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Endings

Teacher Affect/Teacher Effect

> It was the caring much more than the curriculum that caused me to aspire.
>
> —Charlayne Hunter-Gault, "I Remember"

It's the last week in the semester. Cindy, a young woman from another class, slumps in the chair in my office, clearly discouraged. She looks woefully at her collection of English 101 papers and then back at me; she is appealing her failing course grade, and since her end-of-semester portfolio passed in the final reading session, I have been asked as leader of my portfolio group to arbitrate between her and the teacher who failed her. "I know I'm not a good writer, but the teacher never gave me a chance. She didn't like me." I look over Cindy's collected work, and while it shows little improvement over the semester, it is not incompetent. I am puzzled. It is not impossible for a student to fail the class after having passed the final portfolio readings, since the portfolio is simply a way to establish writing competence, but it usually occurs when the student in question had not completed other assignments. I see no evidence of missing work. When I discuss the case with the teacher, she responds that Cindy's work is "shallow." I agree that it is fairly superficial but not that dissimilar to the writing of other students in her class who had passed. What made this student's work different? I probe further. Finally, the teacher admits her exasperation

with the young woman. "She's so irritating! She's the epitome of a sorority type—no individuality, no independent ideas; she fills her head every morning with her hair drier. From someone like that, what can you expect?"

What indeed? How much of our students' success or failure is due not to our teaching methods but to our expectations about our students? How do our attitudes and beliefs about our students, our feelings about them or about ourselves, shape their writing and our response to it? Much of what I have said so far in this book focuses on the affective processes of the student writer. Here, however, I would like to focus on teacher affect—that is, how teachers' expectations, their empathy, and their own sense of self-efficacy have an effect on their teaching or on their students. Teacher affect is just one of many variables in our interactions with students, but I hope to make teachers more aware of its importance.[1]

Teacher Expectations: Pygmalion or Golem?

The culture of the process-oriented composition classroom encourages most teachers to expect that all students can learn to write. Many of us have anecdotal evidence that these positive expectations have a good effect on students—that students will rise to the mark we set, especially if we couple high expectations with encouragement and support. The research on teacher expectancies, however, shows that the issue of expectations is rather more complicated than we might think.

While the construct of teacher expectancy originated in learning theory (Tolman), empirical studies of the results of teacher expectancies actually began in research on experimenter bias in psychology. As early as 1927, Bertrand Russell commented that the results of much psychological research involving animal behavior seemed to depend on who was doing the research:

> One may say broadly that all the animals that have been carefully observed have behaved so as to confirm the philosophy in which the observer believed before his observations began. Nay, more, they have all displayed the national characteristics of the observer. Animals studied by Americans rush about frantically, with an incredible display of hustle and pep, and at last achieve the desired result by chance. Animals observed by Germans sit still and think, and at last evolve the solution out of their inner consciousness. (29–30)

Robert Rosenthal, a key figure in expectancy research, began a study of experimenter bias by telling half his class in experimental psychology at Harvard that they were working with bright rats and the other half that their rats were rather dull (when all the animals were of ordinary rat intelligence). At the end of the experiment, students were asked to describe their rats' performance and their own attitudes and behaviors toward the animals. The "bright" animals performed better as maze runners; the expectations of the experimenters were fulfilled. Moreover, experimenters who thought they had intelligent rats described their own behavior toward the animals as more pleasant, friendly, and enthusiastic than did the experimenters working with supposedly remedial rats, and they handled their animals more (and more gently) than did the experimenters who expected poor performance (Rosenthal and Fode).

Rosenthal moved from studying rats in a maze to studying students in classrooms after he was contacted by Lenore Jacobson, principal of Oak Elementary School, who knew of his research and was interested in applying it to teacher expectancies (Rosenthal 44). In a now-famous experiment conducted at Jacobson's school in 1964, researchers administered a bogus intelligence test and then chose children at random as their experimental group. They told teachers that the test showed these children to be "late bloomers" who would

show surprising gains in intellectual competence during the following eight months. At the end of the school year, those the teachers expected to show significant gains did in fact show such gains; from their descriptions of these children it was clear that teachers found them more appealing, better adjusted, and more intellectually alive and autonomous than the other children. Rosenthal and Jacobson concluded that teacher expectancies for their students, like experimenter expectations for their rats, were in fact self-fulfilling prophecies; they christened the result of these expectancies the "Pygmalion effect" (*Pygmalion in the Classroom*).

