

# Chapter 5. Encouraging Potential in Liminal Space: Student Writer Reflection

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## Reflect Before Reading

*Think about the ways you gain knowledge about your students, such as about their past educational experiences, interests, or goals in college. In what ways do you gain knowledge of how your students fit into certain categories? In what ways do you gain knowledge of who your students are in the process of becoming college writers? How do these varied types of knowledge enhance and inform your teaching in FYC?*

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I came back to graduate school after a 15-year hiatus. It started as a personal intellectual journal with forays into ancient rhetoric and cultural-historical activity theory, but then I became a graduate teaching assistant in the first-year composition (FYC) program at my university. In what seemed like no time at all, I went from being an expert to a novice. I did not know how to write a paper for my own classes, let alone teach someone else how to write a paper. Stripped of my familiar practices and routines, left adrift with a sea of knowledge that had seemingly no relevance in my new space, I was completely disoriented. I did not know *what to do*, but, worse yet, I did not know *who I was*. I felt that I was becoming someone, but I did not necessarily know who that was or what that person would do. I felt in-between most of the time—not still a lawyer and not yet a teacher, not still a student and not yet a professional, but I had a sense of excitement and wonder about my own potential to become someone else and that kept me working. As graduate students, we shared our frustrations and fears about the job market, our teaching personas, our plans and goals in formal seminar spaces and hallways, but most of my time was spent with first-year college students and I never talked to them about their experiences of being new, being un-moored from their past lives, being part of a re-orienting process. My interactions with them were shaping who I was, and, yet, I knew almost nothing about their personal experience of *becoming*. If I felt lost in spite of my years of life professional experience, how did first-year students negotiate this liminal space? How did my students conceive of their liminality? Were they similarly aware of their potentiality to be better writers, to produce better writing? And if they were, did it enhance their process of *becoming* a writer? So I decided to ask.

How to get at someone's sense of their own potentiality? I supposed that if students did think about it, it might be in moments of reflection—on their writing projects, on the feedback they received from teachers and peers, and on their goals for the future. Reflective practice is common in FYC classrooms for the powerful learning opportunities offered by encouraging students to analyze what they have learned through a review of their writing projects as well as the assembly of print and digital portfolios (see O'Neill; Smith and Yancey; White; Yancey, "Electronic" and Reflection). In writing instruction, reflection is employed both to teach students to develop useful writing strategies and to "ask students to participate with us, not as objects of our study, but as agents of their own learning" (Yancey, Reflection 5). Through the process of reflection, Kathleen Blake Yancey asserts that "[s]tudents can theorize about their own writing in powerful ways" and that "[w]hen treated as a rhetorical act, when practiced, [reflection] becomes a discipline, a habit of mind" (Reflection 19).

Thus, I decided to use a series of interviews that would ask students about their writing projects, prompt them to reflect on those projects, and then look forward to future writing projects and future writing selves. The interviews would be acts of reflective self-assessment in which students were prompted to look back, but also to look forward, along a trajectory of their own becoming. Over the course of one semester, I studied four first-year writers and their self-assessment through processes of reflection during their enrollment in their university's required FYC course. I sought to engage students in ongoing conversation about the possibilities of looking not just reflectively at what a writer has accomplished but in looking forward to future incarnations of writing and writers through the concept of potentiality. The voices of these students describe their experience of FYC as a liminal space, in which they could explore what they were capable of as writers through reflection as well as anticipation that empowered them with an awareness of their own potentiality.

