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VOLUME 20 NUMBER 1

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Cumulative Index 1997-2000

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 10-20 pages on topics related to basic writing, broadly interpreted.

Manuscripts will be refereed anonymously. We require five copies of a manuscript and an abstract of about 100 words. To assure impartial review, give author information and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page *only*. Papers which are accepted will eventually have to supply camera-ready copy for all ancillary material (tables, charts, etc.). One copy of each manuscript not accepted for publication will be returned to the author, if we receive sufficient stamps (no meter strips) clipped to a self-addressed envelope. Submissions should follow current MLA guidelines.

All manuscripts must focus clearly on basic writing and must add substantively to the existing literature. We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about such matters as classroom practices in relation to basic writing theory; cognitive and rhetorical theories and their relation to basic writing, social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; discourse theory, grammar, spelling, and error analysis; linguistics; computers and new technologies in basic writing; English as a second language; assessment and evaluation; writing center practices; teaching logs and the development of new methodologies; and cross-disciplinary studies combining basic writing with psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. We publish observational studies as well as theoretical discussions on relationships between basic writing and reading, or the study of literature, or speech, or listening. The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, sometimes referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and sometimes referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a *variety* of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research reports, written in nontechnical language, which offer observations previously unknown or unsubstantiated; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy.

EDITORS' COLUMN

The last couple of issues had us feeling justly proud but also exhausted. Partly because it was our own resolve, partly because it was what was in the air (or at least in our mail), we found ourselves publishing a number of very good but also very expansive views of the field of basic writing. Wrong as we knew the feeling to be, we found ourselves wondering what more was left to say. It took the authors in our present issue to tell us.

What we needed—what, we daresay, the field needs—is a shift (and multiplication) of perspectives. When we ask where we are in basic writing these days, the question tends to be tinged with a sense of crisis, a conjuring of political forces at work, often against us. And all that is no less true than it was. But the present authors remind us that where we are is also in the classroom, confronted with students who defy and overturn our generalizations, making us look at ourselves, our systems of support, our own pedagogical practices. And the more specifically and reflectively we can look, the better.

Laurie Grobman leads off the issue by calling our attention to just how victimizing generalizations about our students can be. In "(Re)Writing Youth: Basic Writing, Youth Culture, and Social Change," she is not speaking just of basic writing students but of the whole youth culture, often defined (and maligned) as disposed to violence and irresponsibility. Drawing on the work of Henry Giroux, she calls for a critical pedagogy that allows students to resist and rewrite such definitions of themselves.

Definitions are always based on relationships, and Ann Tabachnikov, in "The Mommification of Writing Instruction: A Tale of Two Students," reminds us that the student-teacher relationship often partakes of a relationship still more primal. As a particularly close look at two students shows us, the "mommification" not only complicates behavior, but can, on reflection, lead to a complicated understanding of behavior.

Culture is also a powerful shaper of behavior in student-teacher relationships, of course, and Raul Ybarra makes that his focus in "Cultural Dissonance in Basic Writing Courses." Here too we have a particularly close look at a student-teacher relationship—in this case, one in which the author is neither student nor teacher (nor, for that matter, disinterested observer).

In "How Soft Is Process? The Feminization of Comp and Pedagogies of Care," Wendy Ryden gets personal about the teacher's perspective, but hers is, again, a perspective on perspectives. What is it that makes students see a teacher as "hard" or "soft"? Is it a stance?

A strategy? A gendered destiny? A mutual decision? A search for answers complicates our ideas of who or what constitutes authority while blurring the lines between what is public and what is personal.

Ideas of authority and ownership are also important to David C. Fletcher's "Tutors' Ideals and Practices." Tutors occupy a potentially fascinating mediating position between the worlds of student and teacher, often drawing on what is seen as successful from both. As two carefully examined case studies reveal, the results can be revelatory, often all the more so when characterized by conflicts between theory and practice.

The ultimate shift in perspective (and practice) may be Linda VonBergen's "Shaping the Point with Poetry," and the shift may be still more radical than the title suggests. The change of strategy we are invited to consider represents not just a shift in discursive fields but also in discursive aims, as students adopt imitative and referential approaches to writing that is so often, in basic writing classes, expressive and confessional.

Astronomers have long known that a key principle of relativity is parallax: a shift in perspective due to a change in the position of the observer. We welcome you to the parallax views of basic writing instruction in this issue, new alignments of thinking about our students and ourselves, closely observed.

— George Otte *and* **Trudy Smoke**

Laurie Grobman

(RE)WRITING YOUTH: BASIC WRITING, YOUTH CULTURE, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

ABSTRACT: *As an extension of Henry Giroux's critique of mainstream media and popular culture's depictions of young people, this article examines the ways in which students in basic writing respond to rhetorical constructions of their generation. It argues that compositionists' efforts to intervene and mediate society's conceptions of youth are complicated by students' simultaneous acceptance and rejection of these representations and also explores the subsequent implications for students' and teachers' responsibility and complicity in society's "demonization" of young people. Claiming that students in basic writing are uniquely situated to write across and against society's definitions of them, the author suggests approaches to critical basic writing pedagogy that bring youth culture into its critique, paying particular attention to public writing.*

In "Public Pedagogy and the Responsibility of Intellectuals: Youth, Littleton, and the Loss of Innocence," Henry Giroux calls on critical compositionists to factor the category of youth into broader discussions on power, politics, and change. In response to what he describes as the "demonization" (35) of youth in the post-Littleton (Columbine High School shootings) climate, Giroux argues that we must consider "the question of how young people experience, resist, challenge, and mediate the complex cultural politics and social spaces that mark their everyday lives" (10). The "crisis of youth must be central to any notion of literacy, pedagogy, and cultural politics," he argues, because youth have become the "victims of adult mistreatment, greed, neglect, and domination" (10).

As an extension of Giroux's critique of mainstream media and popular cultural depictions of young people, this article examines the impact of students' own constructions of youth and youth culture. Specifically, I focus on my students in basic writing, their investment in and response to rhetorical constructions of their generation (as they define themselves in relation to news media as well as contemporary music, television, and film).[1] Using student essays and classroom tran-

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scripts, I argue that efforts to intervene and mediate society's conceptions of youth are complicated by students' simultaneous acceptance and rejection of these representations and their implications for "responsibility," "innocence," and "complicity."[2] Finally, I suggest various approaches to critical basic writing pedagogy that bring youth culture into its critique, paying particular attention to opportunities for students to engage in public discourses.

Rhetorical Constructions of Youth

Sometimes called "Generation Y" or "The Millennial Generation," labels having to do with time rather than character, young people are indeed the victims of what Annette Fuentes describes as a "sour, almost hateful view." The past two decades have seen a dramatic change in attitudes toward youth, she asserts, "reflected in the educational and criminal justice systems as well as in our daily discourse." This "criminalization of youth" is evidenced in the "zero tolerance" policies in schools nationwide and the increasing efforts to treat younger and younger offenders as adults—to punish rather than rehabilitate. Fuentes also cites a 1997 report from Public Agenda, a nonprofit policy group, which found that that only 23% of adults surveyed had positive things to say about kids. Public Agenda's more recent study, "Kids These Days '99," indicates that disturbing attitudes towards young people have changed little since the earlier study, with substantial majorities of Americans describing teens and children as "rude," "irresponsible," "wild," and "lack[ing] basic values." As David Sarasohn asserts, "in the general view of adults today, adolescents are an assembly of drugs, body-piercing and black trench coats. From parents to commentators to congressmen, American grown-ups are scaring themselves silly about—and scaring themselves away from—American kids."

Perhaps most disturbing of all is how students are portrayed by academics. Todd Gitlin describes today's students in "Liberal Arts Versus Information Glut":

> students come to higher education today for largely vocational reasons. A diploma is seen as a meal ticket. . . . Society preaches to them about the overpowering value of money. They see little evidence that philosophy, literature, history, foreign languages, aesthetics or even coherent expression are valued. They arrive at the university immersed in high-technology media, with only the sketchiest command of history or Western literature, let alone experience in thinking about similarities and differences among diverse histories and literatures. Increasingly,

> their professors tell them that their education must be multicultural, but their grasp of any culture at all is slight. Few can write cogently, but they find little to help them do so in the ever more abstruse humanities.

Gitlin's purpose in this article is to argue for the important role the liberal arts might play in countering the information glut, and I do not think he deliberately demeans students. Yet, how he constructs students to make this argument—"how students of all stripes arrive at college with shallow and scattered educations, ill-prepared to learn"—does demean them, even if he blames others for students' current state. It is a characterization of students that permeates the halls of higher learning today.

Berl Falbaum is more direct in criticizing students: "Although the following observations are not based on any scientific research, after teaching at two state universities for some 30 years, it is clear to me and some of my colleagues who have taught for decades as well that today's students have been 'dumbed down.'" He goes on to give example after example of college students' inability to produce clear, coherent prose as well as their inclinations to cheat. Andrea Billups echoes these comments, even while citing "good news" about students and substance abuse: students "are less prepared than ever, for the rigors of higher education and seem more blasé about their studies."

Yet Mike Males, a sociologist at the University of California, Irvine and one of the nation's leading advocates for teenagers, contests these views. Males points to the irony of Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*, lauding the youth of the 1930s, by documenting how 1930s media condemned the same generation as "violent, mentally disturbed, drugged, lazy, promiscuous, criminal, and hopeless" ("Generation Gap"). He also contests claims about today's students' poor academic achievement: "Even after 25 years of massive public-school underfunding and classroom crowding, students display higher school enrollments, test scores, college preparatory work and volunteerism than their forebears." Males thus asserts that current attitudes toward young people are likewise misguided and, as they did in the 1930s, function to "whitewash the failures of the adult generation."

Fuentes looks specifically at perceptions of juvenile violence, asserting that youth crime has not increased, despite the fears and exaggerations resulting from recent school shootings. Fuentes cites studies by the Justice Department and the National Center for Juvenile Justice demonstrating that today's juvenile offenders are "not significantly younger than those of 10 or 15 years ago," nor are today's youth committing more violent acts as their predecessors of 15 years ago. Moreover, as Fuentes points out, the increase in juvenile arrests is more likely due to the shrinking "universe of permissible behavior"—for example,

curfew arrests—than because more teenagers are behaving criminally. Males points out, furthermore, that juveniles commit far fewer crimes than adults and, in fact, teenagers and children are far more at risk of being victimized by adults than by children or teens. (*Framing* 9) In fact, a majority of births to teenagers under sixteen result from sexual relations with men over that age (197). Criticizing the media's hyping of teens' self-reported sexual activity and debunking the notion that teenage girls are hypersexed, Males points to how poverty, disintegrated families, rape and sexual violence in childhood, and adult sexual pressures are more instructive of teen girls' sexual activity (196).

Why do Americans harbor such negativity toward young people? Certainly popular culture has played an important role in constructing public attitudes about youth. From shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and films such as *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me, South Park: Bigger, Longer, & Uncut,* and *American Pie,* young people are depicted as crass, vulgar, violent, promiscuous, and vapid. The music of youth culture, from the explicit violence, misogyny, and homophobia of Eminem to the hate-filled lyrics of Limp Bizkit, fares no better in swaying public opinion of young people, nor do magazines marketed for teens, such as *Seventeen, YM, Sassy,* and *Teen,* which portray scantily-clad young people and stories of teen sexual activity.[3] As Giroux notes, overly sexualized images of youth pervade television, advertising, and other popular culture forms, for corporate culture "makes a constant spectacle of children's bodies" to turn a profit ("Public" 23).