Melanie seems to be a case in point. A high school dropout, she had been told by her supervisor at work that she was crazy to think about going to college—she would never make it. At the beginning of the semester she was very anxious about her abilities, mentioning her supervisor's remarks. I looked at her first draft, which was in fact fairly rough and disconnected, but as we talked I found her to be a person of native intelligence and sensibility with a wealth of life experience. I made a point of telling her my "take" on her and repeated my confidence in her abilities as the semester progressed. My confidence in her seemed to build her confidence in herself. Her final paper showed vast improvement over her first; she told me before she turned it in that she felt proud of her final portfolio and also felt that she would, in fact, make it in college.

The notion that they can have such a positive effect in the classroom is enormously appealing to composition teachers who want to help students empower themselves through writing (Elbow refers to Rosenthal's work in his own discussion of teacher expectancies; see *Embracing Contraries* 149, 164). It is comforting to think that by treating all students as if they were smart, they will all become smart. Many of us would like to believe in nurture over nature, in the power of our own ability to motivate students and influence what they learn. But the issue of teacher expectancies is not as clear-cut as the Oak School study suggests; while positive teacher

expectations are important, their effect on student achievement is not as strong as first supposed. One study involving borderline college-level engineering students, for example, found that students whose teachers told them they had the potential to blossom did show improvement, but their degree of improvement was still below the class average (Meichenbaum and Smart). Attempts to replicate the results of the original Oak School experiment have been mixed at best (for summaries see Hall and Merkel; Cooper and Good 6–12). The study has been criticized for logical and methodological problems (Mitman and Snow) and especially for the implication that teachers need to treat all students alike; as Hall and Merkel point out, treating students differently according to their individual needs is not necessarily bad (84–85). Perhaps most important, the small mountain of data that expectancy research has accumulated suggests that while teacher expectancies do have an effect on students, the effect is more likely to be negative than positive (Brophy 209). A teacher's low expectations can have what researchers have termed a "golem effect," lowering students' own expectations for themselves (in Jewish legend a golem is a monster, an automaton created by cabalistic rites). As Shaughnessy observes, "However unsound such judgments may be at the outset, they do tend gradually to fulfill themselves, causing students to lag behind their peers a little more each year until the gap that separates the groups begins to seem vast and permanent" (*Errors* 275). The golem effect seems, unfortunately, to be not only more frequent but also more powerful than the Pygmalion effect (Eccles and Wigfield).

Ira is an extreme example. Just after midterm, during a conference in my office about his failing grade, I became increasingly frustrated with his passivity, with what I viewed as an unwillingness to take any responsibility for or interest in his own learning. I lost my temper and told him he needed to grow up. He looked as if I had slapped him and left without a word. I felt terrible. Two days later I got a call from his grandmother (an unusual occurrence, but then Ira is an un-

usual student). She was worried about him—he was failing all his courses and she was checking in with his teachers. In the course of the conversation I discovered that Ira is the youngest of six children. He was slow to talk as a youngster and has been treated ever since by his parents and siblings as someone who was not very capable. Grandma observed that everyone expected he couldn't manage, so they did things for him—at age 18 he was the only one in the family without a driver's license. He barely got by in high school; she tells me that his teachers said Ira was capable of doing better but was a "low achiever." When the family moved to another state, she suggested that Ira stay with her so that he could learn more independence. Ours was an enlightening but discouraging conversation; clearly Ira had arrived in college expecting that he was not responsible for anything that seemed too difficult. The golem effect had done its damage.