## Interviews: Revelations with Limitations

I interviewed students regularly while they were enrolled in a required first-year composition class. As a novice researcher and teacher, I began with a set of questions and a plan to run the interview. But I soon discovered that students had their own plans, their own things to say, even their own questions for me. And as I let loose the formality and structure of the interviews, what they had to say—what I was ultimately trying to discover—revealed that they not only thought about their writing and themselves but that they were actively engaged in a process of creating their position within the larger structure of the writing program and the university. As my analysis and coding of the interviews uncovered, students performed a complex process of assessment through (1) reflections on past writing experiences, (2) contemporaneous assessments of present writing projects, and (3) future-looking plans and expectations for themselves as writers and

community members (of academia and then, the working world). But the most exciting aspect of these conversations was that the complexity of self-assessment performed by the participants was performed not through my prompting of them to self-assess but through their own processes of negotiating their own goals with those of the writing teacher and writing program, their own sense of a writing self that included a categorization of themselves as novice writers, and their own ability to work with or against expectations set forth around them in the liminal space of first-year writing.

The liminal space of the FYC program is a rich but dense space in which to explore potentiality as a concept for self-assessment practices of FYC students because it is active and dynamic, a space where students are becoming—through unseen psychological and social changes, but also through conscious and reflective thought. Each student's experience of FYC is unique, and this small study can only tell us about the reflective practices of these four students, in this university, at this particular moment in their education. While this limits replicability, it reinforces a basic tenet of writing assessment scholarship: that assessment practices must be local and contextual so that they attend to the needs and serve the purposes of a particular program and a particular group of individuals (see Adler-Kassner and O'Neill; Broad; Huot; O'Neill). Furthermore, the students and I each bear our own subject positions within this space, intersecting within a hierarchy that constrains our interactions. I was their teacher and then their interviewer. We met in my office, in our FYC program office. Even as I write this, I am aware of an impulse to call them my students. Even though we ethically promoted each other's agency, shared, and expressed care and concern for one another throughout the process, I was always the researcher and they were the researched. While I am acutely aware of these limits, my hope (and that of the larger collection) is that this work encourages others to appreciate the value of engaging students in the overall project of FYC programming. Writing research that is grounded in the real expressions of student writers offers a messy but realistic and dynamic picture of the work that student writers do and the work that FYC programs might do to support them.

## Participants and Their FYC Courses

The students with whom I worked come from a large public university located in a small town in northwest Ohio where the FYC program is the cornerstone of the university's learning outcomes with regard to written communication. The program focuses on college-level academic writing and consists of a sequence of three different courses: an intensive introductory writing course which introduces students to academic writing (required only of the most underprepared students); an introductory course in academic writing (required of most incoming first-year students); and a required academic writing course in which students develop writing skills that focus on inquiry-based essays. Typically, first-year stu-

dents take one of the introductory courses and then the required course. Writing is taught as process, with opportunities for drafting, reviewing, revising, and editing. At the end of the course, students submit a portfolio containing all of their written work for the semester along with a “Narrative Self-Reflective Essay” written from a program-designed prompt that instructs students to develop a narrative essay addressing how they have developed writing skills and processes that attend to the major categories on the program’s common writing rubric, which include audience awareness, organization/theme/structure, development, syntax, and word choice. This is the only formal self-assessment built into the program.

The participants successfully completed “Intensive Introduction to Academic Writing” with me as their instructor and had begun “Academic Writing,” the required FYC course, when our interviews began in January 2013. They were all in the second semester of their first year of college, each enrolled in different courses with different instructors. These students were familiar with the FYC program’s learning outcomes and terminology through their exposure to these in the introductory course. They were new to various elements of academic writing, and their developing understanding of these elements is reflected in our conversations over time. At the end of the spring semester, all but one of the four student participants passed the course.

