Chapter 4. Becoming a Person Who Writes

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Reflect Before Reading

Think about your current or former students who struggle with writing. When a student calls herself a "bad writer" or another says he "hates writing," how do you respond? What activities in your course allow students to build their confidence as writers?

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The Writing Marathon was always my favorite day in Basic Writing. Usually on a portfolio turn-in day, a day when students' energy would be low from working to finish a major project, we left the classroom just to go somewhere new and write. Students' charge: Go with a couple classmates wherever you want. Take your notebooks. Write about what you see, hear, smell, taste—coffeehouses and fast food are often a part of a Writing Marathon. Let the place you're in trigger your writing. If anyone asks what you're doing, you have to reply "We're writers. We're writing."

Before anyone left the room, we all rehearsed that line. Students had to repeat loudly and with enthusiasm: "I am a writer!" Students giggled, then dutifully chorused that sentence. Then off we went to write until time to return to the classroom to tell the stories of the day's writing and for each student to share at least a small piece of what they had written. We rejoiced when sometimes students had had the chance to announce "I am a writer!" to curious passersby.

Students generally enjoyed Writing Marathon days as much as I did, but I doubt they took the "I am a writer!" routine seriously. It is serious, though, the idea of considering oneself a writer. For students in Basic Writing it is an especially serious issue. So much of a student's success in college depends on skill with words, as does much of a person's success in a career. And here they were in Basic Writing, marked in their first semester of college as individuals whose words were somehow inadequate. It raises questions: Can a Basic Writing student become someone who says and *believes* that "I am a writer"?

Writing is tied to identity. Numerous composition scholars speak to this, articulating that students' taking on a writer's identity is an essential part of any composition course. Tom Romano argues that adolescents and college students

DOI: https://doi.org/10.37514/PRA-B.2020.0308.2.04

need "to have opportunities to create their identities on the page" (175). Roz Ivanič argues for the teaching of writing to be focused above all else on "helping students to take an identity as a person who writes" (85). Taking this idea one step further, Robert Brooke insists that successful teaching of a composition course is marked by students' "com[ing] to see that being a writer in their own way is a valid and exciting way of acting in the world" (40).

James Paul Gee discusses the identity-building process in terms of adopting a discourse: "Think of discourse as an 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act and talk so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (51). The role of someone who writes would entail ways of talking about writing and the ability to think of oneself as having something to say. This identity, however, would be just one of many. Both Gee and Ivanič discuss the multiple identities any individual simultaneously maintains (Gee 56; Ivanič 11). Take, for example, Frankie, whom readers will meet in these pages. She arrived in Basic Writing with multiple identities that she made apparent in class and surely had others in addition. Her classmates and I knew that she was a business major, that she had been a student government leader in her high school, and that she was a multi-sport athlete. Each of these roles in her life demanded its own discourse, its own identity kit.

My course would challenge Frankie to add another identity, that of a person who writes. Given her life history including multiple identity kits already, adding this new one could create some clashes. Ivanič recognizes that taking on a writerly identity is a potentially tension-filled process (65). Further, Frankie and her peers were entering the world of higher education which would, according to Ivanič, "require [them] to extend their repertoire of literacy practices: to build and adapt existing ones and to engage in new ones" (70).

What conflicts of experience and expectation would emerge? Could being a writer sit comfortably beside being a new college student, a business major, an athlete? And so, I return to this question: Can a Basic Writing student become someone who says and *believes* that "I am a writer"?

Two Basic Writing students, Spike and Frankie, show that this process can occur. Both were part of an IRB-approved study of literacy development. Participants were volunteers who had taken my own Basic Writing classes during a four-year period designated for the study. Data used here come from students' final exams and other papers they provided and from interviews conducted by my colleague Dr. Gloria Park and her graduate assistant, Ravyn McKee.

Spike and Frankie were among nine study participants. At the time my former students were invited to participate, they were the only two who were seniors, thus the two with the most experience to share. Their experiences with Basic Writing, with writing in courses for their majors, and their planning for jobs after graduation provide an interesting picture of coming to consider oneself a writer during and after their first college composition course.

Spike and Frankie: Literacy Experiences before Basic Writing

Spike arrived at college with his criminology major firmly in mind. During his interview, he said: "It was probably around fourth grade. . . . One of my good friends that I went to elementary school with . . . his dad was a state trooper, and I always went over to his house and communicated with him on a regular basis and it kinda influenced me to want to grow up and be a state trooper." Spike's older sister was the first in the family to hold a bachelor's degree; Spike would be the second.