Perhaps even more important to the social construction of youth than pop culture is the response to it—by politicians, religious leaders, the media, and academics—who offer a never-ending barrage of assaults on pop culture's destructive potential on young people's morals. Males suggests that media does not corrupt youth, but "by presenting a systematically false image of teens," media "frames the public debate" (*Framing* 263). Indubitably, print media has fueled the anti-youth sentiment in our country. In the post-Columbine period, in particular, articles about teenagers, crime, violence, and values were pervasive, as journalists, psychologists, sociologists, criminal justice specialists, teachers, and parents tried to make sense of the tragedy. Any search through databases such as *Periodical Abstracts* or *ProQuest* underscores how negative these articles were towards young people; whether they outright attacked youth for their lack of values or sought causes for what was perceived as increased youth violence, collectively, print media constructed youth negatively—as a grave problem either to be dismissed or fixed. Headlines such as Elizabeth Mehren's "Tragedy in Colorado: Growing Gap Between Teens, Adults Creating a Cultural Divide" in *The Los Angeles Times* and Michael Schrage's "Disruptive Teens Totally Rule (Your Future)" in *Fortune* foster a rhetoric of

hate against young people. Saundra Smokes' "For Today's Teens, It's a Different—and More Violent—World," in *Masthead*, based on a conversation with 17 adolescents, constructs a teen world so frightful it reads like fiction.

Complicating Youth Culture in Composition: What Students' Texts Reveal

Responding to Giroux's call to factor youth into critical composition, I designed a course that I hoped would help students to see how language works to construct meaning and arm them with the rhetorical skills and critical understanding to write across and against their socially inscribed youth identities. I had not yet imagined how students' texts would reveal the several ways they construct themselves in response to the discursive representations that surround them. These insights both highlight the importance of what Giroux has asked educators to do as well as problematize the tasks, making more complex issues of "responsibility," "innocence," and "complicity." They impact Giroux's call for educators to "connect their work to the political task of making research, teaching, and learning part of the dynamic of democratic change itself" ("Public" 29) as they account for youth culture as a site of critique and reform. They require us to take our students' perspectives into account as we further consider youth culture at the intersection of politics, pedagogy, and social change.

In order to give a sense of the context in which these student texts were written, I will briefly describe the course and its purposes. Participating in this critical moment of defining their generation, my students in basic writing examined, interrogated, analyzed, and then wrote against the demonization of youth that permeates society's discussions and representations of young people. In collaboration with classmates as well as individually, students examined the rhetorical construction of youth in print journalism and popular culture, and students (re)wrote youth constructions through asserting the meanings they see in popular culture and by speaking to their peers in an interview essay.[4] The culminating project of the course extended students' writing from the academic to the public sphere.

What was particularly striking to me as students revealed themselves through their written and oral texts was their ambivalence about popular culture and how they might respond to it. While on the one hand they recognize how popular culture constructs teenagers in destructive ways, they embrace it passionately, while simultaneously buying in to many of its depictions. Although they were initially somewhat resistant to the assignment that asked them to take a frank and honest look at these images, my students were able to employ rhetori-

cal analysis to uncover popular culture's portrayals of young people. Kathy, for example, argues that the magazine, *Teen People*, "sends out a message to others that says teenagers only care about looks and getting a hot guy."[5] Todd, another student, studied the magazine, *Maxim*, and concludes, "young girls, in both the advertisements and the actual body of the magazine, are being portrayed as objects of men." In her analysis of MTV, another student, Justine, stresses the numbers of "young girls that were no older than twenty, wearing tight, barely there clothing" with "excessive amounts of make-up" singing songs about being "boy crazy." Justine then observes how lyrics such as "Hit me baby one more time" or "what a girl wants, what a girl needs" are sexualized, but what matters even more, she concludes, is that the videos are produced "not to show off the singer's voice, but to show off their body." Nidia, a great fan of Lil Kim and Foxy Brown, argues that they are "dressing 'sluttish' just to gain more attention and sell more records." Melinda writes about Eminem, arguing that his song about finding his wife cheating on him, in which the listener "hears Eminem brutally killing his wife," "pushed his limits and sets a bad example for his listeners."

And yet, despite some level of awareness of the marketing value and commercial rationale for such images and how media targets youth with its destructive images and messages, many of my students buy into these images. The constant barrage against youth culture has distorted my students' conceptions of themselves. Ramesh, Adam, Rob, and Justine begin their group essay by stating, "Many teens are leading troubled lives. Teens need to be helped, so they know right from wrong." However, when in our writing conference I expressed surprise that they had taken such a stance, each student looked back at me with surprise: none were consciously aware that they had made this assumption. Melinda, another student, interviewed three teens, all of whom "party," drink alcohol, and smoke marijuana fairly regularly but who are, in her mind, perfectly "typical" teenagers. For one student, Mike, interviews with his peers only reinforced for him what he had himself proclaimed throughout the course, both in his written and oral work: "These students said that our generation is very bad, but that it's not all our fault." Mike emphasizes his interview subjects' own admission to "immoral" behavior, but no matter how hard I pressed him, he was unable (or unwilling) to point to any specific behaviors, values, or attitudes that cause them to make such an assertion or cause him to take them at their word.

Students' constant criticism of parents was another important insight revealed by their work in the semester. The vast majority of students in the class described parents as "hypocrites," "uninvolved," "too wrapped up in their jobs," and "absent," yet very few of these students described *their own* parents this way. Todd, Marlene, and Jeff

use the following dramatic introduction to their group essay, connecting the misdeeds of young people with pop culture's influence in the absence of parents:

> Imagine being a seven year old child coming home from school having no one to greet you other than the television. This is a scenario that occurs to a large portion of our youth today. After school, we used to go outside and take part in extracurricular activities, which kept us away from popular culture media. Modern youth does not take part in as many extracurricular activities. Instead they stay inside and use their abundant resources available to them. Modern youth turns to popular culture media due to the lack of adult guidance.

These students' perceptions of parents and children today have been influenced to such an extent by what they hear around them that they speak nostalgically of the world in which they grew up. In our class discussions, no student in the class actually knew any young child who came home to an empty house. Adam, another student, emphasizes parental absence in his analysis of the television show, *Dawson's Creek.* Arguing that the show "reveals the pressures and social views teenagers may encounter in their lives," Adam asserts that "in the show the parents are not really involved in teenagers' lives. Dawson's parents are separated and seem to worry more about themselves than Dawson. . . . In today's society parents are also not connected with their child. The drama purposely has the parents in the episodes as little as possible."

While not mentioning parents specifically, Giroux directs much of his ire at an adult society that he believes cares more about material goods and profit than about its youth: "Too many adults rely on the commercial language of self-help and character formation to further their own obsession with themselves, and they ignore the social problems that adults create for young people, especially those who are disadvantaged by virtue of their class, gender, and race" ("Public" 25). Fuentes certainly echoes Giroux's sentiments about parents: "To an older America in a postindustrial world, children have become more of a liability than an asset. Middle-class parents calculate the cost of raising kids, including an overpriced college education, as they would a home mortgage." Mehren cites various positions blaming parents for alleged out-of-control teenage behavior: "Some say many adults are little more than overgrown adolescents themselves and that they are too self-obsessed to know what's happening with their own children. Others say grown-ups are too busy: working too many jobs and otherwise failing to connect with their kids. . . . Teachers say they have never seen so many mothers and fathers who have no idea how to

parent." A 1999 Kaiser Family Foundation study of 3000 children ages 2 through 18 indicates that children spend an average of 5 hours, 29 minutes every day with media for recreation, and that the total is higher for kids eight and older, who spend much of that time alone (Edwards). Donald F. Roberts, a professor of Communications at Stanford University and an author of the study, states, "Most parents will be dumbfounded by this...Most parents will say, 'Not my child.' And most parents will be wrong" (Edwards). In article after article, parents are constructed as materialistic, narcissistic, self-absorbed, and totally disconnected from their children's lives.

Students' constructions of youth and parents raise many important questions needing thoughtful consideration at the intersection of youth culture and critical composition and lead me to question my role as an educator. Primarily, these questions hinge on innocence, protection, independence, and responsibility, age-old questions made more compelling (and complicated) in the current climate of animosity toward young people. First, how do instructors respond to student attitudes toward parents? Are they mythologies, or are they reflective of adult society? As an educator and a parent of young children, I wonder about my own stake in believing that students' attitudes toward parents are internalized social constructions. Is it possible that parents today behave as my students describe them? As a working mother, I cannot help but question how my students' hostility towards (alleged) absent parents does not represent the backlash against feminism and choice. But am I ensnared in discursive constructions of feminism, unable (or unwilling) to consider the consequences of women's work roles and children's development? How do I respond as an educator? As a parent? As a working mother?

My students were also passionate about defending specific, often targeted forms of popular culture, despite the class' consensus that "popular culture"—in the abstract—took over where absent parents abdicated their responsibilities and left kids vulnerable. Nidia, whose earlier essay discussed the "sleazy" and "sluttish" images of musical artists Lil Kim and Foxy Brown, defends rap in familiar ways: "rappers have a right to express their opinion," "teens like rap's beats and rhythms," and "rap doesn't cause me to kill anyone." At the same time, she takes issue with the alleged connection she'd come across in her reading between low test scores for African American youth and rap music: "once again the media is trying to blame rap music, when in fact the problem is lack of good schools in urban neighborhoods. The reason why we lack good schools is lack of funding. Children that live in the suburbs receive more money." Nidia's text reveals important contradictions: a simultaneous defense of popular culture and an awareness of its potential to reinscribe rhetorics of injustice.

Justine's interview with some of her peers revealed that one stu-

dent "looked up to" Fred Durst, the lead singer from Limp Bizkit, "not because of the trashy lyrics" but because "he's never afraid to speak his mind." Justine thus concludes that Durst "seems to be apositive role model in that he will always stick to what he believes in and that is a positive thing for many teens." Giroux stresses the need for educators to allow young people to speak for themselves about pop culture, to consider how young people use these venues as "site[s] of negotiation" ("Public" 20). And yet, I cannot help but wonder whether Justine and her peers fail to consider how their understandings might be framed in terms of how youth are sold to mainstream society. What, then, are compositionists' roles as educators in providing sites for teenagers to negotiate and resist media depictions of them? If I encourage students to negotiate meaning in rhetorical and popular constructions, should I also make them aware of how their negotiations are necessarily limited? Am I naively affording my students too much volition, when it may be that their discourse is institutionally, rather than individually, controlled?

This question is made even more complex by what Giroux refers to as the "myth of childhood innocence" ("Public"14). and how it works to erase young people's civil rights and agency. The myth of childhood innocence, Giroux argues, constructs children as white, middle-class, static, and passive. This social construct denies children any role in political spheres and leads to the "erosion of students' civil rights" ("Public" 18). What do we expect from students as they negotiate youth culture, pop culture, and youth identities? How do we balance responsibility with protection?

For the most part, my students agree with Giroux's claims about the increasing restrictions on young people. They do not want adults—their parents or anyone else—censoring or restricting what they can watch, listen to, or play. As Kathy asserts, "What I've learned from my interviews [with four teenagers] was that teenagers like to feel like they can make their own decisions. Also, when parents tell their children that they can't do things it makes the teen want to do it more." Justine's interviews suggested to her that adults should "not be concerned" with the music teenagers are attracted to and should let teenagers listen to it without restrictions. After conducting his own survey, Adam argues that young people, by and large, use the internet productively and should not be restricted, even if "some teenagers do use chat rooms to verbally abuse other people online" or to access instructions on how to build bombs.

My students spoke about how it felt to be treated as criminals during their final year of high school, and one after another told similar stories about lockers being searched for drugs and weapons as well as students being interviewed and interrogated. Todd, for example, talks about interrogations after bomb threats were called into the school,

and male students "were required to show proof of where they were when the calls were made." He writes about how a "fleet of assistant principals was on patrol at all times" and describes how demeaned he felt when he was stopped in the hall and questioned for missing a hall pass when he was late due to a doctor's appointment. Melinda describes her high school as a "prison" after the Columbine shootings, as "different cliques were torn apart and investigated" for problems. Mike criticizes random drug testing of student athletes which "puts a guilty label on most innocent students" and "violates students' privacy."

Students' ambivalence over the destructive potential of popular culture, their defense of it, and their strong opposition to the increasing restrictions placed on them as a result of society's fears about/for youth raises some complex issues. Joseph Harris argues that cultural studies pedagogy in composition must allow students to "write as people who are at once rock fans *and* intellectuals" (35), because as our students simultaneously experience and critique their cultural world, we give ourselves the opportunity to "listen to and learn from" them (36). And just what do we learn? My students' ambivalences problematize questions about young people's as well as instructors' complicity in social constructions of youth. They also problematize how critical educators might position themselves in relationship to students' rights and responsibilities. When students insist, as they often do, that the violence in pop culture is meaningless for them because they are not violent and they have good morals, are they failing to realize how media frames youth, even if it doesn't corrupt youth? And does this serve the larger crusade against youth, if youth uncritically align themselves with these depictions in popular culture? To what extent should students be held responsible for their embrace of repugnant forms of popular culture? On the other hand, what are the implications when we ask students to critically analyze their attraction to the violent and misogynistic forms of rap, for example? Are we fueling anti-youth constructions? When do we allow youth to simply experience popular culture without expecting them to be critical in their response to it?