Elizabeth is a white female in-state student from a rural area. She was conscientious about her writing assignments when I taught her the semester before the study. She was insightful and reflective about her writing without much prompting, and she even articulated a new writing process that she had developed for herself over the course of the semester. Susan is a white female student from a suburban area in-state. She did not demonstrate grammatical or mechanical difficulties in the introductory course, and her essays were well-developed and organized throughout the semester. Though she did not seem interested in writing for its own sake, she used writing as a tool in her education and viewed it as a way of learning. Walter is a black male student from a large city in-state. In the first week of class, he told me he was a creative writer and shared rap lyrics that he had written, but by the time we began interviews in January, he had changed his major to communications with a focus in promotions and advertising. During our interviews, he argued that writing in required FYC courses could not be interesting or entertaining—the hallmarks of good writing according to Walter. And he denied that anything he had written in FYC was of any interest to him. Julie, a black female dancer from an in-state metropolitan area, struggled with the conventions of the FYC program. Julie acknowledged that she would need to be able to write not only clearly but also persuasively in order to have others accept and follow her advice when she became a social worker. She expressed frustration with the FYC course, and toward the end of the semester explained to me that her friends had told her to “just write what the teacher wants” and she hadn’t taken their advice, but now she knew they were right. This process of writing what the teacher wants, she said, was what she learned from the FYC program. Julie did not pass

the required FYC course and would have to take it again.

## Reflection and Negotiation in Liminal Space

The students whom I interviewed shared their self-assessments with me during their interviews, revealing a process of negotiation among a variety of aspects of their experience in FYC: between old writing lessons and new, between writer and reader, between their own goals and desires and those of the larger FYC program. Their negotiations reveal FYC as a liminal space in which they were suspended between who they were as high school students and who they are to become as college students and members of the academy. First-year writing classrooms are a site where students can mediate and negotiate their own sense of self through their contemplation of goals.

In “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage,” anthropologist Victor Turner describes rites of passage as transformations between social, physical, mental and emotional states, ranging from graduations to wars. In the liminal state, individuals are “disengaged from social structures, [and] neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection” (14). It is not a far stretch to think of the first-year writer in a liminal space, both in terms of the inner processes of composing and in terms of her presence in the writing classroom, which makes this a rich location for a study of agency and practices of reflection.

In fact, some scholars have described FYC as a liminal space between novice-ship and expertise. In their survey of the experience of Harvard’s first-year writers, Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz discover the “novice-as-expert paradox,” in which students develop their writing skills while performing assignments beyond their skill level—in other words, “writing into expertise” (134). Sommers and Saltz assert that “those freshmen who cling to their old habits and formulas and who resent the uncertainty and humility of being a novice have a more difficult time adjusting to the demands of college writing” (134). The four students whom I worked with reveal that “clinging” and “resenting” are part of an involved process of becoming, a negotiation that goes on largely invisible to their FYC teachers.

Throughout the interview process, these four FYC student writers revealed their experience of FYC as a liminal space in their descriptions of the various kinds of negotiations they were engaged in during the semester. As Yancey explains in *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*,

[W]hen writers are treated as writers, they will need to be awarded the authority that comes with writing. They may make decisions that run counter to our recommendations, and if they do so for reasons that are rhetorically sound, then we need to defer. Through reflection-in-action, we begin to negotiate; our

practice changes in fundamental ways. (41)

The four students demonstrated these kinds of negotiations, and then some, in the conversations that developed around and beyond the scripted interview questions that began our monthly meetings. Elizabeth was eager to incorporate FYC lessons into her own developing sense of “good writing” and herself as a “good writer.” She made connections between her FYC lessons and the larger concept of “good writing.” In her first interview, she declared, “Writing is a form of communication, and communication is like essential to everyday life. So I feel it not only would it be helpful to the rest of my college experience, but for a job.” A month later, with her first FYC paper completed and graded and with instruction underway on a new kind of essay that would involve integration of multiple sources, Elizabeth described activities her teacher facilitated in class to build essays in a series of steps. In reflecting on these activities, Elizabeth says, “It was interesting the way of learning something. I never really thought of doing it that way.” This assessment of the teacher and her classroom activities continued throughout Elizabeth’s interviews, and her description of her own work was often intertwined with her observations about the context of the assignment, its purpose, and its relation to larger educational and personal development. She was negotiating among old and new techniques, between her own sense of good writing and her new experiences with writing. Elizabeth received good grades on her FYC writing projects at the same time that she was developing and demonstrating a confidence in her own ability to make writing choices. She also received the reinforcement of a non-FYC teacher, who had praised her for employing the FYC-taught process of “synthesizing” sources into an essay for another class. Through her negotiations, she described a process of assimilation and a developing sense of agency as a developing writer in the liminal space of FYC.