Graduating in a class of 150, Spike described reading and writing as something he needed to do for school. He was diligent, but not enthused: "I always did my schoolwork and I always kept up with readings. If I had a paper, I . . . completed the paper, but I never went above and beyond schoolwork to satisfy a reading habit or anything like that." His writing experiences in school had consisted of reflections on readings for English classes, daily writes (which he did not further explain, but which I take to be short journal entries or responses to readings), and his senior paper, about the charity golf event he had helped to organize. Essay writing adhered to "the five-paragraph stance," meaning "the fundamental introduction, body, and conclusion." When asked about more writing in his classes, Spike responded that "I was never able to participate" in "classes that were for higher up students, above the normal average student." In other words, he had not taken advanced or AP courses.

While he knew his writing skills were not especially strong—"I was a pretty weak writer before coming to college"—his placement into Basic Writing was "kinda like a bummer feeling . . . it's not good." However, Spike's high school habits of diligence and persistence—"I always did my schoolwork"—carried him through the new learning curve.

Frankie arrived in college with 15 credits she had earned through joint high school/college credit classes offered through her high school. None of those courses, however, must have been in English, as she completed all of my university's required English courses. Like Spike, she had already decided on her major: business. After a few courses, she refined that major to human resources management. Interestingly, college was not her original plan: "I didn't want to come to college; I didn't want to at all. I wanted to join the military." Her parents' fears about, at that time, an active war in Afghanistan changed her mind. Their agreement was that if Frankie finished college and then still wanted to join the military, they would not object. At the point of her interview, one summer course away from graduating, she was no longer planning military enlistment. Frankie's older sister had already graduated college. Her parents' college experience is unclear; but her father owned his own business and her mother worked part-time while Frankie and her sister were growing up.

Frankie described her literacy background with positives and negatives. "I love to read." Her extensive reading, in fact, created barriers for her writing. "I

strongly disliked writing. . . . I think I had read so much and so many types of things, I couldn't make my writing sound like something I would want to read. So like why do it?" Her placement in Basic Writing was not a great surprise to her: "I've never been a good test taker and when we did placement testing I probably just didn't do very well." Her high school experience, even with all those college credits, prepared her for college-level writing in limited ways. "In high school we didn't write a lot. . . . We only wrote two papers my entire high school career." For these two papers, the possibilities seem to have been minimal. When asked how she knew what to write, she said, "Normally, I was answering . . . a writing prompt or something like that. We had specific things we have to have in papers." The key guideline was the standard five-paragraph theme: "Most of our writing base was based on what you had to know for PSSAs [the Pennsylvania Department of Education mandated testing] to write those essays, like, brainstorm first, like have an introductory paragraph and something and filler stuff in middle and conclusion."

Despite limited writing experience in high school, Frankie flourished in Basic Writing. Her work was so strong that near the end of the semester I approached her about submitting a portfolio to ask for exemption from College Writing, an option my department allowed. Frankie did submit a portfolio and was approved for exemption, her work in Basic Writing considered equivalent to what any student completing College Writing would have been able to produce. Frankie's high expectations for herself allowed her to blossom when given assignments she could dig into and tools for making her writing sound like something she and others would want to read.

The Basic Writing Course as Spike and Frankie Experienced It

"I have to give you a little background because you won't understand if I don't give it to you," Frankie said, in discussing her narrative essay with her interviewer. In that spirit, we will leave Spike and Frankie for a short time and look at the Basic Writing course they experienced. This course design is reflected in the writing that Spike and Frankie did and in their development of identities as writers.

During the semesters when Spike and Frankie were in my courses, students completed three formal writing assignments. Each assignment was submitted as a portfolio; a reflection on writing decisions made from drafts to final copy was part of each portfolio. Embedded within the three major assignments were numerous smaller ones, what Frankie called "annoying little exercises." We used a writing workshop model. Students did a lot of writing in class; I used that time to provide individual feedback through conferences. I wrote scant notes on papers. Most teacher feedback came through conversation. Feedback also came from peers; writing groups, in which talk also superseded writing on papers, met at least twice for each paper. Mentor texts, i.e., writing that offers models for writing tech-

niques that students themselves might adopt, were an important course element. The assignment sequence worked as a spiral. Each new assignment built on skills practiced and honed in the previous assignment. New learning was layered in; students could always circle back to writing techniques they had already rehearsed.

The course design reflects elements that others in this collection have advocated for. Jo-Anne Kerr speaks to the development of a discourse important for transferring writerly habits to future contexts: reading in a writerly way, feedback from readers, moving beyond one format for writing. Kara Taczak, Liane Robertson, and Kathleen Blake Yancey show that deliberate reflection on one's work and active uptake of language to describe it are essential for transfer. All of these features were part of the course that Spike and Frankie experienced.

Table 4.1 presents the major assignments for the course, accompanying in-class exercises, and the mentor texts that Spike and Frankie reference.

