaked only in blind faith
They abandon caution and leap from sandstone cliffs,
Trusting in rumors of soft sand below
To cushion their landing
Because the cost can't be counted,
Can't be conceived,
Yet.
They yank and jerk on the breast of life,
Greedy, like sightless kittens suckling.
They walk into every red sea
Expecting waves to part,
Defying water walls to tumble.

Do you love them—
Accepting your new part as anchor, bystander,
Definitely not center stage?



Ask Me Tomorrow

Matthew B. Ittig

The room is dark, save a shaft of light beaming from a projector mounted to the ceiling. Laura passes into the light, and the letters of her poem map her for a moment. She reads from the opening of a multigenre narrative she composed in response to Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*:

Softness touched me, brushed me, held me for a brief moment, then, nothing. I opened my eyes and there was no one, there was nothing, and yet I knew something, sweet and soft, had graced me. So I reached out into nothing, searching for what had to have been there. I felt something, but it was cold and hard. Not at all what I had remembered. I tried to grasp it, to bring it close, so I would have something in all this nothing. But when I did it pulled away and my fingers slipped. And so there was only nothing. Time passed and still there was nothing, I thought I might have felt that what was soft and sweet again. And when I did there was still nothing. I feel alone in all of this nothing. The only company I have to console in this the haunting softness that would touch me and the coldness that would always slip from my grasp. I don't know how long I have been in this nothing there are no clocks here, no watches to tell you the time. For this is all nothing. I've grown to love the nothing. And the softness that is altogether sweet and the coldness that is hard. Those feelings so opposite and different, yet so much the same and together, have become the only thing I look forward to the only thing I can feel.

"Wow, says Desiree, "it made me think of all the whiteness in the book, how huge the margins are. Is that what you were thinking about?"

"Yeah," says Laura, "I really like that. Billy's words are always bouncing all over the place. There's a lot of white and not very many words."

"I love how it's sad," Jordan says, "but it's also—I don't know...sweet, like you're writing about a boyfriend."

"Yeah," says Laura, "I think life is a lot like that. There's long periods of nothing, but when something comes, you sort of miss the coolness—the softness of nothing. Something is always hot and sharp. That's how I feel anyway. You're alone, soft, and then bang something happens, and you have to react."

"I wonder if that's how Billy felt," I ask.

The Collected Works of Billy the Kid reads like a fight between the fixedness of the letters and pictures against the overwhelming size and whiteness of the margins.

"You seem to like those blank spaces?" I ask.

"Yeah, nothingness, blankness...but I don't think that idea makes much sense." Laura says.

"Why?"

"Well, there's never really nothing. Even when I'm sitting in my room: there's always something. Everything is always deteriorating or fading with time, but nothing ever really disappears. If I'm angry when I come home from school and I sit with the lights

off in my room for a while, I'll calm down, but the angry girl is still there. It's like she's standing next to me."

"Standing next to you?"

"Yeah, there's lots of me's standing next to each other."

"Do they talk to each other?"

"Yes."

"What to do they say?"

"I guess it depends...ask me tomorrow—of course I'll probably have a different idea about it by then. Like I said, 'I'm everything I am, but I'm also the opposite.'"



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Writing Program

Laurence Musgrove

A letter arrived today
Addressed to the writing program
Here at the university.

It was postmarked last week
From a prisoner living
At the Robertson Unit,

A correctional facility
North of Abilene
With a capacity shy of 3000.

Written in black ink,
The lettering is clean
And easy to read.

The college-ruled paper
With three holes punched
Is folded nicely.

*My name is _____
And at this time I'm writing
To see if your program have*

*Any type of writing programs
For inmates within
The prison system.*

*So would you please
Write me back
And let me know.*

We do not offer
Writing programs
For prisoners.

Though it's easy
To imagine my students
Sometimes feel that way.

The correct thing to do
Would be to write him back
And be his program.