These questions become even more profound as we consider them in light of the racialized nature of the demonization of youth. Giroux rightly argues that the attacks on youth have insidious racial undertones. The liberal assault on pop culture is both racialized and "Victorian," he argues, a nostalgia for the white middle-class lifestyle now corrupted by electronic technologies as well as the influence of minority culture (hip hop, etc.) ("Public" 19). For minority youths, the myth of childhood innocence, yields two results: they are viewed as a threat to middle-class life and subsequently "disposable" ("Public" 21), or they are "commercial[ly] appropriat[ed]" (21).

In my class, issues of race arose in students' writing and our class discussions because many students chose to write about hip hop and

rap. One student, Ramesh, an Indian student who spoke often, openly, and eloquently of his own victimization by racism, wrote about Tupac Shakur: how he presented himself, the image he chose, deliberately, to project. Ramesh writes, "Tupac wears a black bandana, has his nose, both his ears pierced, has tattoos of people who have passed away, wears heavy amounts of jewelry, and wears 'ghetto clothes.' This image has begun to frighten a lot of the adults." Ramesh then discusses the violent lyrics and vulgar language in the same vein, concluding that Shakur and his lyrics are "dangerous" and "terrifying."

But it took heated class discussions and a lot of urging from me (in our writing conference and in my comments on his drafts) for Ramesh to look at Shakur from this critical perspective. Perhaps he simply capitulated to "what the teacher wants," or perhaps he finally acknowledged how Tupac was being marketed (and marketing himself) to fit a particular image, one that mainstream society fears and that perhaps these teens weren't even aware they were buying into. Either way, I can't help but wonder whether by asking Ramesh to more closely examine the image *I* believe Shakur projects, I became complicit in reinforcing negative stereotypes of black youth. Again, as I encouraged students to resist these discursive constructions, did I fail to adequately address the ways in which I am entrapped by those same constructions?

Arguably, students' associations with rap music are racialized (even racist, according to some researchers). Jack Solomon, a professor of English at Cal State Northridge, questions the staying power of gang-related fashions in middle-class suburbia, concluding that, "A lot of suburban kids dress like gangsters because they admire gangsters. The menacing appearance, the capacity for sudden violence, simply looks cool to a lot of middle-class kids without gang affiliations." Yvonne Bynoe argues differently, asserting that white suburban youths' embrace of gangster fashions and music represents "the re-emergence of the White Negro." Suburban white kids, she argues, coopt a narrow and stereotypical view of Blackness as an act of rebellion against mainstream society: "For whites brought up in suburbia or in affluent, homogenous urban neighborhoods, the biggest, nastiest, lustiest, most uninhibited edge they can find in their nearly all white experience is dressing 'black,' talking 'black,' and walking 'black;' even as their 'black' is a distorted MTV version."

These are difficult and potentially explosive issues for students. Most students disagreed vehemently with both Solomon's and Bynoe's claims, viewing their allegiance to rap music as signs of racial tolerance. They argued that hip hop fashions are no different than any generation's "rebellious" fashions, and that Solomon's and Bynoe's views, not theirs, are prejudiced. One student, who took issue with Bynoe by defending white youth's embrace of the gangsta culture,

nevertheless exposes how her own newly acquired appreciation of gangsta rap reinforces negative images of black youth, even as she tries to defend the music and her white friends' embrace of it. She writes about how one of her African American friends introduced her to rap music, which she now "appreciates" and listens to regularly. But then she goes on to talk about how this black friend "is different from other young Black kids because he doesn't really use slang or curse a lot."

Giroux begins to address some of these questions of educators' responsibilities when he asserts that we can challenge abhorrent representations of youth in media culture without aligning ourselves with conservative politics. Progressive educators, he argues, can both protect First Amendment rights and rights to artistic expression even for material they find offensive and simultaneously "take up what it means to provide an ethical discourse from which to criticize those images, discourses, and representations that might be destructive to the psychological health of children or serve to undermine the normative foundations of a viable democracy" (*Channel* 6). I agree with these assertions, see them as even more complicated than Giroux implies. The "ethical discourse" to which he refers is not easily defined, nor can we easily or uncritically work our way out of the trap of our own complicity in discourses to which we feel allegiance. The ideological conflicts at the intersection of youth culture, feminism, racial politics, liberalism, and conservative agendas are far more complex than I imagined when I initiated this project. Clearly, these issues beg further inquiry as we bring youth culture into composition's critique.

Rhetorical Interventions: (Re)Writing Youth in Basic Writing

Giroux's article on youth culture was published at approximately the same time as the Spring 2000 special issue of *JBW*, which centered on the current and future status of basic writing. Giroux's article resonated for me in light of *JBW*'s focus on the justness of basic writing's very existence and the Othering of basic writers. This issue's articles on the assault on basic writing—and on the students in basic writing—from basic writing's inception to the present day illustrated the unsettling fact that our students in basic writing are *twice-demonized*—marginalized both as youth and as basic writers.[6] Although Giroux never specifically mentions basic writing or students in basic writing as he encourages compositionists to factor youth culture into its critique, as a teacher of basic writing, I was particularly inspired to act.

From the inception of basic writing programs in the Open Admissions movements of the 1960s and 70s, students in basic writing have been demonized by both popular/news media and academic

elites, labeled as "'not belonging' to the academy" (Horner and Lu, "Introduction" xv). Tracing the history of the Open Admissions policy at CUNY, Bruce Horner describes how opponents framed the debate in terms of the "intellectually undeserving" students draining resources and thus depriving "intellectually deserving" students of academic excellence (7). Significantly, even advocates of Open Admissions participated in the demonizing discursive constructions of these students, demarcating social goals of Open Admissions as separate from the goals of "academic excellence" (10), since these students were largely perceived as politically active (as opposed to intellectually motivated), "'unqualified' blacks and Puerto Ricans" (8), when most were whites of working-class backgrounds (8).[7] Still today, students in basic writing are viewed skeptically by some faculty in English and across the disciplines: many faculty in English refuse to teach "those students," and many faculty across the disciplines complain endlessly of these students as a threat to academic standards.

Laura Gray-Rosendale's analysis of the discursive history of basic writers' identity similarly emphasizes how students in basic writing have been identified as outside the mainstream, even by basic writing specialists themselves. Tracing the discursive construction of basic writers' identities from the cognitive developmentalist model to the socially constituted/ initiation/academic discourse model to the conflict model (gendered, raced, and classed forces acting upon the basic writer), Gray-Rosendale argues that the basic writer's identity in each of these three dominant models is marginalized and ghettoized, delimited "according to a deficit theory model, an etiological 'problem' that the Basic Writer endures, be it cognitive, discursive, or social, in spite of professed efforts to work outside a diagnosis/cure model" (126-27). Paradoxically, then, even those who care most deeply about these students have furthered the Othering of students in basic writing.

Presently, the public, political assault on basic writing programs reinforces the marginalization of students in basic writing. Deborah Mutnick points to Nancy Romer's observation that a key strategy in the campaign to eliminate remedial programs at CUNY's eleven senior colleges was "to demonize students in remedial programs" (73), which in turn "'humiliated the students of CUNY into stunned inaction'" (qtd. in Mutnick 73). Equally significant, the assault on remedial programs, like assaults on academic support programs and on affirmative action and like the demonization of youth Giroux describes, is racialized, "disqualifying poorly-prepared minorities and discouraging those who are better prepared from even applying" (Mutnick 75). Moreover, the public assault on basic writing programs from outside academia are based on negative attitudes towards the very youth that can profitably benefit from them, and is thus another example of how educational downsizing and the elimination of social programs are

premeditated attempts to limit access to those already disenfranchised.

Finally, mainstreaming proponents within our own discipline point to the pernicious labels placed on basic writers by virtue of the existence of basic writing programs. Judith Rodby and Tom Fox assert that "basic" is a construct that supports an inequitable credit system, so that basic writing is punitive (84-85).[8] For Ira Shor, basic writing is "our apartheid",[9] constructing students as "cultural deficit[s]" ("Illegal" 102) and targeting students of color and low socioeconomic status to maintain inequality rather than promote democracy (107). My point here is not to argue for mainstreaming, but rather to underscore the manner in which many of our students in basic writing have been doubly marginalized: as basic writers and as youth.

Given the complexities of students' positionings within social constructions of youth, how can we, as critical educators, respond to Giroux's call to factor youth into critical composition? How can we negotiate our own contradictory positions to intervene in such constructions, help students gain a more critical understanding of how discursive construction occurs, and help them feel empowered to resist and rewrite those constructions? In particular, how do we answer Giroux's call for students in basic writing?

In some ways, these are not new questions. Indeed, compositionists have long considered how we can help our students to feel empowered to act if we are all constituted by multiple discourses. But there's something uniquely compelling for students in basic writing when they have the opportunity to rhetorically deconstruct youth culture and *see* discourse in action as it constructs youth. Just as discourse can construct young people so negatively, so might young people use discourse to turn those constructions back on themselves, to configure and reconfigure "the codes, scripts, or terministic screens that define individuals as helpless ciphers" and replace them with "narratives that enable democratic participation" (Berlin 98). As Alan France asserts, our curricula should help students understand the "dialectic between self and culture" (149) so that they can "learn to assemble and assimilate the fragments of postmodern experience into a coherent, self-conscious identity in order to communicate, or to join discourse communities, as we say" (149). Like Berlin and France, I believe we can assist students to become aware of how they are multiply constituted as a first step toward social action.

Pedagogically, youth culture as a site of critique in basic writing has distinct advantages. Students in basic writing need to be better readers of texts (written and visual). They must learn to apply rhetorical analysis to understand how texts are rhetorically constructed as well as how texts construct rhetorically their subjects so students might see more clearly how writing works in our world to create rather than merely reflect meaning. Students in basic writing need to be empow-

ered with a sense of agency by having the opportunity to write back against the assaults on them; they need to claim discursive power and became meaning-makers. They need opportunities to deconstruct their world or their identities and also to (re)construct them.

In my course, I tried to provide opportunities for students to claim their discursive agency by re-writing their socially inscribed, and often demonized, youth identities in academic and public discourses and empower students with a sense of their own potential to make a difference. In the pages that follow, I discuss one specific strategy from this course that I hoped provided opportunities for students to take on the role of "cultural workers" who might begin the movement to "reclaim the promise of democracy for the lived majority of citizens" (Giroux, *Channel* 17). As I will suggest, this strategy was one way for students to begin to negotiate questions of innocence, responsibility, and complicity.

In their final writing project for my course, students wrote for the public sphere, as a letter-to-the-editor for mainstream print media and in other forms for alternative media. This assignment was a logical extension of our work in the course, which encouraged various mixtures of academic and non-academic discourse forms. I firmly believe that helping students appropriate academic discourse is among the most important work we do in basic writing, for it is through their ability to operate inside academic discourse that students can choose to reinforce or resist injustices that discursive codes, such as academic discourse, reinscribe. But I also recognize the limitations of academic discourse in its tendency to reproduce hegemonies, for evaluating students on their adeptness with academic discourse ignores or dismisses the diverse and multiple literacies they have at their disposal, and of course marginalizes those discourses (see Bizzell; Bartholomae). While accurately observing that "what has remained constant" in academic discourse even as it has changed over time is "the privileged social position of whatever currently counts as academic discourse" (6), Patricia Bizzell rightfully argues that scholars' discursive innovations should be extended to our students' writing.