As is apparent in biographical information for both Spike and Frankie, each entered his/her first university semester with limited writing experience. They resemble the students that Mina Shaughnessy, the first composition scholar whose work was dedicated to basic writing, described as "have been writing infrequently" and "in such artificial and strained situations that the communicative purpose of writing has rarely if ever seemed real" (14). Today's testing culture in K-12 schools has, for many students, reduced writing to a formula in order to earn an acceptable test score. Ritter, in this collection, testifies to the pervasiveness of this practice. Thus, it is not surprising that university placement testing might reveal a limited writing repertoire among some incoming students if they do not engage in self-sponsored writing and if their writing for school has primarily focused on test preparation. Ivanič notes that "writers bring to any act of writing the literacy practices into which they have been acculturated through their past experience" (184). Test prep is the writing practice many high school students have become accustomed to. This had been the experience of both Spike and Frankie.

However, over many years of teaching Basic Writing, I have found that students assigned to my classes are capable, competent learners. Inexperience with writing is the issue, not capability. Given opportunities to write and to craft their writing, inexperienced student writers can accomplish things that surprise them.

Spike: Breaking Away from the Five-Paragraph Theme

When interviewed, Spike said, "I was expecting to come in[to his first writing course in college] with my basic writing skills as the five-paragraph essay as that's how you write." Lorna Collier addresses this kind of mismatch between what high school seniors think college writing will be about and what actually occurs, noting that students "expect to *do* writing rather than *engage* in writing, both as a way of thinking and as a way of demonstrating knowledge" (11). Very quickly, Spike realized that writing would not be simply filling in a formula: "My professor she kinda told me that's [the five-paragraph theme] not the way to go about the papers."

Table 4.1. Assignment sequence

	First third of semester	Second third of semester	Final third of semester	End of semester
Assignment:	Narrative	Researched Essay	Radical Revision	Final Exam
In-class exercises:	-quick writes -guided imagery	-collaborative topic development -quick write prompts -color coding to balance research, personal writing -bookless draft -Post-it organizing and thesis	-write from a new point of view -found poem -rework previous writing	
Skills learned:	-1st person -narrow focus -strong lead -develop evidence: anecdote, description -dialogue -organize for readability, interest -variations in paragraph length -aware of audience -revise -monitor patterns of error	-research question -find sources -gain content expertise -develop evidence: sources -recognize multiple views -integrate others' words -strong topic sentences -organize for reader needs -transitions -transition markers -monitor patterns of error	-re-envision topic -global revision -try out new form -provide reader adequate information -maintain reader interest	-provide evidence of learning -identify practices, behaviors that helped during semester -identify how to reproduce practices and behaviors in future courses
Techniques that carry over from previous assignment:		-new view of topic -strong lead -nonlinear organization -anecdote, description -dialogue -1st person -variations in paragraph length	-any skills from previous papers -writing or projects outside the course	-any skills from previous papers -writing or projects outside the course

The mentor texts the class read and discussed played a significant role in showing him new possibilities. "We started off by reading various stories . . . and we picked out the similar techniques they were using. . . . We were going to be able to try these techniques in our own writings." While this shift felt somewhat uncomfortable to Spike, like learning "there's actually another way to tie your shoe," he did what he had always done in high school. He relied on his sense of responsibility to do the assignments. By the time he submitted his narrative portfolio, the first assignment of the semester, he was recognizing the benefits of trying out some new writing techniques.

One new technique that Spike used to his advantage was writing dialogue. In his final exam, in answer to a question about which mentor authors influenced him, he named Jimmy Baca: "Baca gave me the idea to use dialog" for "not just the words coming out of the characters [sic] mouth but the feeling being expressed as well." Dialogue comprises much of his narrative and does, in fact, move the action forward more effectively than his expository sections. In the following segment he has found a credit card that someone has dropped in a busy convenience store/gas station; as he ponders what to do with the card, he notices the car parked beside his:

> The man was saying, "I do not know where it went. I had it in my hand and I went up to pay and it was gone." I walked over to the man.
>
> "Did you lose something?"
>
> The man turned around and his face was as read [*sic*] as a tomato. He looked like he was about to hit someone.
>
> "Yeah, I had it and now it is gone."
>
> "What are you looking for?" I asked.
>
> "I lost my credit card. I don't have any money on me. Some punk ass kid probably has it now and is running my bill sky high!" stated the man.

The dialogue continues until Spike establishes that the credit card he found and is still holding onto belongs to this upset man. He hands the man the card.

Spike also worked to make his speakers' language more realistic, the way talking actually sounds. From draft to final copy, *shopping* becomes *shoppin'*. *You cannot trust anyone anymore* becomes *You can't trust no one anymore*. These are tiny shifts, but they reflect a writer who has begun to understand that writers craft their work and that he, too, can craft his writing. This is a far cry from simply filling in a five-paragraph template.