*Why are you looking
For a writing program?
What do you like to read?*

I tried to fold my letter
And write his name
Just as neatly as he did.



The Power of a Slave Narrative

Julie O'Connell

I teach the narrative of Frederick Douglass in my developmental English class. I ask students to read about his literal and emotional journey from slavery to freedom. I expose them to the cruel inhumanity of slave owners who treated slaves like livestock, binding them up in chains, examining them, bidding on them at auctions, stripping them of their humanity. Slavery robbed individuals of their families, cultures, and identities. We treated people in the United States like this for economic reasons, I tell my students: we did it because of greed.

I teach mostly first-year students. Douglass is relevant to them. We feel his pain and fear; we also become grateful for our own relatively easy access to literacy. The narrative leaves us with monumental questions. How did he survive? How did he escape and

then learn to write in such an eloquent way? Why did he take on this struggle to save others? Douglass helps us understand that we, too, can overcome any obstacle. The first step, though, is acknowledging the evil, then writing about it articulately—narrating the story. Douglass shows us that no one can ever be enslaved if they can read and write. Education means freedom.

Douglass resounds with my students when it comes to setbacks. When Douglass's mistress, Sophia Auld, is warned not to teach him to read, and when he later reads the philosophical dialog between a master and a slave, my students and I discuss how we also cannot rely on the generosity of people in power. He writes, "In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as I do to the kindly aid of my mistress" (38). This lesson resonates with my students. Developmental students are still mastering academic skills, and they need additional support in order to succeed.

Still, people complain that these students do not belong in higher education, or that they take their educational opportunities for granted. My experience has been that the vast majority of developmental students are competent, sophisticated, and serious. They have their own histories of endurance against oppressive systems of race and class. I find that if I can create an atmosphere of safety, guidance, patience, and respect, and if I can give them meaningful curriculum, I am often entrusted with their own extraordinary narratives. Hearing about the hope that comes from injustice gives them permission to make sense of the injustices they experience. All told, this slave narrative gives them (and all of us) a foothold to survive. Douglass also shows us that the journey is not over until we help others overcome as well.

Developmental students are going through a struggle that is much larger than they are. Part of the story is that they are part of the story. Douglass humanizes suffering and invites them to see their own chains of oppression. Slave narratives have that power. They invite us inside ourselves, which is where the true construction of meaning and the search for social justice begins.



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Embracing Chaos

Leslie A. Werden

A little bit of chaos in the first-year classroom is not a bad thing. I'm not talking about the students who chit-chat in the back corner or the ones who continually glance at their laps, smirking as they read Instagram posts. I'm talking about the I-don't-have-an-answer-for-this-you-figure-it-out-on-your-own kind of chaos. Here's a scenario: students receive a reading they don't quite understand. They are irritated. They want immediate answers. But all they get from me is an assignment to discuss or, oh no, write something. *Write about what? Are you kidding me?* Hair pulling ensues. Pouting and frowny faces. Chaos.

What is happening here is the act of cognitive dissonance that occurs in the transition from high school to college. Four years of high school have given the students a fairly clear set of expectations, rules to follow given by familiar teachers, and a level of comfort in how to accomplish tasks. Obviously, there are many high school teachers who push students out of these "comfort zones," yet students arrive at college with a perspective of learning that they have trouble relinquishing. Instead, they try to mimic what others have done or said, often using language and ideas they think they should be using but don't quite have command of yet.

To practice this command of language and ideas, a little intellectual chaos in the classroom is necessary to encourage cognitive dissonance. In order for our students to regain a sense of authority in their own writing, they have to understand how they once learned and blend it with how they will learn. It's like taking a short story and reimagining it as a play. But that is hard work and kind of confusing. And that's okay.