Furthermore, I believe it was vital for my students to write beyond the academic community and into the public sphere, in other forms and for other venues. By taking their writing out of the classroom, students began the process by which they could intervene discursively in rhetorical constructions of youth. As Giroux argues, cultural studies theorists and practitioners (and I assume he would include students as well) should "speak to multiple audiences and actively engage . . . in broader public conversations" ("Cultural" 530). The course's focus on youth culture gave students a meaningful and potentially fruitful conversation in which to participate. It enabled them to see how politics and power intersect, and how vital it is for all of

us—our students included—to become a force in these intersections, to direct traffic there, and to disrupt the ways in which knowledge and practices are produced, distributed, and imbued with meaning.

But what kind of public space is available to students in basic writing? Is there a public space in which their writing will be taken seriously? Referring to Jurgen Habermas' definition of the public sphere as a place where private citizens engage in debate, Susan Wells notes, however, that while ideally the "public sphere promises equality of access and discussion governed by rationality, with no holds barred, no topic off limits" (327), such is not usually the case for students. Certainly this dilemma is intensified for students in basic writing, whose difficulties with writing limit their access.[10]

In my course, many students chose a traditional public venue, submitting letters-to-the-editor to *The Reading Eagle/Times*, the local newspaper. Despite the constraints on basic writers in the public sphere, one student, Pam, had her letter published in *The Reading Eagle/Times* in December, 2000. In her letter, Pam cites the "inflammatory adjectives" that have been used to describe teens—"rude," "irresponsible," and "wild"—but counters that "In my experience these inflammatory adjectives do not apply to teens" and that when the media chooses to describe teens so negatively, "they are widening the gap of understanding between teens and adults." Melinda, another student, argued in her letter that the newspaper's positive articles about young people are placed mainly in the Sports section rather than in the front news section.

Wells argues that we must construct a public sphere for our students (328); although I did attempt to construct such a sphere in my course, and although one student was successful in becoming a participant in a traditional public venue, the more significant result was that some of my students constructed these spaces for themselves through the World Wide Web, providing unique opportunities to negotiate youth culture outside teacherly authority. My students taught me that there are now numerous public venues in which they can participate—even as students in basic writing—and it is vital that we continue to encourage students to participate in these public forums. One very effective type of venue for my students was online mainstream news sources, such as *cnn.com* and *time.com*. Justine wrote her essay on the negative portrayal of teens on *cnn.com*. When she searched the site and realized there was no place for her to contribute these ideas and begin a conversation on the issues, she chose to contact *cnn.com* through their "Feedback" feature, requesting that the editors "take [her] writing into consideration as a possible discussion topic," *cnn.com*'s main interactive feature. The Message Boards and Chats on such sites as *cnn.com* allow students to venture out into the public arena with their written words, and we should take more advantage of such public

forums.

Another student, Amy, chose *DoSomething.org*, self-described as a "nationwide network of young people who know they can make a difference and take action to change the world around them." In her essay, which she submitted to this website, Amy (re)writes society's negative depictions of youth through the assaults on youth music. She writes that Britney Spears and the Backstreet Boys are "good role models for young kids today," citing their community work and affiliation with *DoSomething.org*. Specifically, Amy points to the articles written about these musicians on *DoSomething.org*, *Yahoo!Music*, and *RollingStone.com*, asserting that "the authors of these articles are helping to portray youth in a positive way."

Through Amy's and other students' work in the public sphere, I have learned more about the possibilities of these public youth forums as venues for students in basic writing to participate in public politics. These sites provide ways for us to heed Giroux's call to seek opportunities for youth to "narrate themselves, to speak from the actual places where their experiences and daily lives are shaped and mediated" (*Channel* 31). As such, they help educators negotiate our role in such a process. In these public venues, students negotiate youth culture outside the purview of their instructors and thus help us to reconcile the complexities of students' innocence, responsibility, and complicity. Student participation in the public sphere does not absolve us of these complexities, but they do provide a "moment" when students can exert a measure of control over how they will mediate social constructions of youth.

(Re)Writing Youth in Basic Writing: Implications for Research and Practice

I believe there are many further possibilities for factoring youth culture into basic writing, and I will briefly mention a few of them here. Linda Adler-Kassner's recent work in basic writing suggests that we help students to understand what it means to be students in basic writing in their college or university in order to help them contest those labels ("Just Writing"). I see fruitful connections between students' reconstructions of their collective youth identities and their institutionalized status as students in basic writing. Like the curricula Adler-Kassner suggests, my curriculum centered on "helping writers develop alternative conceptions of themselves" as they became writers whose work made a difference and who were able to bring what they knew to enrich and inform knowledge-making in our classes (Adler-Kassner, "Just Writing" 81; See also "REVIEW").

Another direction I see for rewriting youth would involve fur-

ther inquiry into the relationship between youth culture and race. Although this relationship was not a central component of my course, the work we did on this subject leads me to believe that factoring youth culture into the critique might open a window to other rhetorics of injustice, providing a unique opportunity for white, middle-class youth to see how rhetorics of injustice can be destructive and exploitative. Factoring "dominant" students into the critique through an emphasis on youth culture might fruitfully put these students in the margins as they "variously stand with the oppressor and the oppressed" (Alexander 275).

The intersections of gender and the demonization of youth might also be productively explored in basic writing. Despite some discussion of girls with regard to their sexualized images in mass culture, Giroux largely ignores gender issues and uses the term "youth" without critical attention to gender. Jackson Katz and Sut Jhally argue that this gender neutrality was all too common in the Columbine aftermath, but that this tragedy was "not a case of kids killing kids. This [was] boys killing boys and boys killing girls. What these school shootings reveal is not a crisis in youth culture but a crisis in masculinity." Students in basic writing classes might explore the nuances of gender in youth culture, exploring how media constructs male and female teenagers differently.

As Lu and Horner suggest, there is much to be gained when students' writing motivates basic writing faculty to escape the perspectives in which we are fluent and "locked" (47). By listening to my students' critical reflections on youth, pop culture, and even (especially) parents, I was forced to reflect on my own assumptions about youth. I am much more aware of how my own contempt for violent, misogynist, homophobic and otherwise insidious forms of popular culture should not be misdirected at young people. I need to heed Ann Powers' cautionary remarks that young people often feel that assaults on popular culture are assaults on them. It is not only popular culture that can harm young people; most likely, it's our responses to pop culture—and to young people—that can do the most harm. In my research and my classrooms, I intend to continue to work through questions of complicity: of my own and students' rights and responsibilities when it comes to media representations of youth as well as adults' and young people's responses to them.

I will thus echo Giroux's call to encourage compositionists to include youth culture in critical composition—as well as emphasize its import to basic writing research and pedagogy—to create "pedagogical conditions for students to critically engage knowledge as deeply implicated in issues and struggles concerning the production of identities, culture, power, and history" (Giroux, "Cultural" 511). Together with our students, in our classrooms and in our research, we can "re-

write the importance of what it means to treat youth with dignity and respect" (Giroux, *Channel* 33).

Notes

1. Like Linda Adler-Kassner, I have deliberately chosen to use the phrase "students in basic writing" rather than "basic writing students" or "basic writers" (REVIEW 232). I, too, am concerned with how these labels emphasize students' deficiencies.

2. I have not made any changes to students' texts.

3. The research I found on teen magazines for girls focuses on girls' socialization and their understandings of femininity through the magazines rather than the image of teenage girls presented (for example, see Duke).

4. I began the course by assigning eight articles addressing youth culture collected from a wide variety of print media. These articles included Edwards; Fuentes; Gottschalk; Kantrowitz and Wingert; Males, "Generation Gap"; Mehren; Miller; and Romero.

5. Throughout this article, I use pseudonyms for my students.

6. While many basic writing programs have a large number of non-traditional age students, at Penn State, Berks Lehigh Valley, where I teach, 18 and 19-year-olds dominate classes in basic writing. In the course under study, I had one non-traditional age student out of a class of sixteen.

7. Citing a study by Nancy Romer (1999), Deborah Mutnick points out, however, that Black and Latino enrollments increased enormously at CUNY after Open Admissions, and that basic writing, "for all its internal contradictions, has played a vital role in increasing access to higher education, in particular for working-class people of color" (72).

8. Judith Rodby and Tom Fox differentiate themselves from conservatives whose arguments against basic writing have to do with "limiting access" to higher education (8).

9. Shor uses this phrase in the title of his well-known article, "Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction and Inequality."

10. Not only is their writing less likely to be accepted into the public sphere, students' lack of confidence in their writing likely makes

students in basic writing reluctant to submit it. Indeed, in the beginning of the semester, when I first mentioned their final project involving public writing, most students laughed or rolled their eyes. But by semester's end, there was quite a change, as many students embraced the assignment and expressed great hope and desire to see their writing published.

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THE MOMMIFICATION OF WRITING INSTRUCTION: A TALE OF TWO STUDENTS

Abstract: *The questions explored in this paper grow out of a long career in the teaching of composition, and out of relationships with literally thousands of students. Centering on two allows an especially complex dimension of such relationships to be treated with some necessary personal depth. The issue of teacher as mother is with most of us, students and teachers alike, from the first moment we set foot in a classroom. Indeed, the issue of mother as teacher – and, by extension, woman as nearly everyone's first teacher – is one that has abided with us for as long as humans have abided as a race. The personal way in which this picture of woman as primal teacher speaks to so many of us in composition may not abide for as long, but is in no danger just now – for good or ill – of fading.*

When I began teaching composition 10 years ago, I don't think I even considered the question of whether I would be some kind of mother figure to my students. Looking back now, though, whether I consciously thought about it or not, I most certainly counted on it in order to do the kind of work I wanted to do with students. That included a good deal of "personal" writing—often separate from their "academic" writing, and other times, in tandem with it. This meant not only a lot of autobiographical papers, but the keeping of daybooks (Donald Murray's more expansive and liberatory version of the journal) in which students, not infrequently, shared some pretty intimate confidences with me. It did not occur to me at the time—at least, not as a fully conscious question I could ask myself—that perhaps, their willingness to do so meant that I represented some form of the maternal to them. I still can't know with absolute certainty if this was so, given the multiplicity of meanings and resonances the very word *maternal* has for most people, but my recent explorations into this long, multi-faceted metaphor of my teaching experience confirm it. Indeed, I am now convinced that the female teacher often finds herself located in some subset where the teacher's universe intersects with the

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mother's.

I began my investigation by asking several of my mostly female colleagues, composition instruction being what it is, whether their experiences in their classes bore any suspicious earmarks of mother-ness. Did they get many student confessionals? Did they encourage them, simply accept them, or try to deflect them? Did they receive treatment from students they felt was designed to elicit a motherlike response from them? Did they themselves consciously encourage this motherly view of themselves?

I found that many shared this sense of surrogate motherhood and responded in a variety of ways. Some clearly relished this aspect of their classroom experience, and encouraged it by putting their home telephone numbers on their syllabus, and being consistently available to hear students' personal troubles and triumphs. Others just as clearly resented it, and made sure to actively and verbally reject being cast in any role smacking of motherhood, seemingly with no regrets whatsoever at any possible lost opportunities to better understand—dare I say nurture?—students as a way to help them achieve. Most, however, myself included, seemed to fall somewhere between these two extremes, on a spectrum consisting of a wide variety of responses to the notion of teacher as mother.

I think it's important to mention that my male colleagues did not seem to be particularly interested in whether or not they manifested as father figures to their students. This is not to say that they did not have close, personal relationships with certain students, or that they did not admit to using their teacherly authority in a fatherly way. It simply did not seem to stay with them as an abiding concern. And most did express some degree of surprise that students were sharing "secrets" with me, related to sexual orientation, abortion, difficulties at home, and abuse as a child. What this is indicative of needs a good deal more exploration, as the sampling was small, and the ages of my male colleagues in composition rather young.

With this very subjective and preliminary evidence, I have come to believe that female teachers are more apt to experience what I will call "echoes of motherhood" in the classroom, sometimes appearing as deep closeness with students, by virtue of assignments and other communications, and sometimes as a deep discontent with the role. But does the mere presence of a woman as an authority figure, particularly in a composition class, open up a space in which students are apt to expect a certain amount of motherliness? I think that in asking that question, I've answered it.