Walter’s interviews offer a demonstration of negotiations between self and teacher, as well as between self and writing program. Walter combines the terminology of the writing program community with his own interpretation of the purposes and effects of different rhetorical strategies. Walter’s interviews are notable for his concern about whether his writing was interesting or entertaining (as opposed to “forced”). His interviews are also notable for his perception of the interview as an opportunity for him to share his criticisms of the FYC program and his suggestions for its improvement. Walter was not just assessing his own work in the course of attending FYC courses and our interviews; he was assessing the FYC program as well. Walter projected confidence in his writing in his introductory FYC class before we began our interviews, and he continually challenged my feedback on his essays. His questioning and his resistance continued through his interviews, with him explaining to me in his second interview that he knew how to write a paper and found FYC “boring.” He found validation in his interpretation of a comment that his teacher had made about the expectations of the course. Walter describes his FYC teacher writing on the board, “This is not cre-

ative writing, this is um [FYC] and you are writing to an academic audience.” He objected to FYC courses being “so structured” and being “different than writing papers like in other classes” where “it’s just like write four pages and then that’s the paper.” As reinforcement of the significance of Walter’s distaste for boring, formulaic writing taught in FYC, Walter’s general lack of interest in talking about his FYC papers contrasted sharply with his enthusiastic and detailed conversation about papers that were “interesting” to him in other classes. His short answers morphed into more energetic, detailed descriptions of writing that he was doing in other classes, such as this description of a project in one course for his major:

I get to write about how instructor of a physical activity um just pretty much runs their class such as a gym teacher or something and I get to watch how they, like the tone of their voice, just how they get the participation, the respect and then I have to critique that and I also get to write another paper about um, about a game. I gotta pick a game to um show a whole class how to play and I have make like, to have like all the details in case someone’s never played it.

This writing was an opportunity—“I get to write”—not a requirement, or a “forced” FYC assignment for Walter.

While Elizabeth seemed to willingly incorporate instructor feedback into her own bank of knowledge about revision and preparing a final draft of a paper, Walter struggled against what he disagreed with in the instructor’s commentary (in so far as it contrasted with his own knowledge and purposes in writing) and in the program’s teaching. Walter maintained his own sense of what he believed was effective in his writing abilities while acknowledging the need to conform to the instructor’s beliefs about what was needed for a final draft to pass the criteria set out for the course. Elizabeth, in some ways, saw herself as a novice and was open to changing her writing strategies, believing that doing so would enhance her writing ability. That belief was an awareness of her own potentiality to be a different kind of writer than she was.

Walter, in contrast, did not see himself as a novice writer, and seemed to resent what he thought was “boring” writing. With non-FYC projects, though, Walter saw an opportunity to develop his writing ability in ways that were connected to his sense of becoming a communications professional. In a similar inquiry into the student experience of becoming a writer, Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis observe a “writing into” process in their interviews of four students, finding that “they actively use writing . . . for the ongoing development of their personal identities, including their sense of themselves in relation to others” (1). In interviews, I observed what Herrington and Curtis explain: “for some students, more than for others, learning was not a passive acculturation process, but a negotiation where they were actively considering how they would position themselves in relation to teacher and disciplinary expectations” (34). This negotiation can be seen very clearly in Walter’s



interviews, marked by his resistance to give up his beliefs and confidence in what he believes to be good writing in the face of the requirements and demands of the FYC program and its writing instructors. As Walter explains, “I feel they like, it’s set up to where you like can write about what you want to write about but then it’s not really like that.” Walter did not see himself as a novice, but he did not completely reject the lessons of FYC. Instead, he made negotiations in his mind and in our conversations between his idea of the writer whom he was and the program’s idea of the writer he should be. Through negotiations that were possible because of the liminal space of FYC, Walter was developing a sense of his own identity and of who he might become. Elizabeth and Walter experienced the liminal space of FYC in their own unique way, but they did not experience it passively. They engaged actively in negotiations about their acceptance and integration of writing processes to come to a cohesive notion of what constitutes successful writing—a notion that they could call their own, and their negotiations happened largely with themselves, through unprompted self-assessment, reflection, and anticipation.