Spike also tested out Baca's single-sentence paragraphs. The following is a short excerpt in which he attempts to draw attention to important lines by creat-

ing them as stand-alone paragraphs. The action occurs at a local mall where Spike has gone with his friend, Nick. Nick is the first speaker:

> "Yeah I will go along." As I looked into his eyes I could tell that what he was really thinking was no way, not after what we just went through in Pac Sun.
>
> We walked over to Lids.
>
> After purchasing a hat, we were done shopping at the mall. Therefore, I asked Nick if he wanted to go get something to eat before we headed [home]. With a firm yes to my question, we then began to decide on a place to eat.
>
> We went to the Ponderosa Steak House.

Spike's use of the single-sentence paragraph is not particularly successful. Baca's single-sentence paragraphs convey vital information. Spike just uses them to shift scenes. Still the attempt again shows a writer's willingness to experiment with something new.

Spike's final foray into new techniques in his narrative is something we decided to call sidetracking. We used the term to describe a digression he added in order to stretch and slow down time within the action of the piece. It serves the additional purpose of addressing a common issue with basic writers, lack of elaboration of ideas (Shaughnessy 227-32). In his cover letter, Spike identified sidetracking as a risk he took in the writing. It looked like this:

> On my way into the store, I looked down and I saw a credit card lying between the two automatic doors.
>
> *"Should I keep it? How would I feel if this happened to me?"* These questions raced through my head.
>
> I was brought up by my mom and my dad. We live on the outskirts of town and I have been there for as long as I can remember. My dad, abandoned by his true father, is self-employed. He does concrete work, brick masonry, and his favorite, stone masonry. My mom, on the other hand, works in an office for [name of her workplace]. I was raised with the idea that stealing was not acceptable. If an item was free and I wanted it my dad would push me to ask if it would be alright if I had it. If I would take something without asking and my dad would find out he made me take it back to where I got it and ask if it was alright to have it. Stealing, in my dad's eyes, is for two types of people, people who are too lazy to get a job and those who are too lazy to pay.
>
> I finished my business and walked out to my car.

From here the essay continues with the dialogue about the upset man in the car nearby.

Nested between internal dialogue, marked by the italic font, and the actual dialogue noted earlier, the sidetrack, as noted by Spike in his portfolio reflection "really worked." I agree. It added some depth to his paper, adding a deep motivation for returning the credit card to the man who had lost it. Spike wrote, "I have seen this technique before, but I have never really given it the thought to add it in one of my own writings. This most definitely changed the way I usually write."

Unfortunately, Spike did not provide his researched essay or his radical revision for this study. His final exam, however, provides an excerpt and some commentary from the researched essay.

Spike identifies Deborah Tannen, writer of a mentor text for this assignment, as key to the progress of his researched piece. True to the creative nonfiction mentor texts we used, like Tannen's, Spike "learned how to incorporate my own story into a research paper." The following excerpt shows how he did this:

> Criminals of identity theft are very seldom caught. . . . However the government has passed a law in 2004. . . . The government has also added the Identity Theft Penalty Enhancement Act, this Act states "IN GENERAL.—Whoever, during and in relation to any felony violation . . . imprisonment of 5 years."
>
> When I walked out of the gas station, and the credit card was still in my hand, I walked over to my car. . . . I asked him a few brief questions about the card in my possession and I handed the card over to the young man.

While the transition between researched and personal text is bumpy, Spike has again been willing to try something new. With growing audience awareness, he articulates why he has done this: "Instead of using strictly information this technique allowed me to add a personally [sic] experience that relates to the topic to make it sound more real."

He attributed this awareness of how a writer might mix research and personal information to a color-coding exercise (based on ideas drawn from Harry Noden's *Image Grammar*) that we did with the Tannen essay. After using a highlighter, each of a different color, to mark 1) exposition; 2) narration/description; 3) quotation (quotes from sources as well as use of dialogue), students discovered that Tannen's integration of multiple writing techniques made the research she presented highly readable. Students then color-coded their own drafts, evaluated what the colors revealed to them, and revised accordingly.

Where do these examples of Spike's writing lead us? In what ways do they demonstrate his developing an identity as a writer? As noted earlier, taking on this identity means acting and talking like a writer.

As a writer new to the college classroom, Spike's incoming assumptions about

writing, particularly about one-size-fits-all writing, were challenged. He responded by trying new techniques. He developed vocabulary for articulating what he was doing and why he was making particular writerly choices. Perhaps the best example is his noting that he had seen writers do sidetracking before but never considered doing it himself. Now he was doing it. His final exam includes these lines, indicative of someone who has taken on some aspects of being a writer. Basic Writing, he writes, has "busted [boosted] my confidence to be able to write with integrity for my future writing courses." Later in the same document he notes, "I am no longer afraid to try new things in my writing." He was no longer filling in a predetermined template. He was crafting his writing with a reader in mind. In baby steps, his thinking about "I am a writer" was emerging.