It may be that students can not avoid some sort of parental expectation when faced with a teacher of either sex, but the imposition of "mommyness" onto a female authority figure seems particularly *de rigeur* in a culture that is most comfortable with female authority in the

guise of the mother. While this paper is mainly concerned with the uneasy crossing over of the unstable boundary between teacher and mother, I will return to the question of teacher as father as one growing in importance. But my main purpose remains to, quite shamelessly, explore my central questions primarily with my own experience. The perspectives of Max Van Manen, Sara Ruddick and bell hooks I use (just as shamelessly) to further complicate and clarify this huge piece of one teacher's experience. This approach I offer in lieu of any personal "definition" of motherhood. First of all, that is a definition I cannot compose in 25,000 words or less. And given the almost endless experiences and conclusions every teacher of either gender has accumulated and formulated about teacherhood as motherhood, such a definition by me seems, in every sense of the word, academic. Besides, I don't think a definition is what's needed, so much as what I will call an *active understanding* of this classroom dynamic.

I believe that many students, including adults in continuing education classes, make an assumption, often quite unconscious, that they can expect and in fact, demand, a certain amount of "maternal" behavior from a female teacher, a demand shaped and modified by the teacher's individual temperament, age, style of dress, and any number of other subtle cues. While this has, as I've indicated, many a time been a blessing for me, given the kind of unorthodox and personally rooted work I often ask for, it has also been a curse when I am expected to listen patiently to a long list of ailments and other mishaps as excuses for why a student has been out for two weeks, or why work is chronically late. I know all teachers must listen to excuses, and then weigh them in the balance scales of standards vs. compassion. One of the most outrageous examples of a student not only treating me as she might her mother, but, in the process, regressing into some kind of third grade mindset, occurred during the Fall 1999 semester in a freshman composition class.

The student was a young woman, but no teenager – perhaps mid to late twenties -- and, in fact, a mother herself. She had missed a good deal of school during the first few weeks of the fall term, then came in and told me she'd "been sick." She came to two classes, and then stayed out another week and a half. This time when she returned wearing a neck brace, she told me she'd been in a car accident, showed me a doctor's note, and promised to make up the work she'd missed. We agreed on a date about a week and a half hence on which all the work would be due. The date came and went, and she missed that particular class. The next class she showed up with half the work, said that the injuries she'd sustained from the accident had been plaguing her and she'd finish the work by the very next class. I was losing my patience, but stayed pretty laid back, and told her the term was progressing, and she needed to get caught up in order to work on the newer

and more challenging assignments already in play. She said she understood.

Before the next class, I was checking my phone mail at school, and received a message that was clearly from her—I recognized her voice; also, CCNY phone mail that comes from anywhere on campus will give the extension the person is calling from. This particular student had obviously called from the college office where she worked part-time. I could barely believe my ears. I heard, in a very formal accent and cadence reeking with phoniness and discomfort, "Hello, Miss Tabachnikov, this is Cindy Jenkins' mother (name changed to protect the guilty), and I wanted to let you know that Cindy can't make it to class today because she's very ill with a stomach virus." *Hesitation, guilty gulping and breathing, then:* "Thank you very much."

My system didn't know whether to collapse in paroxysms of hysterical laughter, or "blow a gasket", as we used to say up home in the Bronx, in righteous anger. I remembered that when I was 15 or 16 and in high school, I had a friend who worked for the Dean of Discipline; she accepted all of my written excuses for absence—from "my mother"—and occasionally helped me to compose them. And of course, I remembered that unspoken agreement I had with my own mother—I'd lie and, as long as it wasn't too outrageous, she'd believe me. "Of course I was at school! Who told you she saw me here at 9 in the morning with 6 friends?" Still, I don't think I ever would have attempted a prank like Cindy's, and I was at a loss as to exactly how to handle it.

I guess the logical thing, the "teacherly" thing to do, and the most professional, would've been to call her back immediately and tell her that I did not take at all kindly to that kind of immature behavior, nor to having my good nature taken advantage of, and that I especially resented having my intelligence so grievously insulted. It was what I would normally have done. But I was rushing to get to class, and so put it on the back burner until other concerns drove it from my mind altogether.

Two days later, Cindy showed up at my office about ten minutes before class was to begin—the only occasion she was actually on time to a class. I was wolfing down the last of my dinner and talking on the phone to a friend. I asked Cindy rather brusquely to wait outside the office. I don't really know what possessed me next. Perhaps I had finally had enough of having to be consistently mature in the face of some pretty outrageous boundary violations. Why should students be the only ones allowed to "act out"? Dammit, I wanted some fun, too. I began telling my friend pretty loudly that a student was there to speak to me, and boy, had she pulled the most unbelievable stunt I'd ever encountered in my ten years teaching. I left my friend unsatisfied as to the nature of this outrage, preferring to call Cindy in at that stra-

tegic moment. I was sure she had heard my conversation. It was all I could do not to rub my hands together and twirl an invisible moustache as she entered in an obvious snit, yet too thrown off to look me straight in the eye. I cut off her new litany of excuses as to why the elusive assignments were "almost finished but not quite," and told her we'd continue this discussion after class.

I remember a good deal of sulking from Cindy as I taught in that small classroom, punctuated by some very pointed killer looks in my direction, and a long period of time when she was on an extended "break." At the end of class, I did not rush to "handle" her, but spent a leisurely time talking to two or three other students. She did not wait, and did not come back to class again. She never officially dropped the class, so I dropped her. I can't say I'm sorry. More than a decade of experience teaching composition tells me she would not have shaped up, and was too far behind to hope for a decent grade.

This "roundabout" form of pedagogy—or perhaps passive-aggressive would be a better description—was a real departure for me, as direct and even confrontive as I tend to be. I don't think what I did diminished the mother role I felt Cindy had foisted upon me, but instead destabilized it some, taking full advantage of the mother's "other" stereotype: her unique, guilt-producing and chameleon-like punitive nature, rather than her endlessly long-suffering one. Either way, I enjoyed it, and I got what I wanted, and, I would venture to say, Cindy got what she so desperately needed. I have long held to the precept that a lot of what students learn, particularly from basic composition courses, has nothing to do with the course content, but more with an awakening sense of what it means to commit to being a student. And this may be very closely connected to what it means to commit to being a child, lying in the simple yet powerful epiphany that there are times to question authority and times to just accept it. The terrors of making choices and picking battles are rough waters to negotiate. Cindy was not that good a swimmer yet, and this kind of sloppy form often requires failure, or an early departure.

It occurs to me now that this comparison on my part bespeaks an embrace of the parental role in teaching. I don't think it can be avoided. For me, it offers a new challenge: Can I embrace my 'mommyness' and use it to the best possible advantage in my work? Certainly, I'd often commisserated with students, even held them and cried with them after terrible losses and traumas, including rape and the death of a loved one. I'd also scolded them, sometimes mildly, other times harshly for their transgressions. But I don't remember taking such a questionable, yet unquestionably natural and human liberty as I did with Cindy.

To continue in my own confessional vein, I was embarrassed for several months by this decidedly unteacherly response to Cindy, and

also a little bit thrilled. I believe the thrill came from what I perceived as an unprecedented opening in my ability to give students what they came for—a good lesson—and in a most unexpected way.

Sara Ruddick, in her book, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, defines good mothering as that which fosters growth in a child; in other words, it will "nurture a child's developing spirit—whatever in a child is lively, purposive, and responsive." (82) I think that one can easily substitute the word "student" for "child" and "teacher" for "mother" in the above and, in fact, in much of what Ruddick writes. However, she sees and accepts as natural and often productive all sides of motherhood. I agree: Even the ambivalence she insists is a constant companion to the fierce love in motherhood, comes to the teacher in similar, if less extreme ways: "Mother-love is intermixed with hate, sorrow, impatience, resentment, and despair." (68) Ruddick quotes a piece of dialog from Jane Lazarres' *The Mother Knot*, in which a young mother says of her children, "I love them and everything, but I hate them." (68) After reading this and another account by Ruddick of a young and very devoted mother who, after weeks of sleep deprivation, fantasized about throwing her perpetually cranky, squalling infant girl out a window, I gave up a lot of the guilt I had about giving Cindy a dose of her own medicine, not to mention some other unpleasant feelings I'd harbored for other students over the years.

It occurs to me that a 'reasonable,' by the book—the Education 101 textbook, that is—response to Cindy might not have served her that well. She was quite sharp (fortunately, I was sharper), and not a bad writer the few times she handed something in. And I would also hazard a guess that she came to comprehend quite easily where my behavior was coming from. Also, I "know" (second-hand, from friends and relatives, being childless myself) that an experienced mother will grow very relaxed about being natural and spontaneous with her children, eventually giving up the constant, nagging fear that any false step will ultimately send them into therapy for at least half of their adult lives. As an experienced pedagogical mother, I am also quite inclined now to be myself, and I am no more anyone's stereotypical idea of a mother than I am of a teacher. If I had to give it a label? *Butch Mommy.* That's me. But, lest one misread "Butch" as "unrelentingly tough and sharp-edged," the other side of this role is almost embarrassingly nurturing.

During the Spring 1999 semester, a middle-aged man named Pete, with a very winning childlike way about him that was also unswervingly mature, enrolled in my developmental writing class. As one of the first papers that term, I had assigned an original short story, told in the first person by a character who is clearly revealed. After Pete read aloud in class, he very calmly heard my uncomfortable feedback that, while he'd created a very believable character with a life

that was also believable in its deadly boredom, his character—predictably named Joe—needed some creative occurrences, even obstacles in his humdrum life. Pete's response was to say, also quite calmly, that he 'did have problems with his imagination' and had been psychologically tested to that effect.

I spoke to Pete a few more times and was quite impressed with his lack of defensiveness about being critiqued that way, not only by me, but by a few other students, as well—he said it was no problem. And as to his ability to "defend" his work with pretty formidable equanimity, only throwing one or two mild shots at other students' work, he said he'd had a lot of experience in group therapy, and was used to expressing himself: "That's what I was doing, expressing myself."

Pete then opened up to me about his psychiatric history, calling his condition "residual schizophrenia," which essentially means that it comes and goes, and said that the learning disability he had was a form of dyslexia, and was related not only to his illness, but probably to some of the medication he took for it as well. His candor, as well as his obvious intelligence and commitment to doing well in my class, gave me the courage to ask him if he would participate with me in some research, which eventually came to be an ethnographic study called *Looking at Pete: A Case Study of Disability and the Writing Process.* Pete readily agreed, and over the next three months, we had many conversations about his writing, his educational and personal history, and his struggles to live a quality life despite his illness. Our relationship seemed to develop rather effortlessly into a trusting friendship, but still retained an appropriate amount of distance. Our in-class relationship never seemed to suffer for it—in fact, it was enhanced—and neither did my relationship with other students in that class. Pete was as naturally direct and cooperative a team player as he was a one-on-one communicator. And I know that there was also something very protective in my dealings with Pete. We related in many respects as equals, yet never forgot that there was a difference in our roles and our positions of power. This I attribute primarily to Pete's ability to "swim" so well the waters where Cindy foundered, between questioning my decisions and criticisms of his work, which he surely did, and knowing when to back off and take on faith and, hopefully, experience that I was apt to know what I was talking about.

I think that Pete's age was certainly a factor, although I've also seen this same closeness in age between student and teacher result in unrelenting power struggles. But more than that, I am convinced that the years of intense illness and drug-induced suffering he endured and finally surmounted created an aura of solidity, self-assurance and—I shudder yet remain true to my subjectivity—inner peace about him that made such a productive relationship possible between us.

And I was certainly parental to Pete. I hesitate to say motherly. I

was much more motherly with Cindy, possibly because she behaved like such a child. Not that I was not motherly with Pete. I think what I displayed was a much more fluid movement from teacher, to mother, to father, to parent, which I suppose means to me some healthy combination of the motherly and the fatherly. And this is a good time to wonder, as I promised I would, how motherliness and fatherliness differ, and how much they should. In my study about my experience working with Pete, I quote Max Van Manen's book, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* on this subject.

Several times in the text, Van Manen equates teaching with fatherhood—very natural, as he taught and conducted research with much younger students—and observes at one point that fatherhood is "a creative vow." (75) In my study, I conclude that, after my very rewarding work with Pete, "teacherhood is a creative vow, as well."