To understand how and why teacher expectations *can* affect student motivation and achievement in the writing classroom, it is useful to look at the phenomenon through the lens of achievement motivation and attribution theory. Attribution theory explains achievement behavior in terms of the perceived causes for outcomes: based on their experience, students develop a set of beliefs about the reasons for their own success or failure. They might attribute an outcome such as a good grade on a paper according to whether or not they thought it was due to internal or external factors ("I'm good at writing" versus "I was just lucky this time"), or according to factors over which they either had some control or had no control ("I worked hard" versus "the teacher must have liked this piece"; see Weiner, *Attributional Theory*). Teachers also form attributions to explain student outcomes. Research suggests that how these attributions are formed depends on three major factors: the student's past performance; the student's characteristics (such as ethnicity, gender, social class, or the fact that he or she belongs to the campus Greek system); and the effect of the teacher being an

actor rather than an observer in teacher-student interaction (Peterson and Barger). Teachers look to their students' past performance as indicators of consistent patterns and then attribute success or failure accordingly; thus if a student who has not been doing particularly well suddenly writes a good paper, teachers are more likely to attribute his or her success to luck (or to plagiarism) than to that student's writing ability. Student characteristics also influence teacher attributions. Though the research shows mixed results, some studies suggest that teachers tend to attribute the failure of students from lower socioeconomic groups to outside factors (such as bad luck) while attributing the failure of middle-class students to internal factors (such as lack of ability; see Peterson and Barger 169–70). Finally, the effect of being actors rather than observers in teacher-student interaction—of having some personal investment in that interaction—leads teachers to make attributions that are either ego-enhancing or counter-defensive. Thus some teachers will enhance their own egos by taking credit for student successes and blaming students for their own failures, while other teachers will accept responsibility for student failures and give credit to students for their successes.

When teachers form attributions to explain outcomes, they communicate their opinions to their students through affective as well as cognitive feedback. Cooper found that most teachers create warmer socioemotional climates for students whom they perceive as bright (or as putting forth a good deal of effort), giving these students more opportunities to learn new material, attending to their responses more carefully, persisting longer if they don't at first understand, and giving more positive nonverbal cues (leaning toward students in class or in conferences, nodding, smiling) than in their interactions with students for whom they have low expectations (145). This is perhaps not such a startling finding but one writing teachers need to keep in mind: we tend to like students whom we perceive as bright or who seem to be trying hard, communicating to them our perception that

they can succeed as writers and thereby contributing positively to their own attributions. Conversely, we can also communicate our negative attributions to students, our perceptions that they are not good writers, and our affective feedback will have an effect on their own attributions and their subsequent motivation to write.

Even the most well meaning teachers can be guilty of misattribution and subsequent low expectations. In their discussion of remediation as a social construct, Hull, Rose, Fraser, and Castellano describe June, a committed composition teacher, who attributes the verbal behavior of one of her students, Maria, to "thinking continuity problems" (310). (To the observers, Maria seems eager to be involved in discussion and to interact with the teacher, but she does not follow the "teacher initiates-student replies-teacher evaluates" sequence of verbal interaction that June has established in the classroom.) Because she perceives Maria as having a thinking deficit, June appears not to value Maria's classroom contributions and undercuts her ideas during discussion; at the end of the semester, June confides to the researchers that Maria "drives me crazy" (310). As the researchers point out, June is not alone in her negative affective response to a student she sees as having some sort of difficulty. There is a long tradition in American education of treating students who are perceived as low achievers as if they were lesser not only in ability but also in character (311–12); these students, like the supposedly remedial rats in Rosenthal's experiment, are treated less gently and patiently by teachers. These students become the ones who (like Cindy and Ira) are not worthy of our time and attention, who are not likable, who drive us crazy.