## Reflection and Anticipation: Recognizing One’s Potentiality

In addition to reflecting on what they had learned and how their writing processes had changed from one writing project to the next, these four writers were also assessing the value of changes that they had made incrementally and in terms of a larger trajectory of becoming a certain type of writer or producing a certain type of writing moving forward. They did not describe themselves as being any specific kind of writer in the moment without describing a future writing self. This movement back and forth through reflection and imagination of selves and texts in the future demonstrates that these students assessed their own capacity for being changed and changing themselves as well as their potentiality. When asked what kind of writer she might be two years from now, Julie said, “[S]omebody will read [my writing] and say, ‘She is a smart writer. She’s a smart person. She’s very intelligent.’” Julie expressed confidence in her writing skills from the beginning. She was particularly proud of her ability to “reel” readers in and demonstrated a rather sophisticated awareness of audience. But she struggled to really understand her teacher’s comments as the course progressed, and concepts such as synthesizing sources and using an academic tone escaped her even at the end of the semester. She initially told me that she felt FYC was a useful course, that she had learned a lot from the introductory FYC course that she had taken in the fall—“I learned about myself, and how I write, the good and the challenges of writing.” But at the end of the semester, after the second, required FYC course, she was upset with receiving and processing feedback:

I understand that [the teacher] told me that this is wrong, but like she told me, not help me all the way but she didn’t really say how she wanted me to change it. Since I write it for her, I change



it to the way I think is right, she says it is still wrong. Okay, what is your definition of right and wrong? I know she can't do it for me, but like, what's your right? To your liking? I kept revising to the best of my ability and it still wasn't right.

One specific example of a divergence between her teacher's instructions and her own rhetorical purposes arose when Julie was writing a paper about marriage equality, in which she had written about how her own sister's homosexuality had affected her family. The teacher's feedback was that the essay was too informal, which Julie interpreted to mean "to stop putting my own personal, I guess." Julie went on to explain that "when you used to write papers you always had to put in a personal experience and that's why I'm probably like used to it so that's why I am probably like—I don't know." Julie purposefully and rhetorically used a writing technique that she had learned and successfully used before college and was now being told not to. In the end, she explained that she replaced the personal experience with source material from "like psychologists or whatever." Her frustration with her teacher's assessments of her FYC papers mounted over the course of the semester, and in the end she did not pass the required FYC course, but in her final interview, she reflected on and shared with me what she had learned from the experience:

Me at the beginning trying to do it for myself wasn't working, then I know what she wants. She said this is great, this is what I am looking for. That's the smart way—just do what they want. Not settling! You still have a mind of your own, but it's just [pause] . . . you are not settling. . . . That's how good you are; you can just write whatever they want to hear.

Remarkably, in spite of her FYC experience, Julie refused to completely give up her authority as a writer and her vision of being an effective writer one day. And even though she did not succeed in the course in the way that Elizabeth, Susan, and Walter did, Julie engaged in dynamic and rich processes of reflection on past writing experiences, contemplation on current writing processes, and anticipation of a future writer that she might become.