After reading bell hooks' views on motherhood and things maternal in her book, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, I find it very appropriate that I used Sara Ruddick's views on maternity to explore my encounter with Cindy, and Van Manen's on paternity as a commentary on my work with Pete. hooks takes a dim view of the neofeminist trend, particularly among those she terms "white middle-class, college-educated women," to romanticize motherhood in much the same way as it has always been within the framework of patriarchy. (133, 135) To hooks, this is one more way in which women, even with the best and most liberatory intentions, perpetuate the stereotypes which have kept them chained to home and children, and ensure that men continue not to be equally responsible in child-rearing. hooks asserts that Ruddick is guilty of this romanticizing in *Maternal Thinking* when she envisions the day that there will be no more fathers, but only mothers of both sexes. (138) hooks believes it is useless to try to get men to acknowledge being maternal, even when they are, as closely identified with strictly female behavior as that word is. hooks posits that "[r]ather than changing it *[the meaning of maternal]*, the word *paternal* should share the same meaning." (139)

While it is certainly true that men must continue in the task of adding more nurturance to their parenting and their teaching, it is also important for women to add a bit more authority, more willingness to be the heavy—and sometimes the clown—without all the cloying mother-guilt attached to these behaviors, in their interactions with their children, and their students. This would seem to mean both sexes giving up their notions of being either "mothers" or "fathers" to become truly equal *parents*.

The romanticizing that hooks warns against is worth taking to heart, yet this vigilance must be applied even-handedly, and certainly to hooks' own vision of a desirably androgynous parent, as well as to

any institutionalized sexist notions of the nurturing mother and authoritarian father. Because, as a teacher, as a woman, and as a Butch Mommy, I *will* be gendered in my students' eyes, and they in mine. I think that continuing to find new and unexpected ways to use this unavoidable tendency to the advantage of all is a goal worth working for.

Before, I spoke about the importance of gaining an "active understanding" of this dynamic. To me, the first step in this kind of self-research of our pedagogy amounts simply to a heightened awareness--without undue judging of ourselves or our students, and without any immediate desire to change anything—of what we truly put out there as teachers qua authority figures qua parents, and what we receive.

Months after my encounter with Cindy, I was unexpectedly reminded of it by, of all things, a TV commercial for an automobile. In it, a young man, obviously on his way up the corporate ladder, is in his brand new car, predictably red, which is stopped at a light next to a school bus. As the young man hotly and expertly negotiates a deal on his car phone, the children on the bus scream and make faces at him in a most intrusive way. The young man suddenly breaks off his conversation, and presses his contorted face against the car window, showing a truly horrifying mask to the children, who all gasp as one, face front, and fall into shocked silence. The young man calmly returns to his deal.

As a teacher, I am very concerned with being proactive rather than reactive with my students. Most teachers, and most parents, no doubt share this concern. I know that many might see my behavior to Cindy as the latter, and not without reason. However, I think that there is a third alternative which amounts to being reflective, as a mirror is. This approach is not without risk, as mirrors can distort what they reflect. I can only trust that the overall sense of responsibility and dedication, as well as the lack of rancor or cynicism I bring to my teaching, kept my mirror relatively clear in my interaction with Cindy. And this type of reflection can empower what we do and how we do it in some surprising ways.

I am inclined here to give Van Manen and not myself the last word. He is, after all, both a teacher and a father, and one whose apparent nurturance would fit quite well hooks' picture of the true *parent.* He reminds us, teachers and parents alike, that when we use "the dialectic of inside and outside . . . of separation and reconciliation" (127), we are engaging in that "epistemological silence" in which we come to realize "that we know more than we can tell." (113)

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Raul Ybarra

CULTURAL DISSONANCE IN BASIC WRITING COURSES

ABSTRACT: *Understanding why Latino students do poorly in writing courses is becoming an ever more important issue because Latinos are the fastest growing group in the United States. Although we can account for some of the reasons for the high dropout rates of Latinos, we still do not understand the majority of the factors. These statistical realities of Latino student concerns warrant serious investigations. Indeed, the prevalence of failure among Latino students in particular in Basic Writing courses suggests a (dis)connection – or dissonance – between the cultural backgrounds and corresponding thought processes of Latino students in the composition classroom. To date, research in this area is virtually nonexistent. Thus, an intensive case study using ethnographic techniques was carried out to understand how teaching affects nonmainstream students, particularly Latinos. Understanding, and consequently overcoming, this problem is key to reversing the low retention rates of Latinos in the U.S..*

> Before dismissing urban, U.S.-born youth as lazy underachievers, it behooves researchers and practitioners to first examine the school's role in fostering poor academic performance. Bringing schools into sharper focus, as my study does, reveals that U.S.-born youth are neither inherently antischool nor oppositional. They oppose a schooling process that disrespects them; they oppose not education, but schooling. (Valenzuela 5)

Introduction

I have been teaching Basic Writing for over sixteen years. My interest lies in examining how particular pedagogical assumptions and practices affect the writing performance of Latino students in Basic Writing courses. While teaching writing at California State University, Fresno (CSU), I noticed significant and disturbing demographic placement patterns in the various composition courses. While the majority of students in Basic Writing classes were largely Latino, with a lesser percentage of African-American/Black and Asian, in the Introduction to Composition courses the students were mostly white.

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Despite numerous studies attributing socioeconomic and cultural origins to this phenomenon, the actual reality of this ethnic/racial division was staggering. Even more daunting is the fact that this ethnic division of basic and regular composition courses doesn't appear to have changed through the years. At the University of Illinois at Chicago, for example, it is interesting to note that Latinos comprise 10.1% of the undergraduate student population at UIC, yet Latinos made up 26% of students enrolled in Basic Writing (UIC Student Data Book 1989-1993). At the University of Massachusetts Boston, student placement mirrors this demographic distribution, while research conducted at other institutions nationwide confirm the reality of this disturbing pattern.

Several questions emerge in analyzing placement patterns in Basic Writing courses. Why are Latino students placed in larger numbers in Basic Writing courses than other groups in composition courses? Equally perplexing, why do these students not matriculate into the credit bearing courses in numbers that reflect their distribution in the university? Furthermore, considering that many Latinos, after twelve years of schooling, apparently fail to perform at the levels expected of them, how does placement in Basic Writing courses affect Latino students even beyond factors such as individual self-esteem?

Understanding why Latino students do poorly in writing courses is becoming an ever more important issue because Latinos are the fastest growing group in the United States. With the increasing Latino population, one would assume that we would see a corresponding increase in Latino college completion rates, but unfortunately the opposite is true (Ybarra, *Latino Students* 51). Indeed, current census data show that the retention rate for Latinos at all levels of schooling is decreasing, and the prediction is that this trend is going to continue (*Digest of Educational Statistics*, 1999). Moreover, the statistics do not identify or apparently explain the problem of the disproportionate placement of Latino students in Basic Writing and their limited success in producing acceptable academic writing. As both a Chicano and as a composition specialist trying to reverse such statistics, this bothers me tremendously.

These deplorable statistical realities of Latino student concerns warrant serious investigations. However, due to the centrality of ethnicity in this study, the research methods employed must necessarily include what is often labeled as sociological data and deemed irrelevant to educational research; that is to say, qualitative methods that locate students' attitudes, cultural backgrounds, ethnic patterns of expression and thought, and other cultural information. Indeed, the prevalence of failure among Latino students in particular in Basic Writing courses suggests a (dis)connection—or dissonance—between the cultural backgrounds and corresponding thought processes of Latino

students in the learning environment in the composition classroom. To date, research in this area is virtually nonexistent most likely due to the interdisciplinary nature of such research that must necessarily borrow from education, sociological cultural studies, and linguistic investigative methods. Once composition specialists are able to identify the cultural tropes which I suggest herein conflict with the cultural and cognitive assumptions embedded within academic writing structure, we can then adapt to make such tropes conscious and use them to help us revise our pedagogical assumptions and apply them in Basic Writing courses.

II. Overview of Research

This paper is based on a much larger ethnographic study.[1] The purpose of this study was to assess whether pedagogical assumptions and practices together with the communication patterns of Basic Writing instructors toward their Latino students affected writing performance. Since student placement statistics reveal that a disproportionate number of students placed in Basic Writing courses are Latino, Basic Writing classrooms were thus chosen as the sites for the study. For the purposes of this article and to illustrate the cultural complexities involved in the seemingly higher ratio of failure among Latino students than other ethnic groups in Basic Writing classes, I shall focus on this one particular course.

Overview of Basic Writing Course

The purpose of Basic Writing at the University of Illinois at Chicago, as stated by Downs et al. in the "Content Guidelines" for teaching Basic Writing, is not so much "to teach students how to write, but to help students understand how writing works in the world, especially the world of the university":

> Remember that the goal is not to turn students into expert critics but rather to give them a sense of confidence by helping them realize that each piece of writing is produced by a human being for some purpose in the real world, a world of which they are a part. (5)

Thus, the focus of Basic Writing, though still a preparatory course, is not on skills, but rather on understanding the writing process as a whole, from the beginning stages of ideas to the final product. Instructors of Basic Writing at UIC are encouraged to assign their students a significant amount of reading and writing, drafting and revising (both the in-class essays and out-of-class essays), and conferencing with students (Downs et al. 4-9). By steering students through a series

of revisions, the students will not only create their own models of writing, "but will learn academic discourse through using it" (Farr and Daniels 81; Downs et al. 32).

Students

In this particular class, three students (out of the fourteen) self reported their identities as Latino.[2] Connie (all the names of the students and instructor have been changed), an entering freshman and eighteen years of age, categorized herself ethnically as half Ecuadorian and half Argentinian though neither parent had been back to their respective countries for more then twenty-five years. She did not speak Spanish except for a word here and there. Born and raised in the U.S. and attending both public and private schools, Connie never left the Cicero area.[3] She took advanced English courses in high school, yet she scored low enough on her placement test to be placed in Basic Writing.

Letty, another eighteen-year-old entering freshman, categorized herself as Mexican. While Letty's parents were born and raised in Mexico and immigrated to the U.S. a year before Letty was born, Letty was born in the U.S. and attended school in both California and Chicago. She and her parents travel to Mexico on a regular basis, at least once a year. Letty did not score high enough on the written portion of her placement exam to take the required college level composition class.

Joe turned out to be a perplexing anomaly. An entering freshman, Joe categorized himself as Hispanic. Through his continued silence and frequent absences, Joe communicated his response to his placement. Joe's eventual withdrawal from the course, at the urge of his instructor, is representative of a significant percentage of Latino students to the cultural dissonance that emerges between Basic Writing requirements and the culturally encoded discourse patterns of Latino students.

Research Methodology

Once I identified my subjects, I followed them throughout the term and continued to collect data through audio-taping, interviews, and my fieldnotes. I audio-taped many of the class sessions. Additionally, throughout the semester, I interviewed or talked to the students and the instructor periodically (audio-taping whenever I could). After each of the class sessions, I would review the audio tapes and make any adjustments in my field notes I felt were necessary for the identification of the tapes and interpretation of the data.

Background of Instructor

The instructor whom I shall call Pat came to this course with the requisite background in composition teaching. Having taught college level writing courses at two other urban institutions (De Paul and Loyola Universities) she was entering her second year teaching Basic Writing at UIC. She also held the reputation of being considered one of the better instructors in the program due to her energetic style of teaching and her propensity for encouraging lively discussions among her students. From such indicators Pat appeared to be a successful instructor for Basic Writing students. I thus predicted that I would witness a positive impact of her pedagogical practices and interaction with her Latino students on their written performance.

Pedagogical Assumptions and Practices

Pat's presentation of her Basic Writing course unequivocally located her position in what might be termed the conventional academic standards camp: the tri-partite structure. This pattern of academic written discourse is termed "essayist literacy" by scholars such as Scollon and Scollon and Heath.[4] This pattern can be described simply as a beginning, middle, and an end pattern—although I do want to stress it is not simple by any means. This, as Farr ("Essayist Literacy"), Heath, and Scollon and Scollon argue, is a way of cognitively structuring and viewing the world around components of threes. Members of this society in general, and college students in particular, must internalize this tri-partite structure in order to "progress upwards educationally and, in many cases, economically" (Farr, *Oral Texts* 9). The possible link between these structural schemata and a host of culturally embedded dominant ideologically implied assumptions they may endorse suggest a rationale for the pervasiveness and function of this tripartite structure in education. To assess how the teaching of this culturally-dominant structure affects the performance of culturally marginalized students, in particular, Latino students, I analyzed the instructor's syllabus, since as Stock and Robinson argue, a syllabus reflects an instructor's "beliefs about learning" (315).