Students who receive feedback indicating that the teacher thinks they can't perform academic tasks successfully will of course become discouraged. Maria, who began as a self-assured young woman (she had been on her high school speech team and had told the researchers that she loved writing), ended the semester by expressing negative self-

assessments of both her speaking and writing ability (317). Some students simply lose interest in learning and tune out, as Mike Rose vividly illustrates in *Lives on the Boundary*. Shunted by mistake into the vocational education (read "low achiever") track in high school, the talented Rose developed

> into a mediocre student and a somnambulant problem solver, and that affected the subjects I did have the wherewithal to handle: I detested Shakespeare; I got bored with history. My attention flitted here and there. I fooled around in class and read my books indifferently—the intellectual equivalent of playing with your food. I did what I had to do to get by, and I did it with half a mind. (27)

Empathy

But there are ways to prevent this golem effect and at the same time encourage the Pygmalion effect in the composition classroom. As in most areas of teaching, perhaps the best way is to understand the phenomenon and to know ourselves well enough to be aware of our own goals for and affective responses to students, to reflect carefully and consistently on our own teaching, and to begin with the affective stance of liking recommended by Elbow: "Liking is perhaps the most important evaluative response for writers to think about. . . . Good teachers see what is only potentially good, they get a kick out of mere possibility—and they encourage it. When I manage to do this, I teach well. . . . It's not improvement that leads to liking, but rather liking that leads to improvement" ("Ranking" 199–201). We can also follow the recommendations researchers make about how to create a warm, supportive classroom atmosphere: deemphasize evaluation and minimize competition, set high but realistic expectations, communicate the conviction that all students can master the material, and express the belief

that the material is worth mastering (Eccles and Wigfield 201).

We can also cultivate a particular affective state that Rogers has singled out as a central ingredient in the learning process: empathy. "When the teacher has the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems *to the student*, then . . . the likelihood of significant learning is increased" (*Freedom* 125). It is empathy that we recognize in some of the best teachers in our discipline, teachers who work not only to understand their students but who also actively try to appreciate their perspective, who try to feel and think along with their students. It was empathy that allowed Mina Shaughnessy to look at the error-filled pages of open-admissions writers and see the logic behind the errors, to understand the "incipient excellence" ("Diving In" 238) as well the difficulties of those we now call—thanks to her—basic writers.[2]

The state of empathic understanding is usually seen not only as an ability to understand the other person's affective world but also to communicate this understanding to the other in a sensitive, caring way (Rogers, "Empathic"; Deutsch and Madle). It differs from the affective state of sympathy in that it does not include pity or approval of the other and also in the fact that where sympathy focuses our attention on our own feelings, empathy focuses attention on the feelings of the other (Katz). To be empathic does not mean to be deeply involved with the personal problems of each student; indeed, teachers need to maintain some distance in order to establish an atmosphere conducive to learning, as well as to survive emotionally (Wehling and Charters 13). But cultivating empathy does mean that teachers actively engage themselves in the thinking and learning processes of their students. When Melanie came up after class the first week to express her anxiety about her writing, I tried to be as empathic as possible. Even though there were distractions (students from the next class were starting to drift into the room), I tried to focus my attention on Melanie as if she were the only person

there, repeating back what I heard to make sure I got it right: "I understand that you are anxious. Tell me a little more." After some probing and reflecting back what Melanie was saying, I found that she was worried about being "rusty" after so many years out of school. I told her that I too had gone back to school after having been out for awhile, with some of the same feelings of inadequacy. I tried to empathize: "I've been through it too and I understand just how you feel; I'll try to help." In an interview with a researcher at the beginning of the semester,[3] Melanie was very nervous, hardly speaking above a whisper and expressing anxiety about what she called her "grammatics." In a second interview at the end of the semester, she said that she loved writing, even though she still had a lot to learn, and wanted to take more composition courses; she said the fact that "the teacher really cared" helped her build her confidence in herself as someone who could be a writer.

The research on teacher empathy suggests that there is a robust positive correlation between high teacher empathy and student achievement: at all grade levels, students of high-empathy teachers showed more gains in achievement than those of low-empathy teachers (Goldstein and Michaels 145–50). Students of high-empathy teachers also showed significant gains in nonachievement areas such as self-concept and relationships with peers; the teachers' attitudes and behaviors became models for many students to follow. Moreover, the achievement and nonachievement gains associated with high levels of teacher empathy seem to be cumulative—the more consecutive years that younger students have high-empathy teachers, the greater the benefits.