So, what do we do to encourage our students to embrace chaos? Step into the chaotic moment with them. Here's an example: once I assigned the Kant essay on "Conscience"—a tough read; still, I was ready and lobbed out an easy starter question. Silence. I tried again by rephrasing and adding another angle. Nope. No go. Blank stares, shaking heads, and furrowed brows were all I got in response. I felt that uneasy tingle of frozen fingers walking up the back of my spine and knew Chaos was paying me a little visit, whispering, "You have no idea what you're doing." But Chaos had paid me a visit before, and I don't mind a little awkwardness, so I flicked that little bugger off my shoulder and stepped in the muck.

I said to the students, "This reading leaves me confused, and I'm the teacher. Now what?"

Oh great, they were most likely thinking, *our teacher has NO IDEA what she's doing!!!!*

I continued, "Sometimes we learn best when we have to push through something really confusing and try to figure it out on our own, so we are going to do this together."

Impromptu, we read "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson, and it was just creepy enough to grab their attention. Next, I asked them to try to find any online connection to this story. I really didn't know what they would find, but that's part of stepping into the chaos with them.

Someone found a music video by Marilyn Manson titled “Man that you Fear,” and the discussion revved up. Suddenly, they were pondering questions about how someone could consider human sacrifice as reasonable and could you condemn someone to die and so on. Then I asked, “Are you talking about having a conscience?” I saw nodding. Woo hoo! I asked if they noticed how they went from being confused about Kant’s piece to being slightly disgusted by the Jackson story to questioning their own ideas after watching the Manson video and circling back to the idea of “conscience.” More vigorous nodding. I said, “You did that on your own. You got through that confusion all on your own.”

Yes, part of it was me feeling comfortable with some intellectual chaos, but a majority of it was letting them explore and question and then, most importantly, realize that they could, indeed, find a sense of authority in their own thinking (and eventually writing) processes.



Teaching Dachau, 2014

Donna Souder-Hodge

Yesterday we wandered off
Avoidance Alley
and took a walk in sync with
32000 memories.
Left-two-three-four;
Left-two-three-four.
A place of order:
where noise is verboten...
then and now.
I turn Left-two-three-four,
and we march in time with the past
on silent parade grounds
empty.
Everything is erased, connected,
forgiven:
the horrors,
the hunger,
the hope.
It is a new generation’s memory now.
I feel the burden as teacher,
rhetor, archivist
for the dead.
For their humanity,
the anger,
the fear.
You are all that is Left-two-three-four...
And just for the teaching of it,
I find myself one degree more human.



“Hanging Out”: Cultivating Writing Groups Online

Tanya R. Cochran, Rasha Diab, Thomas Ferrel, & Beth Godbee

It's Monday morning, 8:30 a.m., when Thomas gets the expected ring to join the hang-out. Beth and Rasha are already present, chatting about the weekend and what awaits in the coming week. Thomas joins in—adding what he hopes to accomplish during this morning's collaborative writing time—and by then, Tanya has also joined, finishing breakfast in the process. For the next three hours, we all settle down to work independently, but in shared space.

We are lucky to live in a time when technology makes remote collaborations easier than ever. As collaborators, colleagues, co-authors, and friends who work in four different states, we especially value google hangouts for hosting our weekly writing meetings. Just as writing group members often meet in person in coffee shops, libraries, or other spaces to negotiate the complexities of writing, we meet at least weekly (and oftentimes daily) online to write toward pressing projects. Like skype and other communication tools, google hangouts not only allow us to hear and see each other, but also to share screens when brainstorming, troubleshooting technology, answering how-to questions, and sharing passages from our texts when revising and editing. Paired with google docs, these hangouts additionally help us manage shared files, work collaboratively on a single one, and keep records of previous drafts.

Today Rasha is running late--still recovering from the long flight back from Egypt. When she arrives, she messages in the chat box before stepping away: "I'll make a cup of tea, as tea can magically heal anything." Meanwhile, Beth is giving Thomas feedback on his methodology chapter; Thomas takes notes, interrupting to ask questions as needed. Tanya gives her cat Calliope medicine, and once she has finished, Beth begins to ask about recent and upsetting events in the news. We spend a few minutes processing the social injustice we see around us before shifting into individual writing tasks we've set for the day.