In the introduction to the course syllabus, the instructor announced, among others things, office hours and location since she expected to confer with her students individually periodically throughout the semester. She also expressed her interest in having students seek out her help during office hours in addition to individual conferences.

In the "Aims of the Course" Pat described her expectations of what she wished her students to accomplish:

1. To develop clarity of thought by reading, thinking, and re thinking, redrafting, revising, editing, and polishing prose;
2. To organize and develop ideas in coherent writing;
3. To become confident in writing academic discourse.

It is important that I note the extent to which the instructor set up through the announcement of these course objectives the tri-partite structure and the corresponding culturally-dominant ideological assumptions embedded within it. First, note that the objectives mirror the tri-partite structure not only in number (three objectives) but also in their relational interfacing with one another. "To develop clarity of thought..." parallels the introduction of an essay where ideas and points are initially made (just as the second objective by underscoring organization and development of ideas mirrors the body and development of the thesis in an essay, while the third objective as the outcome of one and two, mirrors the outcome of the conclusion of an essay which is a result of the introduction and the body.)

Pat's objective by the end of the semester was to get her students to write in academic discourse. Although Pat did not state this directly, the implication is made quite clear by her stated three goals of her syllabus: "To develop clarity of thought" meaning to write clearly, and directly, and concisely to avoid any "unnecessary complex prose" (*The Practical English Handbook*); "To organize and develop ideas" meaning to shape the ideas "to the larger intentions of the paper," organization and cohesion, without sacrificing clarity (*The Practical English Handbook*); finally, in the goal "to become confident in writing academic discourse."

Pat was suggesting to her students that if they did what she asked them to do, they should be well on their way to writing academic prose on their own. This is important because Pat was letting her students know that she was aware that the students must, in time, produce text that the academic community wants. As Bartholomae writes in "Inventing the University," the student "has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy . . ." (274). To acculturate her students into the academic community, this instructor knew that the students "must speak and write. . .toward such familiarity" (Stock and Robinson 318).

In the middle section of the syllabus entitled "the conduct of the course," the instructor explained the procedures she would employ in getting the students to write according to the expected standards. Here, the instructor stated that the essay writing in this course would be personally focused and conform to a narrative structure that is mirrored in the assigned personal readings. The self-focused writing expectation required of the students reveals the course theme as well as the underlying ideological assumptions and expectations.

The purpose of the course was for the students to focus on themselves, their families, and cultural backgrounds with a shift to the internal struggles and conflicts they might have experienced in being asked to conform to externally imposed expectations. The pedagogical assumption here underlying the course theme was the hypothesis that in writing about personal experiences, the students would be more likely to participate in written form because they would start with what they know. Many writing specialists believe that approaching writing with what the students know "is a workable concept which can help us teach writing. . . .It taps the intuitive communication strategies writers already have, but are not adequately using" (Flower 77). By trying, by participating, and by emulating the students would in time produce the type of text acceptable to the academic community.

The ideological assumptions underlying the tripartite structure imply a homogeneity of experiencing and articulating experiences. Pat expects the student then to encode experiential information into this tripartite structure; moreover, she expects the Latino students to write about their cultural backgrounds coupled with issues of identity. There are, however, two levels of cultural dissonance associated with these requirements: 1. The cultural background of Latino students that involves what might be described as circular discourse patterns is not easily translatable into the tripartite structure; 2. Due to sociological complexities, the stress on singular identities is culturally confusing and emotionally disconcerting for students who often feel they cannot articulate a specific identity for themselves as requested.

Here is where we see that, although Pat has a broad understanding of essayist literacy, she has a somewhat ineffective interpretation of it. But is this all there is to learning how to write, memorizing the rules of academic discourse? Obviously, the answer is no. For if this were the case, then we wouldn't have, what Pat Bizzell describes as discrepancies in helping students to successfully complete composition courses. She points out that while some students are familiar and comfortable with academic discourse and excel in writing courses, others are not so familiar with this writing style and are even resistant to learning it.

Student Responses

When expected to write about their cultural backgrounds, the Latino students experienced considerable difficulty. The required tripartite structure conflicts with the oral discourse patterns which are influenced by Spanish syntax, discourse rules, and cadence. Equally problematic are the complex issues of identity for Latinos, many of whom have considerable trouble labeling themselves with distinct iden-

tities. The tensions are compounded because these same students do not understand why they are having so much difficulty with writing; they do not and cannot understand why they have so many mistakes in their essays. As a result, for example, Letty, though not angry, remained very suspicious about the Basic Writing course and struggled with both the instructor and with the tripartite structure required of her writing, often refusing to complete essay assignments that forced these pedagogical issues and cultural patterns to the writing surface. Connie, on the other hand, because of her struggles did show her anger and frustration. Though she continued the course, she was subsequently dismissed as "hostile" by the instructor who, in turn, refused to help this student any further, assigning me the task instead. What happens with many students like Letty and Connie is that their struggles with writing do not stop even though they may have successfully completed the Basic Writing course.

For an all too significant cadre of Latino students, however, the response is what Derrida calls the "gap in the text;" namely the silent response that emerges with Latino students is simply that they drop the course or drop out of college as a result, as in the case of Joe. Due to the cultural disrespect and sociological discrimination Latinos experience in the U.S. , Latinos are reluctant to call themselves American. Labeling themselves with the national origins of their parents and/or grandparents is equally problematic since they did not actually come from those Latin countries of origin and often do not speak the language. This explains why ethnic descriptions such as "Chicano" have arisen to distinguish children (and/or grandchildren) of Mexican immigrants who were born in the U.S..

Joe

The only time Joe spoke in class was the Monday of week three--he had missed four consecutive class sessions when Pat directed a comment/question to him about his irregular class attendance. Pat began the session by taking attendance. She stopped when she got to Joe's name and the following exchanged ensued:

> Pat: You look like you slept well Joe. No more partying, or are you taking care of yourself?
> Joe: Yeah, no more partying.

Although this interaction was very short and took place in a humorous tone and the class laughed at Joe's response, I commented in my notes that Joe himself did not laugh; instead, he appeared agitated. At the end of this dialogue, he just looked down at his notes. Pat also

did not appear surprised by his response. She just returned to taking roll, calling out the names of the other students. For the rest of the class session, Joe remained silent and did not participate in the work of the class.

When Pat relayed to me that she had spoken to Joe about his absences and had warned him about the consequences that would develop because of them, I was surprised given the agreement we had about observing (and also taping) the individual student conferences. Although she had informed me about and invited me to attend other student conferences, she did not inform me about her meeting with Joe, nor did she talk to me about what transpired in her conference with Joe, and through this reluctance to discuss another Latino student response to her instruction, she signaled her discomfort with and misunderstanding of the cultural contents of those responses of Latino Students.

Then in week five, Joe attended class again. Pat began the class session by taking roll. She appeared surprised that Joe was in class. When told to pair up, Joe just sat in his seat looking at his paper and occasionally looking at the questions Pat had written on the chalkboard to help the students analyze their papers. I decided to pair up with him. I was also pleased because this was my first opportunity to find out more about Joe. However, just as we started working, Pat asked to talk to me outside the classroom. After we had both walked out into the hallway, Pat—after taking a couple of deep breaths—asked me to convince Joe to drop the course because of his absences.

I was hesitant to get directly involved in handling the situation, but Pat felt I would be better suited talking to Joe because of his and my similar cultural background, i.e., we were both Latino. Pat felt that I was better prepared to avert a confrontation. As I suspected, Joe responded angrily to my suggestion that he drop the course. He felt that he was not being given a fair chance. Although I agreed with him, I did not tell him so because of my professional responsibility to the other instructor. I repeated to him several times that this was only a suggestion. I explained to him again that he was being asked to drop because of the number of absences he had and nothing else. If he felt strongly enough, he could stay in the course. No one could force him to drop.

He kept insisting, however, that we were unfairly singling him out. After about five to ten minutes, Joe did agree to dropping the course, but he stated that he was not happy with what I was telling him, and that he was going to relay all this, all that we had discussed, to his advisor. I told him that would be an excellent idea.

I had a very difficult time dealing with Joe dropping the course. I hated that I was the one to ask Joe to drop the course, but I was more upset that the instructor had put me in such a position. Although Pat

was present during the entire interaction, she kept quiet. Afterwards, I did tell Pat that I wanted to talk to her about Joe, about what transpired, and about how I could have handled the situation differently. Although Pat never outright told me that she did not want to talk to me about what happened or about Joe, she always managed to evade discussing the incident.

As far as Joe was concerned, his suspicions were confirmed—he did not belong—he was not welcomed in this classroom. A few days after this incident, I attempted to contact Joe at his home, but I received no response to the messages and letters I sent him. Later, I found that Joe not only dropped the class, but also dropped out of college completely.

Looking back at this scenario, I realized that the instructor had adapted a strategy in which she thought she was helping the student without considering how deeply this way of thinking was entrenched in her psyche and how this had manifested itself in the classroom, in her teaching, and in her evaluation of Joe. All she saw were the absences, the missed classes. She did not see Joe; she did not know who he was nor understood why he was missing class.

It is obvious that we failed helping Joe, and fail in helping many students like Joe, because we do not take the time to find out what the dissonances are between their own cultural communication patterns and those required in academic writing. This is a phenomenon distinctive to Latino/a students—differing from, for example, white working-class students' learning from a white middle-class teacher. Too many Latino students like Joe withdraw from Basic Writing and even more disturbing, drop out of college in record numbers.

III. Accounting for Student Dissonance

The current research theories on Latino student retention rates in Basic Writing courses has not yet accounted for this disturbing phenomenon. In the previous pages, and elsewhere, I used excerpts of conversations between Joe and the instructor to show how pedagogical practices contributed to a lack of confidence and mistrust on the part of Latino students, which in the case of Joe ultimately removed him from the classroom. We also don't fully understand why many of these students struggle or where their difficulty originates though we can see this lack of understanding in the case of the instructor, Pat, who did not understand who Joe was, where he came from, and why he was absent so many times. This left Joe feeling like he was being targeted unfairly resulting in his complete withdrawal from college.

Ogbu argues that the reason for the dissonance between students and instructors as well as between cultural discourse and academic

structure is not as much the differences in culture (D'Amato 185, and Ogbu, "Frame-Work Variability" 241), as in how the schools are structured that lead to the deep mistrust on the part of both students and instructors. In "Opportunity Structure, Cultural Boundaries, and Literacy," Ogbu writes about how many schools perceive ethnic students as having low levels of intelligence because of linguistic and cultural differences and thus place such students in remedial courses. As Erickson notes, many educators make assumptions about the students' performance based on their poor attitudes about school. This is supported by Matute-Bianchi who claims that many Latinos, especially U.S. born immigrants, are seen as "less motivated," and "more irresponsible" (225).

These negative assumptions can only have negative affects on these students. Thus, Latino students (and many other minority students), by the time they get to college, have repeatedly been faced with being seen as unintelligent or as low achievers (Erickson 41). Erickson offers a theoretical explanation that suggests that as these students grow older "and experience repeated failure and repeated negative encounters" with teachers, instead of developing patterns that are consonant "with the dominant culture, they develop oppositional cultural patterns," similar to what happened to Joe (Erickson 41). Moreover, these students see school as trying to change them, but the personal costs of learning to become members of the school culture are too high (Farr and Daniels; Ogbu, "Minority Status and Literacy in Comparative Perspective").

However, while the resistance framework charts minority student failure in terms of oppositional identities and resistant stances (as further argued by such scholars Min-Zhan Lu, Henry Giroux, and others), it does not fully explain Joe's reaction. Joe knew who he was—Hispanic—and he wanted to continue with college. So what was the problem?