What is it that empathic teachers do to encourage student achievement? Teachers identified as high-empathic see their role—even with very young children (Kieran)—as that of facilitator rather than authority; they give a good deal of responsibility to the students; and they rely more on collaboration and cooperation than on competition in day-to-day classroom activities. One of the most important ways such

teachers behave in classroom and in conference settings is that they respond to students in an active listening mode (as I tried to do in the first exchange with Melanie), focusing their conversational interchange not on what the teacher wants but on what the student has just said. In active listening, sometimes called "Rogerian reflection" (Thomas and Thomas; Teich), one pays careful attention to what the other is saying, reflecting the meaning and attempting to clarify or focus it more clearly. Typical Rogerian openings for class discussions are, "What I hear you saying is that . . . ," and, "It sounds to me like you are trying to argue that . . ." Such interaction not only focuses on the student utterance (or on what the student has written) but also validates and affirms what the student is trying to communicate. It invites real dialogue.

Empathy should not be thought of as a gift, like perfect pitch, possessed by a lucky few and unlearnable by others; one can learn the skill of focusing on and listening intently to another (as it is learned by social workers in on-the-job training). Teachers can be taught active listening skills through modeling, observation, role-playing, and practice (Gordon popularized the technique in *Teacher Effectiveness Training*, a follow-up to his *Parent Effectiveness Training*). Active listening skills are worth learning, because learning the skills that go with empathic teaching can increase the learner's empathy. Teachers who are learning to be active listeners must perforce stop talking and really listen; once they listen and begin to think and feel along with their students, rephrasing their ideas and trying to understand them, they begin to find out that students have something worth saying. Student behavior that seemed evidence of deficiency, like the unconventional readings described by Hull and Rose in their study of students' understanding of text, or like Maria's interruptions in June's class, gradually begins to make sense. As Goldstein and Michaels point out in their discussions of empathy training programs, not everyone benefits equally from such programs—people who don't

have much empathy to begin with are likely to gain the least (191–94). Nevertheless, the evidence seems clear that empathy is important to good teaching; as teachers, we should think about how to express and foster our empathic responses. It would seem incumbent on those of us involved in teacher-training and T.A.-training programs to spend some time cultivating active listening skills in staff development programs.

Teachers' Self-Efficacy

Another teacher trait that has been shown to have an effect on student achievement is the teacher's sense of efficacy—that is, teachers' belief that they can have a positive effect on student learning (see Ashton for a summary of this research). This is not just the power of positive thinking; teachers' sense of efficacy will determine the amount of effort they put into their teaching, their task choices, their degree of persistence when confronted with difficulties, their motivation to continue. This is of particular importance in a writing class, one in which it is difficult to measure student outcomes (improvement in writing being the slow, sometimes invisible, process that it is).

The construct of self-efficacy was developed by social learning theorist Albert Bandura to help explain changes in behavior ("Self-Efficacy").[4] Bandura rejected the behaviorist contention that behavior is shaped by its immediate consequences, proposing instead that it was an individual's sense of self-efficacy that determined behavior and that the major source of efficacy information is affect—one's emotional arousal. Bandura made a distinction between outcome expectations and efficacy expectations, since someone could believe that a certain behavior would produce a desired outcome but might not feel capable of performing that behavior. For example, teachers might have a low sense of efficacy because they believe that low-achieving students cannot be helped (outcome expectation), or they might believe that ef-

fective teachers can help low achievers but that they themselves lack the ability (Ashton 143).

But it is not only internal, psychological factors that shape one's sense of self-efficacy; Bandura recognized that environmental and social factors also have an influence ("Self System"). In a cogent study of motivation and teacher efficacy, Ashton uses an ecological approach to educational research (proposed by Bronfenbrenner) to analyze these environmental factors. This approach examines the environment in terms of four interrelated systems at successive levels: the microsystem (the teacher's immediate setting, usually the classroom); the mesosystem (the relationships among the teacher's major settings—home, classroom, and school); the exosystem (the forces and structures that influence the teacher's setting, including the mass media and the state and national legislative agencies); and the macrosystem (various cultural beliefs that have an impact on teachers) (145).