Frankie: Shifting an Attitude About Writing

Frankie arrived in Basic Writing having "dreaded everything I ever had to write." Her strong reading background and high school/college courses gave her an advantage. Her attitude about writing, however, was a challenge to her progress. Frankie needed to be convinced that she had some skill and that every writing experience was not dreadful.

In his study of basic writers, Josh Lederman found that teacher expectations played a key role in student performance: "The two clear success stories [students] in this study . . . both had teachers who truly believed in them, and in some deep ways, these teachers helped the students believe in themselves too" (199). Lederman's finding echoes other research on the effects of teacher expectations on student performance. Susan McLeod cautions that a teacher's negative expectations are particularly powerful; however, she also confirms that positive teacher expectations can lead to improved student performance (108-09). While Spike's writing improved mostly through adopting new techniques from mentor texts, Frankie's writing improved more in response to topic choice, in-class exercises, and supportive reader feedback.

Frankie's first paper, her narrative, focused on a school consolidation that occurred during her senior year. Two high schools in her district were merged into one. She was from the smaller school that closed. She worked her way through this self-selected topic, one she cared about, as if she were constructing an intricate jigsaw puzzle. Her writing moves were sophisticated and intentional.

Her early draft began this way:

> Senior year of high school, the year to remember, the year where you rule the school, the year you have waited for your entire life. The year for me that was turned upside down. . . . I went from a senior class of forty-six to a senior class of one hundred thirty-seven of which I knew no one but my original classmates.

She wrote of bullying, name-calling, eating lunch surrounded by strangers. Mid-

way through the essay she briefly mentioned her Spanish teacher, Mrs. S., who had moved with the students to the larger high school:

> I had her for eighth period everyday for Spanish IV. The end of the day which I had with eight other kids that I had been with since freshman year. Some days that class took years to get to, those seven periods before it were the longest ever experienced until I finally got to what I was used to, until I finally was familiar with everything around me.

Then she moved on to describe how "I wanted to be the one to change things; I wanted to make new friends, I wanted to say I was the first consolidated class and I benefited from it."

That first draft provided much information but not much focus. The essay was moving in two opposing directions: 1) I'm an outsider; 2) I want to change things. Each idea was functioning without connection to the other. We conferenced about this, and Frankie understood the disconnect but puzzled over how to resolve it.

Before students submitted their second draft, we did one of those "annoying little exercises," an extended guided imagery prompt. Students made a quick list of snapshot moments, i.e., vivid individual scenes from the writing they were drafting. Then they selected one scene and responded to a series of sensory prompts, as if they were playing a movie in their minds: What did you hear? What did you see? What was the temperature?, etc.

Frankie's completed guided imagery described Mrs. S: "never be one to need a microphone," "always wore a skirt," "hair never out of place." It described her classroom: "vocab posters, the Spanish alphabet pictures of her and students from years past . . . maracas . . . spectacular bulletin boards. You could learn just from being in her room." This short piece was filled with detail about how important this teacher and her classroom were to Frankie.

Through this in-class exercise, Frankie's focal point emerged—her beloved Spanish teacher. In her portfolio reflective cover letter, Frankie wrote that completing the guided imagery was significant for her writing "because after doing this exercise I realized what the main focus of my paper should be as well as what direction from that point on my paper needed to head. . . . It made my paper go from several separate pieces to one flowing work of writing." She wanted to "focus more on my 'safe haven' . . . and not so much on the negative." That safe haven was her Spanish teacher's classroom.

The final copy of her essay began with some text that had been midway through her earlier draft, a nod to Mrs. S, and added new material:

> Some days that class took years to get to, those seven periods before it were the longest ever experienced until I got what I was used to, until I finally was familiar with everything around

> me. Walking into that classroom seeing Mrs. S's familiar face and all those familiar students around me, learning like I had been learning for the last three years was in a sense for me like going home.

The new draft and later the final copy included pages about Mrs. S., her methods of teaching, and her ability to personally connect with students. In thinking about this teacher, Frankie also found the rhetorical link she needed in order to connect being an outsider with wanting to change that status. This sentence from her second draft bridged the competing ideas: "I wanted to change things, and when I began to try it started right back there in Spanish IV, with Ms. S. leading the way." It was Mrs. S' response to consolidation, Mrs. S' "courageous lead," that pushed Frankie to ask "students sitting alone in the cafeteria to come and eat with my friends and me. On the volleyball team we made a point to have one team-bonding event a week. I quickly made new friends 'from the other side.'"