A common challenge with writing is holding space for focused, diligent, ongoing, and committed work. As a group of four people, we have created a “critical mass,” allowing the hangouts to continue even if/when one or more of us has a scheduling conflict and is unable to make the writing group. We believe it is essential to deliberately and

consistently choose to protect time for writing, especially when other responsibilities connected with teaching, service, and life in general can (appear to) be more immediate, more pressing. To make the long-term investment in scholarship and writing part of our short-term and daily plans, we prioritize our hangouts as already-scheduled meeting time, and we schedule in longer blocks (3+ hours), while still honoring the changing circumstances of our lives, which means we may sometimes need to leave early, come late, or miss a week.

For the past hour, we have been working silently. The soundtrack involves keys clicking as three of us type, low-volume jazz playing in one of our rooms, occasional cat meows, a garbage truck collecting trash, a microwave beeping when hot water is ready, and pen scratching on paper while one of us handwrites. Tanya interrupts, "I need to head to campus now. Meeting in fifteen minutes."

Thomas looks up from his screen. "Have a great day. Good luck with student conferences."

"Ok, Tanya, may the day be beautiful," Rasha smiles.

"Bye, Tanya! See you tomorrow," Beth says without looking away from her draft.

As Tanya leaves the hangout, Thomas asks, "Are we okay to stay on for another thirty minutes or so? I have until eleven today."

"Yep."

"Sounds good."

The scene continues with writers back in action.

We honor these hangouts because we are able to invest in ourselves and our work by:

1. **Creating a refuge** from the pressures to perform a particular role or to compete for limited resources in order to invest in shared success and professional solidarity;
2. **Thriving intellectually** to realize our capacities and to strengthen our relationships across physical and institutional distance;
3. **Holding a creative space** for brainstorming, incubating, and developing writing projects while developing a repository for ideas about new projects and future collaborations;
4. **Maintaining momentum** for our shared writing projects even when other projects, teaching, and service take immediate precedence;
5. **Providing just-in-time support, mentoring, and processing** of the clamorous, eventful life of the writer, including research as well as teaching, service, familial duties, and other responsibilities and situations (e.g., thinking and strategizing with in-discipline colleagues not present at our home institutions); and, ultimately,
6. **Enjoying a live and life-giving writing environment** where we can think out loud and share spoken and written ideas with engaged, supportive, and sympathetic readers.

Underlying these investments is an understanding that collaboration is by its very nature a relational act, and hangouts allow us to cultivate and harvest our life-writing relationships. Hence, we value the hangouts as collaborating even when we're not directly collaborating because our process is like turning the compost heap of organic

material: we mix ourselves together, breathe air into each other's work, and inevitably become together the fertile soil from which we all grow.

Today we celebrate. Thomas exclaims that he has finished his methodology chapter and feels energized to begin the next step of writing about his interview data. Tanya shares her relief that a third and final draft of her most recent essay is off to the collection's editors. Beth, Rasha, and Thomas announce a major step they have accomplished with their co-authored book project: identifying an enthusiastic publisher. And we all delight over the contributor copies we just received in the mail--a new book by more of our colleagues and friends that includes a short piece we created together about our collaborations. This is the fruit of hanging out, and it tastes very, very sweet. Acknowledging these celebrations is part of what makes the long process joy-full and ease-full. The process continues.

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Sheryl Lain wrapped up her career spanning more than forty years in education in January of 2016. She started teaching high school English in 1968 on the Wind River Indian Reservation and ended up teaching teachers in Wyoming and nationwide. She directed the Wyoming Writing Project and the National Writing Project and published my teaching book called *A Poem for Every Student*. (sheryllain@aol.com)

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

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

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

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Typing: Double-spaced, numbered pages, including works cited and block quotations; internal headings are helpful; author’s name on title page only.