Self-efficacy is a situation-specific dynamic; the factors that make up the immediate microsystem are important in constructing the teacher's sense of efficacy. Student characteristics, particularly ability, are among the most important of these factors (Cooper and Good). We all know teachers who feel quite capable of teaching average undergraduates but who quail at the thought of teaching basic writers. Class size is also an important factor (teachers generally feel less effective in large classes), as is the particular activity teachers may be engaged in (some teachers feel more effective in small-group settings, some in whole-class discussions). The teacher's level of expertise in the subject to be taught is of course crucial; many excellent teachers of literature feel lost in the composition classroom. Finally, the teacher's role definitions influence the feeling of efficacy; teachers who define themselves as guardians of standards may face a decline in self-esteem when dealing with basic writing students, while teachers who see themselves as facilitators of learning are less likely to have feelings of self-doubt in the same situation (Ashton 146–49).

Equally important to the teacher's sense of efficacy is the mesosystem—the general climate of the department and the institution, collegial relations, and relations with the administration. Departments and institutions develop their own cultures; the prevailing attitudes of teachers toward students tend to become organizational norms. If most teachers in the department have a low sense of efficacy and tacitly agree that certain groups of students (sometimes even all students) can't learn to write, then newcomers are pressured to accept the same low sense of efficacy and accompanying low expectations (Leacock). I was once in a department where exactly this phenomenon prevailed, a most dispiriting experience.

Collegial interaction is also a contributing factor to the teacher's sense of efficacy. Teachers generally have high social needs but find themselves in a profession that isolates them from their colleagues, often resulting in feelings of loneliness and dissatisfaction (Holland; Jackson). Strong collegial relations can counteract these feelings and contribute to the faculty's sense of efficacy—one of the reasons why attending a professional conference can be so energizing. Studies suggest that enhancing opportunities for collegial interaction can have a positive effect on teacher attitudes and subsequently on student performance (Ashton 151). This is surely one of the reasons for the success of faculty development programs like writing across the curriculum faculty workshops; teachers who are accustomed to seeing one another only in faculty or committee meetings find themselves in a cooperative, collaborative environment and respond accordingly. By increasing the faculty's opportunities for collegiality, such workshops increase teachers' sense of efficacy, enabling them to be more effective in the classroom.

Finally, relations with administrators can affect teachers' feelings of efficacy. Teachers need recognition and support of their efforts from administrators, especially in terms of helpful feedback, but like workers in other settings they also need some share in the decision-making process in or-

der to feel a sense of efficacy (Hornstein et al.).

Outside the institution, the exosystem influences teachers' feelings of efficacy. Legislative or institutional mandates on such matters as writing assessment, for example, can have a profound effect on teachers' feelings of effectiveness, especially if they have no part in determining how assessment is to take place. Those institutions looking to establish gatekeeping devices for students' writing ability should take note. As one researcher (aptly named Wise) warns, a mandated educational policy without involving teachers in the development of that policy (or at least in how the policy will be carried out) will reduce feelings of teacher efficacy. As test scores drop and reports on why students can't read, write, or think appear in the news media, public confidence in education drops, as do teachers' opinions of their own efforts. Budget cuts in institutions of higher education have lowered faculty morale and the accompanying sense of efficacy to new depths.[5]

Perhaps most influential on writing teachers' sense of efficacy are the cultural beliefs that go to make up the macrosystem of American education. Among the most powerful of these are the conceptions of the learner and the teacher and of the role of education (Ashton 153–54). The popular understanding is that writing ability is not something one can improve but is a stable entity—you either have it or you don't. Some educational theorists have argued that such a view of ability allows teachers to explain student failure in terms of lack of ability (B. Bloom; S. Sarason). Such a view allows teachers to learn to live with a low sense of efficacy and accept some student failures as inevitable; if failure is due only to low ability, then teachers do not have to think about the fact that they may not possess the skills or knowledge to help low achievers, or that the system of tracking students according to perceived ability may not be serving the needs of students. The prevailing cultural view of education is that school provides an opportunity for advancement for all those who are willing to take advantage of that

opportunity; those who fail, then, are those who are lazy or stupid, or both (Lewis). Teachers sometimes subscribe to this belief, one that not only sustains their own sense of efficacy (since students are entirely responsible for their own failure) but also keeps them from challenging the equity of the educational system. Thus, as Ashton points out, teachers may become unknowing accomplices in perpetuating the social and economic inequalities of our society (154). Being aware of these issues will help us understand our own reactions, our own sense of self-efficacy, and its potential impact on our teaching.