In Frankie's jigsaw of revision, each draft rearranged or layered in new information. In her interview, Frankie described herself as being "really big on organization." In high school, she had been an honor student while on multiple sports teams and active in student government. In college, she was "involved in like 4-5 organizations" while carrying 18 credits. "I've always like had a lot on my plate." Her approach to revising her paper was the same as her general approach to life: How do all these pieces fit together? How can I manage them so they all make sense? For her paper, she "needed to decide what direction it needed to take . . . Mrs. S. or Consolidation. I chose Mrs. S." This decision allowed Frankie to "focus . . . on her as a person and what she did for me during the consolidation." With this as her goal, Frankie found ways for the parts of her essay to intersect, rather than cast parts off. In Frankie's words, the paper "was a lot different than what I planned on as my original topic," which had been a much more negative reporting on the consolidation.

One thing she was willing to cast off was the five-paragraph format she was familiar with. Brief nods to it appear in individual sentences in drafts. For instance, in one late draft, this appeared: "She has high standards, an amazing story and the drive to make you a better human being." In no cases, though, did she follow up by addressing each of the items in the sequence. Mentor texts appear to have had minimal effect. The one noticeable technique that was borrowed from the course readings appeared in her final copy of the paper. It came from Annie Dillard, an extra-large space between paragraphs at a place where the topic shifts. Frankie did this only once in her four-page essay.

Frankie's portfolio cover letter for her narrative spoke to the attitude noted at the beginning: "Something I have learned about myself as a writer would be that I can write. . . . I was dreading this project but with much surprise it came easily to me. I felt confident reading my work to my writing group and to you [the instructor]. . . . I liked what I was doing."

Frankie's researched essay, her second assignment of the semester, focused on another topic of great personal significance, the experiences of her sister and her mother with skin cancer. It mattered to Frankie that in Basic Writing she was asked "to write about something that we were passionate about." "She [instructor] didn't give us a prompt I didn't care about and was like blah blah blah write something on this. It was like whatever we wanted to write about so that really helped." The topic for this second piece had actually emerged many weeks before she began the paper. It had been on the list of snapshot moments she had generated for the guided composing exercise.

The creative nonfiction approach we used to writing this essay allowed Frankie to personalize the writing. She bookended two researched pages with the story of her mother and sister. In her portfolio reflection she noted that now she is "able to more comfortably write. Not every sentence is a struggle. Also I feel much more confident as a writer." She was no longer writing "because I had to for a grade."

As with the narrative, Frankie identified an in-class exercise as most helpful for her writing. Before their second draft, students used Post-it notes, one idea per note, to list key points they wanted to make in their essays. Then, in one sentence, they were to write their "So what?"—what is it that you want a reader to understand when they finish your essay? Finally, they arranged the Post-its in the order in which they thought they needed to write; thus, they left class with an outline for a revised draft. Frankie's Post-it page included seven notes, arranged in this order:

-Does artificial tanning cause skin cancer

-Mom and Angela having skin cancer

-Why they got it

-The real truth from studies

-Vitamin D

-How it affected Angela

-Would tan again?

Frankie noted that this exercise was significant because "I knew . . . where I wanted my paper to go and what things I was going to make my most important points. It also made me realize that I was going to need at least two more topics to meet the length requirement for this paper."

Indeed, she adjusted her text in her final copy. She had had some trouble with a researched section about Vitamin D. The writing was awkward and didn't fit well with surrounding text. For the final copy, she abandoned that information. Then she added segments on additional causes of skin cancer—beyond tanning beds, the specific focus of this writing—and on advancements in knowledge of how to treat skin cancer.

Her portfolio cover letter indicated that Frankie understood what she was executing well in this writing: "the detail I use to explain things" and "putting feeling into my paper." The detail she mentions arose from two factors: her ability as a researcher and her ability to make that research readable. Frankie was a skilled researcher, something she must have been taught in high school. Her bibliography included recent issues of *Gerontology, British Journal of Dermatology*, and *Dermatologic Therapy* along with several consumer editions of the more readable *Health Source*. She made this heavy material readable while carefully acknowledging each source and prepping readers with strong topic sentences. One paragraph shows how she included research throughout the essay:

> Multiple tanning regulars would argue that some people just get skin cancer. They would say it is not caused specifically from tanning. That is only because it never happened to them. Denise K. Woo and Melody J. Eide from the Department of Dermatology and Biostatistics Research Epidemiology, out of The Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan would disagree. Their most recent study provides the most extensive evidence to date of the risk of melanoma associated with tanning beds. They recommend discouraging teenagers from using tanning beds and other tanning equipment.

We had talked about strong topic sentences, looking at Tannen's essay and some student essays as models. Frankie understood quickly how to manage her topic sentences. We also talked about selecting credible sources and about acknowledging them. Her scientific articles generally included multiple authors. She was unhappy with the lengthy, sometimes awkward method of naming them, but diligently did so. In later years, with her permission, I used her paper as a mentor text to help newer writers understand how they, too, could acknowledge the resources they had tapped.