Title page: Title of Article; Name; Address; E-mail; Phone; Institutional Affiliation

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Corporal Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning as Bodily Arts Special section, *JAEPL*

While the body is always mediated and mediating, the stubborn, irreducible presence of our physical selves continues to challenge, provoke, and radicalize our teaching and learning. Traditional Western hierarchies and print culture favored a disembodied intellectual discourse that obscured the body's status as a productive epistemological site. However, social movements have combined and collided with technological trajectories of representation to make visible and reposition the relationship between being and embodiment, "to challenge the centering of subjectivities in the mind" (Selzer 1999).

For teaching and learning, focus on the body often means paying attention to lived experience and "situated-ness." What happens to the literal "student body" in our classrooms and what happens to teachers' bodies as our classroom practices necessarily continue to transform themselves in the face of cultural crises and technological developments? This special issue seeks to explore how our classrooms might "re-engage and experiment with sensory connections other than the relentlessly visually reductive" (Wysocki 2014) pedagogies and modes/genres of traditional literacy practices that have previously dominated our classrooms, especially in secondary and higher education. For the ancient Greeks, rhetoric was a "bodily art" (Hawhee 2004). What happens when we understand teaching and learning as bodily arts that holistically engage us rather than disconnect us from our embodied selves?

Without denying the significance of the trend that sees embodiment as inextricably tied to and invoking broader aspects of materiality and production, I use the word "corporal" rather than the expected "corporeal" to reemphasize the "bodily" real rather than the imaginary or merely tangible. The body in discourse often emerges concomitantly with discussions of emotion and questions of privacy that paradigms of intellect have sidestepped or elided. How does the body liberate and limit us when we refuse to allow it to be dissipated in metaphor or obscured in broader materiality? What is at stake and for whom?

Topics might include but are not limited to:

- Teaching/learning/ writing/ reading and the aged, raced, gendered, sized, classed body
- Dis/ability and technological refiguring of embodiment and literacy
- Mindfulness practices and embodiment
- The private and public body
- Kinesthetic learning
- Orality/aurality/auditory learning/rhetoric
- Tactility
- Bodies and memory
- Classroom ethnography
- Embodied genres
- Psychobiological perspectives on teaching and learning

- Health and illness/wellness
- Nutrition, food, and literacy
- The medicalized body
- The disciplined body
- Assessment and embodiment

Send inquiries to Wendy Ryden at **wendy.ryden@liu.edu**. Completed essays due by Dec. 1, 2016. Issue publication date: 2018.



"Everyone IS a story."
Rachel Naomi Remen,
Kitchen Table Wisdom

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through Imagination

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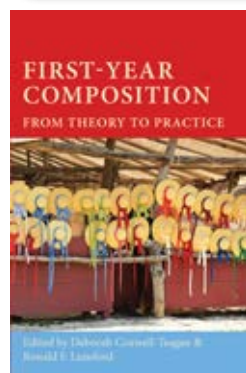
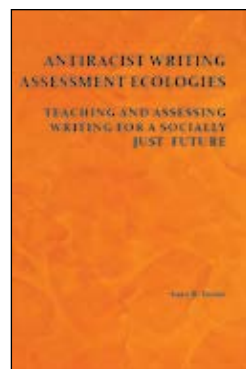
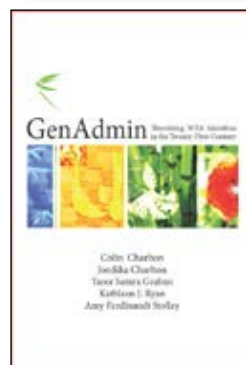
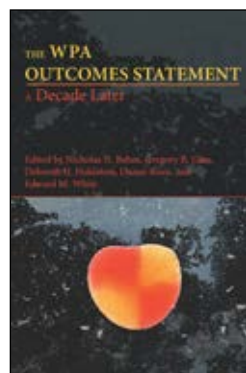
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