Endings

It is the last day of class. As I pass back the final papers, I look around. What effect has the class had on these students; what effect have I had as a teacher? Have I been able to accomplish my major goal, helping them think of themselves as writers? Has the class made a difference? The students have received their grades; now I mentally grade my teaching as I return their work. Melanie. Her writing has gone from borderline basic to passing; the paper I give back to her is one she is proud of. She tells me that she has learned to enjoy writing but knows she needs more help, so she intends to take one writing class each year. An Mei. Her facility with written English has improved, and she mentions that her ESL friends now come to her for help. Rod. His last paper describing his favorite fishing spot meant that he got the grade he needed so badly to keep his scholarship. He comes by my office later and gives me a hug, much to my astonishment, and thanks me for all the help; I find that he would have dropped out of school if he hadn't been able to keep the scholarship. Leontina. After a rocky first paper, she wrote an insightful piece on Malcolm X and his conversion to Islam. She tells me that she shared it with her parents; it prompted her normally taciturn father to reminisce about the time he once heard Malcolm X speak, a chapter in

his life of which she was unaware. Will. He has signed up for a creative writing class next semester and promises to keep in touch. I hope he does. Chad. Halfway through the semester he became much more engaged in the class, producing work that was really fine. He has been meeting outside of class with Ed and Heather in an informal writing group; their steadiness seems to have helped him. Jaymie. She grappled with new ideas in a way that I came to admire. I tell her that I would like to submit her final paper to the departmental literary magazine, and she beams. I feel good about these students.

Then there is Alice. She has told me she is not worried about grades any more now that she knows she has passed the class, but I think to myself that she has not so much passed as just passed through. I wonder if she has really learned anything, if I have taught her anything. I wonder the same about Tom, who slouched through the semester, putting forth the minimum effort. Even though he seems as able as Chad, he just never caught fire. I still worry about Alberto. He has passed the class, but his library paper was so far from fulfilling the assignment that I wonder if he will ever be able to write about ideas with which he disagrees in a way that is acceptable to his teachers. Has this class helped him at all? Ira is not here, has not been here for the last few weeks of the semester; in a final attempt to pass the class he had turned in an obviously plagiarized paper, which according to department policy I turned over to the director of composition. She told him he needed to take the class again. I feel a twinge when I see his empty chair. I always feel that it is my fault when one of my students does not pass. (The director of composition, understanding issues of teacher self-efficacy, later reassures me, saying that she thinks Ira just isn't ready for college. This does not make me feel better.) I have not reached everyone.

As I look around I realize I will miss these students. We spent interesting times together, and I learned with them as I learned about them as writers. They help to build my sense

of efficacy as a teacher as I hope I helped build their sense of efficacy as writers. We discussed many ideas during the semester, many strategies and techniques that I hope they will retain; I hope that they will also take with them a positive disposition toward writing and toward themselves as writers. I hope that the affective climate I tried to create in the class will have nurtured that disposition sufficiently so that it will last.

I am always a little depressed on the last day of class, so to cheer myself I read to the students a passage from *A River Runs Through It*, a book they know not only as a movie but also as an evocation of the natural beauty and the ethos of this part of the country.

> Now nearly all those I loved and did not understand when I was young are dead, but I still reach out to them.
>
> Of course, now I am too old to be much of a fisherman, and now of course I usually fish the big waters alone, although some friends think I shouldn't. Like many fly fishermen in western Montana where the summer days are almost Arctic in length, I often do not start fishing until the cool of the evening. Then in the Arctic half-light of the canyon, all existence fades to a being within my soul and memories and the sound of the Big Blackfoot River and a four-count rhythm and the hope that a fish will rise.
>
> Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. (104)

I tell my students that when spring comes and I think of the waters flowing over the rocks, some of the words I carry with me will be theirs. And then we say good-bye.