Susan's trajectory of interviews also revealed active processes of reflection and anticipation. When asked what writing projects she was looking forward to, Susan explained, "I don't really know what is next. I mean I know the research paper but I don't know the topics or anything. But I usually enjoy research papers if we have like an option of what to write on." She connected her past enjoyment of writing research papers to an expectation that she would enjoy an upcoming research paper assignment, even though she did not know the topic or details of the assignment yet. When I asked her what she enjoyed about research papers specifically, she answered, "Like learning new things that I didn't know before . . . especially if it's a topic you think you are familiar on and then you learn more stuff

like you're like, oh, okay." Not only did Susan's assessment of her writing projects demonstrate reflection and anticipation, but it also revealed her perception of writing as a way of learning.

Susan spoke with confidence about this writing project and about other writing projects, on several occasions noting that she "just" had the writing of the paper left to do. Susan was able to articulate things that she had learned to do differently in her writing preparations and things that she still felt that she needed to work on in her writing. At one point, she described the differences in how she was writing her current project compared to her last project as "doing a lot more organizing and like when I am finding sources, I like write down the key points. And like I research more, like I try to find the best site instead of finding, using the one I find first." She also explained that she needed to take more time with her writing because she would look back over a paper and wonder what she was trying to say, but that she was good at organizing. Her self-assessment of her writing skills and processes involved reflection and review as well as an acknowledgement of the utility of certain skills going forward into developing writing projects. Susan described her FYC papers in terms of her opportunities to revise drafts. She was able to identify what was successful in a first draft, along with what she needed to do in a second or final draft to "pass" the paper, even without instructor feedback. This awareness of her own capacity to assess and revise one paper for the better translated into an awareness of her capacity to develop further in her overall writing skills—an awareness of her potentiality, as demonstrated earlier in the excerpt from her final interview.

These students experienced the liminality of being a novice in their own unique ways, but they all described acts of agency in their process of becoming writers. Recognizing the connections between expertise and agency, Janis Haswell and Richard Haswell argue for student rights of authorship in their 2010 book, *Authoring: An Essay for the Profession on Potentiality and Singularity*. To define these rights of authorship, Haswell and Haswell interview and gather data from "real" authors (as opposed to student writers) on what they call the "phenomenology of authoring," or the inner life of authors (13). Among the traits of authoring that they discover is potentiality, which Haswell and Haswell define as "an ongoing capacity for creative work that needs to be constantly protected and nurtured" (20). This concept of potentiality becomes integral to Haswell and Haswell's call for teachers of writing to imbue student writers with a sense of authorship. They assert, "[S]tudent writers are not allowed the full rights of authorship, which include respect for the work they have not yet produced" (33). In their own unique ways, all four of the student writers in this chapter assessed their potentiality—their capacity to do "better" or different work in the future, their ability to learn, and their ability to be a writer at some later time. Whether they saw themselves as writers seemed to depend upon their negotiations between external expectations of the FYC program (through rubrics, teacher feedback, and portfolio assessment) and their internal perceptions of what they were capable of

doing. The ability and willingness to negotiate these matters arose, in part, from the self-assessments that the students performed in the course of our interviews as they had the opportunity to analyze what they were experiencing. In a sense, these interviews functioned as a method of developing, or sustaining, a sense of authorship—the right to write and the right to evaluate that writing as successful or not in accomplishing individual goals as well as FYC program goals.

## Implications for FYC Students, Teachers, and Programs

The narratives that these four students constructed to describe their own growth and development are narratives of negotiations between high school writing lessons and college writing instruction, between their own goals and the objectives of the FYC program, between noviceship and authorship. Their stories of negotiation reveal their experience of FYC as a liminal space in which they occupy a complicated and shifting subject position. And they are not just aware of that positionality, they are actively engaged in its shifting, in part, through processes of reflection on past work and past writing habits combined with anticipation of future work and a future self revealed through and by the writing that they perform. They are in-between in various significant ways, particularly where they are between noviceship, as Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak describe the state of being a new college writer (18-19), and authorship, a state described by Haswell and Haswell as being knowledgeable but also confident in one's capacity and competence as a writer (33). In this liminal space, these four student writers have the leeway to challenge internal and external limitations, to reflect on what has come to pass, and to anticipate what is yet to come. But what enables all of their negotiations is their awareness of their own capacity to grow and develop from moment to moment. These trajectories grew not just from reflection on past work and past versions of their writerly selves, but also from the companion process of looking forward, anticipating the work that they might do in the future and the writers that they might become. These student writers are not yet the writers they might be in the future, nor are they the writers that they were in the past. This process of reflecting and anticipating might be a key element of the pedagogy of potentiality that Haswell and Haswell urge writing teachers to employ.