Frankie's final paper for the semester was her radical revision. Toby Fulwiler's essay "A Lesson in Revision" provides the basis for this assignment. It asks students to play with form and language. Shaughnessy identifies absence of "play" with ideas as an issue with basic writers (236). I, too, find that my students have rarely been invited to play with language in the ways the radical revision asks of them. The assignment requires students to rethink an earlier completed essay by radically changing its form, its purpose, or its audience.

Frankie returned to her tanning bed essay for this project. She revised the researched essay into a children's story in two forms: a printed and bound copy and the Power Point presentation she had done in order to create the printed pages of the bound copy. Slides were illustrated with colorful clip art drawings. Text from the first three slides gives a feel for how her children's story proceeded:

> Slide 1: One day my Mommy my big sister and I all went to the

> doctor. Mommy told me it wasn't the doctor for when you're sick. It was the doctor for your skin. She said he was called a Dermatologist.
>
> Slide 2: The doctor ran lots and lots of tests on my Mommy. Then he ran lots and lots more tests on my sister. The doctor was really nice and told me I could ask as many questions as I wanted.
>
> Slide 3: After waiting for forever the doctor came out to see us. He told us that there was something wrong with my Mommy's back and something really wrong with the back of my Sister's leg.

Frankie noted in her portfolio reflection that in order to make her radical revision effective, "I needed to keep [different elements of the essay] in order and keep the detail in them, but still take out a lot of my writing"; this time the illustrations would carry meaning as well. Her awareness of her audience was a key factor in this decision; children's books need "an easier reading level." She was also purposeful in her decision about why to revise this essay in this way: "I think this [skin cancer] is something kids should be educated about even at a young age." She was so determined to assure that her writing reached her intended audience that "I tried it out on a first grader and he paid attention the whole time."

As with Spike, readers might now ask what this shows us about Frankie's development of an identity as a writer. Like Spike, Frankie easily adopted the discourse of a writer. She was able to articulate what she changed from draft to final copy and, more important, why she made those changes. Primary to those changes was Frankie's knowing she needed to focus her writing for a particular audience. This, in turn, gave her writing purpose; it was not just for a grade. Also, like Spike, she distanced herself from formula writing, opting instead to craft writing to her own purposes.

In the cover letter for her portfolio asking for exemption from College Writing, she wrote this: "After learning multiple writing techniques I know so much more and am able to more comfortably write. I feel that what I produce is worth reading." Her key reason for dreading writing had disappeared. A surprise surfaced in her interview. When asked if she had any advice for incoming first-year students, she said, "You're not gonna get better [as a writer] unless you're writing. After I took [Basic Writing], I had a journal that I wrote in religiously every single night no matter what until about last winter break. I didn't do that before." Sometimes the journal recorded events of the day, sometimes personal things. Still, this student who had dreaded any kind of writing began and continued self-sponsored writing for several years after her first college composition course. She had not only adopted the discourse of a writer; she was, as writers do, regularly writing.

We know that students' progress in writing is idiosyncratic; thus, course design needs to reach students in multiple ways. Mentor texts and the in-class exercises we did mattered in general to writers in my classes, but Spike and Frankie show how that work mattered differently to each. Conversations with them about their writing were important. The course focus on process, including draft after draft and supported challenges to try new things, was important. Spike noted in his narrative portfolio reflection that "no copy that u [sic] make is your final copy. . . . A paper is always a work in progress." Three years later in his interview, he maintained that process still mattered: "I feel that even for a final draft I feel that there is always something that you can add or change and just you can always take a different view on a paper." All of this leads me to conclude that course design needs to be deliberate. Nothing can happen by accident.

Composition courses are often thought of as service courses. The question becomes this: Service to whom? To the institution and its various constituents? To the student? To both? In her work on identity and writing, Ivanič references Lev Vygotsky's and Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the social and dialogic nature of learning and of language use. Ivanič points to the necessity of teaching writing as a social act, through authentic tasks in which writers have a sense of purpose and of audience (339). She argues that in order for students to take on an identity of someone who writes, tasks, assignments, and outcomes need first to serve the writer (338-39).

In her discussion of teaching English language learners, Gloria Park argues for "the importance of writing in constructing identity," (336) in and outside of academic settings, and raises another issue about teaching writing as well, the need for student writers to benefit in personal ways from their experiences in writing courses. She outlines how she accomplished this in a course. One course goal was "to remind my students as well as myself of how academic writing was, and could be, seen as a form of writing to understand the world around us and not just as a conduit to mastering the linguistic code of the US educational context" (338). While my Basic Writers were not English language learners, I subscribe to the same philosophy as Park. Students should not write only traditional academic prose in Basic Writing. It is just as effective to expand writing opportunities so that students can discover themselves as people who can write and who can, in addition, write in an academic setting.