How might we develop a pedagogy of potentiality? In *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak propose a “teaching for transfer” model of writing instruction that employs reflection to help students enact and achieve “a unique set of resources . . . to call upon as they encounter new writing tasks” (5). Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak describe student writers as being in a liminal state of “noviceship,” from which they “write [their] way into expertise” (39). In the process of doing so, students develop a sense of their own agency, rooted in knowledge and a set of skills that they can deploy to effectively address new writing problems (43). But in using

reflection to help students carry forward their skills and build their expertise, writing instructors must foster a sense of agency, the sense of agency that Yancey finds inherent in the practice of reflection (*Reflection* 5, 19). These students reveal that reflection is part of a larger process of negotiation that involves both looking back and looking forward. This is what enables them to see themselves as becoming and to derive momentum from the awareness of having potentiality to produce a better essay and to be a better writer at some point in the future.

This study is a small, initial exploration into the potential of self-assessment to empower student writers and to provide valuable information to teachers of writing and writing programs about dynamic processes that are occurring within writing classrooms almost without our knowing. It arose from my own exigence, constructed by my own abstract desire to become something new, and it formed the very concrete foundation upon which I became a teacher and scholar. What did I learn? I learned that negotiating liminal spaces is both intensely personal and invariably social, that we cannot be unaware of what our students are experiencing in the process of becoming, and that the in-betweenness of our collective experience of teaching and administering in FYC spaces demands that we listen to our students' voices. It is impossible to extrapolate from this short time with these few students any general claim about student writer potentiality and personal methods of self-assessment. Even among these four students, not all of them succeeded in their FYC class, and not all of them engaged critically with their assessment practices in a conscious way. But these brief moments of asking and listening do suggest we might encourage students to not only reflect on the past, but to envision plans for the future and to think about their potentiality, while we foster and engage in negotiations with them in the liminal space of FYC. Reflection as well as anticipation might be part of our conversations with students in which we can ask them how they see themselves as writers and who they want to become as writers. And through these conversations, we might also engage students in powerful acts of agency by taking into account their assessments of the policies and procedures of the FYC programs in which we work together.

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## Questions for Discussion and Reflection After Chapter 5

1. Chapter 5 demonstrates a range of knowledge teachers can gain about students. What aspects of Martha's interview conversations could be adapted for conferences with your students or reflective writing activities?
2. How can you create space in FYC to give students agency by inviting discussion or critique of an FYC program? What challenges might you encounter in doing so?

## Writing Activity After Chapter 5

Martha's reflection on her own potentiality as a new teacher led her to explore her students' self-assessments of their positions as writers in the academy. Using the introduction to Chapter 5 for inspiration, write a paragraph or two exploring your own potentiality in your current professional position. In conducting this self-assessment, you might ask: Who am I as a writer in this exact moment? Who am I as a reader today? Who am I as a teacher at my current institution or institu-

tions? In what ways do I occupy liminal spaces in my professional work, and what strategies am I engaging in to navigate these spaces?

### Further Reading

Gibson, Michelle, et al. "Bi, Butch, and Bar Dyke: Pedagogical Performances of Class, Gender, and Sexuality." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2000, pp. 69-95.

Skorczewski, Dawn. "From Playing the Role to Being Yourself: Becoming the Teacher in the Writing Classroom." *Teaching One Moment at a Time: Disruption and Repair in the Classroom*, by Dawn Skorczewski, U of Massachusetts P, 2005, pp. 15-37.