Of course, these students-becoming-writers who have had opportunities to write about subjects that matter to them in ways that challenge and stretch them leave our classrooms where their writing has been nurtured. They move into courses where we can only hope they will continue the habits and behaviors they have developed in our classes. What happens to them as writers outside the confines of a carefully crafted writing setting?

Spike and Frankie: Writing in Future Careers

Helping our students to apply ways of thinking used by the professionals they

will become needs to be a goal of all writing instruction (Taczak, Robertson, and Yancey, this collection). Indeed, Spike and Frankie found some footing with a writing identity in Basic Writing and, as their college experiences continued, grew that identity into a more professional view of themselves as writers.

Spike majored in criminology, intending even from his first college semester, to become a state trooper. His major required him to write frequently, for instance "look[ing] at a report of a crime or a study" then writing a personal reflection or applying criminological theories. By the "beginning of junior year," Spike was recognizing "how powerful writing can be and how important it is in current and future society." By that time, he had written papers for various classes, including one about racial overtones in laws guiding sentencing for cocaine users. He recognized that someone had written those laws and that, indeed, words had life-altering effects. He recognized, too, that his own words on the job would matter, especially in offering a point of view: "If I'm working with a fellow officer and he's on the same crime or something . . . and he says something but I believe another, I . . . want my part to be heard. I don't want the judge to go solely off his [the other officer's] things."

Spike expected that his future writing would be comprised largely of accident reports and investigation reports, "like first-hand accounts." He was aware of the weight his own words would carry: "If an arrest happens and you're there, you're a first-hand account, and it's important because that's what judges are gonna read . . . [in order to decide] if he's guilty or not guilty." Essentially, Spike will spend much of his career writing detail-filled narratives so that authorities beyond himself can make appropriate decisions. As a senior, Spike no longer spoke about trying new things in his writing. He spoke of writing not as a separate thing he would do but as an element at the very heart of his professional life. His words would have the heft of affecting individuals' futures.

Frankie, a human resources management major, had also expanded her identity as a writer. When asked how important writing was in her life, she answered, "Way more important than I thought it would be. I do a ton of writing." As with Spike, Frankie's major required significant writing. Her management courses demanded that she write case studies and short essays of two to five pages.

Her future in human resources management, she said, would involve writing emails, memos, letters related to hiring and firing, and reports. The sense of audience Frankie had expressed in Basic Writing three years earlier was further honed. She recognized that her written words needed to be succinct and meaningful if she wanted employees to read them. It was her job as writer, not the employees', to assure that messages were read: "If I'm writing an email or memo . . . if you make the first five or six lines about stupid things that don't matter . . . they'll stop reading."

Five to ten years in her future, Frankie expected to continue her workplace writing. By that time, she hoped to have expanded her audience, saying she want-

ed to be "comfortable with writing things that people higher up in the organization would be okay with reading, okay with presenting to executives. . . . I never want my writing to just stick with emails." The first-semester student who dreaded any writing foresaw a future in which her words would be "worthwhile, like making a difference."

Closing Thoughts

James Paul Gee (in this collection) argues that FYC, if it is to be continued at all, must attend to students' subject positions and social engagement with literacy in the world beyond academic disciplines and certainly beyond the classroom. Intentionality of course design, as shown by numerous writers in this collection, can usher student writers into that larger world of writing. It can foster not only transfer of skills but of dispositions and of one's view of oneself as a writer. Students who emerge from such classrooms can discover what Jane, a first-year participant in the study with Spike and Frankie discovered: "It [her Basic Writing course] . . . made me realize that there are many different ways you can write a paper and different techniques you can use when writing and not to stick to just one thing. . . . Everyone can be a writer; they just have to find it."

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion After Chapter 4

1. During the Writing Marathon activity Helen describes, students write on campus and respond "I am a writer" if someone asks what they are doing. In what other ways can you prompt students to enact the role of "writer" during class, outside of the classroom? In what other ways can you prompt students to own the label of "writer" in the process?
2. What are the mentor texts you have in mind when writing? You might consider the "mentor texts" that you borrow discourse from in any type of writing that you do, including writing course materials.
3. How can you implement the writing activities Helen describes to foster your students' building of confidence as writers? Consider how you may adapt these activities to fit your students' levels of academic preparedness and their language and cultural backgrounds.

Writing Activity After Chapter 4

Choose a current student who you know of who struggles as a writer, or imagine a hypothetical student in FYC. Write a few sentences to describe this student's struggles with writing. Now, dream big: If this student could become a highly confident, highly skilled writer, what would that look like? Dreaming big, write a description of this student in the future that includes what he or she can do as a writer and what attitude he or she has toward writing. Now, dream a little smaller: In what reasonable ways can this student grow as a writer within a one semester course? Dreaming smaller, write a description of this student at the end of an FYC course that includes the few new (or newly refined) abilities he or she has acquired as a writer and the attitude he or she now has toward writing.

Further Reading

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