Valenzuela argues that many students, particularly U.S.-born youth, do not necessarily oppose school, rather "They oppose a schooling process that disrespects them; they oppose not education, but schooling" (5). They oppose how education "is offered to them" (19). Valenzuela refers to this process as "subtractive schooling," a process by which school creates "social, linguistic, and cultural divisions among the students and between the students and [teachers]" (5), "to the extent that relationships with teachers affect students' schooling orientations and achievement" (30). The result is that we end up with students who are suspicious and angry because they feel disaffiliated from school. Thus, they distance themselves even more. As Erickson notes:

> The more alienated the students become, the less they persist in doing schoolwork. Thus they fall farther and farther be-

> hind in academic achievement. The student becomes either actively resistant--seen as salient and incorrigible--or passively resistant--fading into the woodwork as an anonymous well-behaved, low achieving student. (41)

Furthermore, as David Bartholomae, Mina Shaughnessy, and Mike Rose all suggest in their research, many of these students feel as though something is wrong with them, but no one is willing to tell them what that is.

Being placed in Basic Writing, for many of these Latino students, only reinforces the idea that they are not good enough to enter the required composition course, which adds to the suspicions many Latino students already have toward mainstream culture and/or vice versa (Ogbu; Valverde; Jacob and Jordan). One student, a Latina, once described her placement into Basic Writing to me as "going backwards." In one sense, this is also what I felt when I was forced to take Basic Writing as an undergraduate myself, and what I speculate Joe felt.

Where does this suspicion and anger come from? I suggest that it stems in part from the confusion Latino students have about education, about what is happening to them, and what is expected of them. I support Eisenhart and Graue's claim that "minority children often have trouble understanding what is expected of them and how to interpret what happens to them at school" (165). This lack of understanding could well originate in the cultural and linguistic dissonance that arises between Latino discourse patterns used by most Latino students and academic patterns of writing. It is most likely that it comes from this lack of understanding, which researchers have not yet explored. Since instructors do not appear to understand the differences Latino students bring with them in their discourse and ways of thinking, they interpret the defensive posturing of these Latino students as not wanting to be in the class, not interested in learning to write, and even possibly not possessing expected levels of intelligence required to succeed in academic writing. The instructors then dismiss these students by encouraging them to withdraw from the course.

IV. Conclusion

Is this what happened to Joe? Although I cannot speak for Joe directly because I do not have enough data on him to come up with a conclusion, I can present another perspective. Moreover, looking closely at this incident has made me more conscious of my own teaching, of how I interact with students, specifically Latino students. I do not want happening to my students what had happened to Joe. I do not want the students in my class to feel like they do not belong. I

want all my students to speak out in my classes as suggested by bell hooks in *Teaching To Transgress*, by the authors of *Discovery of Competence*, and by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Hence, my role as a writing expert is to actively seek out those students who are having trouble, who are absent from class, and who are struggling with writing, who are in danger of "fading into the woodwork" (Erickson 41)." My role as a writing teacher is finding ways to get students to come to class and motivate them to participate. I use my authority to continuously encourage students to talk and to ask questions because I want them to practice speaking (and writing) with authority (Ybarra, "Latino Students").

As a Latina student once told me, one evening after class, she liked the dialogue and the interaction that took place in my class. She liked that she could speak without fearing that she would be humiliated because of giving a wrong answer. As an instructor, I was not going to allow anyone to laugh at her. Even if she gave a wrong answer, she still felt "good" because she understood that I was not so much interested in the *correctness* of the answer, but that she was practicing speaking academic discourse. As David Bartholomae writes, "To speak with authority that reveals the self-assured person we presume them to be" (31). This is what was important to this young Latina.

It is this type of environment that I want to create in all my classes. I realize creating this type of environment takes a lot of time and energy, and it is demoralizing when the student still leaves, but if we are to reverse the high attrition rates, especially among Latino students, then not only do we need to continue doing more of this type of engagement, but we need to find other means of helping students overcome their feeling of disaffiliation with school.

Notes

1. See Raul Ybarra, "Latino Students and Anglo-mainstream Instruction: An Ethnographic Study of Classroom Communication," Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Illinois at Chicago, 1997.

2. To help in the identification of Latinos I relied on Marin and Marin's (1991) definition: any student who referred to himself or herself as a person of "Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race," I included as belonging to the general group "Latino" (23).

3. A suburb of Chicago.

4. See Ybarra, "Latino Students," 1997, pp. 55-56.

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Wendy Ryden

HOW SOFT IS PROCESS? THE FEMINIZATION OF COMP AND PEDAGOGIES OF CARE

ABSTRACT: *This article is essentially a narrative using the metaphors of "hard" and "soft" to raise and discuss questions about pedagogy and the institutional settings of college writing instruction. The author analyzes transformations that have occurred in her teaching practices in relation to the feminization of composition and an "ethic of care."*

Early in my career of teaching college English, I remember walking down a hallway to one of my classes and passing another classroom where the professor was running late. A crowd of students for the next class was gathering in front of the door, waiting for the professor to finish so they could go in. I squeezed passed a group of students sitting on the floor, and as I did so, I heard one say to his friend as he gestured towards me, "I heard she's really hard."

It surprised me, to hear myself talked about this way. I didn't detect animosity in the student's tone. It was said more in a fearful way with perhaps even a tinge of respect in it. It surprised me, I guess, because, as I shall further explain, I didn't really think of myself as someone to be feared or, frankly, respected either. And it was certainly the first time I ever imagined that I might be what a student would think of as a hard teacher. I wasn't all that much older than some of the people I was teaching. Only a few weeks earlier, when I was walking across campus, a young man from one of the frat houses approached me, as it turns out, for the purpose of inviting me to a party:

> "You must not go here," he flirted. "I haven't seen you around."
> "Actually, I teach here in the Humanities Department," I told him.
> With horror, he responded, "Oh my God! I'm sorry!"

He beat a hasty retreat, which I took to mean as a revoking of the invitation.

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At the time of these incidents, I was, I think, the youngest adjunct in the humanities department of an institute of technology. Adjuncts were employed mostly to teach remedial English to mostly male engineering and computer science students who tended to view their English courses as impediments to their more important work. It was a strange place to be in a lot of ways. A year earlier I had finished an M.F.A., during which time I began teaching freshman writing, specifically basic writing. Like others in my situation, I was for the meantime going to continue to teach while I worked on my own fiction. The lousy pay was slightly offset by the flexibility of schedule that provided time to work on other projects. And, ironically, the school's lack of commitment to its adjuncts was a comfort. It meant the hold they had over you was limited. You gave no more commitment to them than they gave you. It was a job that you didn't have to care too much about. Except that somehow you did, even when you didn't want to.

While I was a graduate student, I had the customary "intro to teaching comp" course, and I had liked and been very interested in what I encountered there. But in my mind my justification for teaching writing was that I was myself a writer. I clung to this qualification because I was quite sure I had no other and, probably, I was right. I was not a scholar, as I understood that term to mean, and I hadn't even been an English major as an undergraduate. I soon learned that in an academic environment, the degree that entitled me to teach, my M.F.A., was an added liability, the mark of Cain, evidence that I was not to be taken very seriously. I was fundamentally insecure about my right to be teaching at a college, and I understood that I was only fit for teaching basic writing—that is students who were fundamentally insecure about their right to be learning at college. Together we shared this peripheral status as well as more than a touch of disdain for the course we inhabited together. Add to this mix the fact that the Humanities Department was one of the few in the school that had women faculty, and they were mostly English professors. The department still had an old boys' feel to it with a current-traditional approach to writing instruction that gestured now and again towards process. Surface pleasantries aside, the message came across loud and clear how part-time faculty were regarded and how writing instruction was considered. It was the course you didn't want to touch with a ten-foot pole, and remediation, well, forget about it. That was the course reserved for the likes of me—creative writing dilettantes and those who didn't have enough real knowledge to teach anything more valuable. Once in a while a full-time faculty member might pull duty in the remediation sequence—indeed I knew one woman who liked doing so because she thought the classes were very undemanding to teach (!)—but mostly the classes were taught by people like myself—people who lived this marginalized academic existence because it gave them both the tem-

poral and psychic freedom to invest their sense of selves elsewhere and because, in a very real sense, they had nowhere else to go.

Certainly there were faculty there with whom I became friendly and worked with a sense of mutual respect—I ended up being there a long time and teaching a variety of courses besides basic writing—but nonetheless I couldn't help but internalize the sense about writing and writing instruction that pervaded the place. It was pretty hard to take yourself, your students, or what you were doing seriously, and this was exacerbated by the institutional attitude towards writing conveyed to students in subtle and not so subtle ways. One student explained to me, for example, that his math professor had told him, as a strategy of time management, to work on his math problems during his less important classes—such as English.

Maybe insisting my students do their writing assignments in English class gave me the reputation of being a hard teacher. Or perhaps as a self-defensive reflex to the conditions I described I acquired a kind of hardness. In order to be taken seriously, a young woman in a predominantly male engineering school had to act tough, especially when she was working in what has come to be called a feminized discipline, one which "has become associated with feminine attributes and populated by the female gender" (Holbrook 201). The feminization of writing instruction was especially apparent at the predominantly male school, where, as I mentioned, one of the few places you might encounter a woman was in a writing or literature class. How conscious was I of this feminization of writing instruction and my resistance to it? I don't know. I think I was vaguely aware that my status as a young woman made me vulnerable; that it could easily become associated in the minds of my students with the "soft" writing course that the math teacher had disdained as being unimportant. I remember being offended, even afraid, when students wrote in comments on my course evaluations about my clothes or my hairstyle. And I remember that I seldom smiled at my students; I think I felt I couldn't afford to.

At first I used Rosemary Deen's and Marie Ponsot's textbook *The Common Sense,* a book I had discovered and liked as a graduate student because it made sense to me from the standpoint of being a writer. Ironically, I clung to what were meant to be its alternative rhetorical forms with a fierce rigidity. There was, I discovered, a structure and plan to my basic writing class that wasn't duplicated in others, and it aggravated me when my students didn't keep up with that structure or seemed not to take it seriously. On occasions when I glimpsed the other teachers' curriculum, I was struck by the flexible haphazardness of it, even the way they would accept handwritten papers and late assignments. I think I told myself that students needed structure, and maybe they do. But perhaps more than anything I was the one who

needed that structure so that I could take myself and what I was doing in earnest. My self-esteem demanded that. I eventually began following the great works/Western Civ bent of that Humanities Department in my writing courses, using Lee Jacobus's textbook *A World of Ideas* in an attempt to compensate for what I perceived as the intellectual flabbiness of myself and of my course. I certainly learned a lot from teaching that book, and I think some of my students probably did too, although I never let myself get close enough to them to ask. And it wasn't as though I was behaving with them in some way that I felt was unnatural or constrained. It never occurred to me that I should be anything but, to use the student's term, "hard." It never occurred to me, nor would I have known how really, to be "soft," to enter into a personal, nurturing relationship, one steeped in what has been called an ethic of care where a pedagogical rapport is "based on interrelationships and connectedness rather than on universalized and individualized rules and rights" (Schell 75). Rather than develop personal relationships, I was doing everything I could to stave them off, to prevent such familiarity from breeding, for fear that what little bodily and intellectual authority I did have would be compromised. When a woman instructor has to read journal entries that freely comment on her appearance and demeanor, being soft is not an option.

Let's skip ahead about ten years. I'm teaching now at CUNY and taking courses myself as a Ph.D. student in the midst of another CUNY standards crisis—something that has been occurring off and on since the great open admissions experiment of the '70s prompted reactions against that democratizing move. The song, which is not distinct from the nation-wide rhetoric surrounding literacy and standards, goes something like this: the quality of education within CUNY has been steadily eroding due to the poorly prepared students who have been allowed to enter. CUNY degrees are meaningless because students, if they graduate at all, do so without being able to read or write. In the media there is nostalgia for the days when the CUNY degree meant something. Responses from the Board of Trustees are draconian. Among them: eliminate remediation from the senior colleges; institute new assessment measures that will further block students from completing their degrees. There is money for developing new gatekeeping instruments but none, it seems, for increasing faculty and decreasing class size.

I'm specializing in composition and rhetoric, so this crisis hits me hard, even though I know that the field of composition in a sense owes its existence to literacy crises that stretch back over a century. The rhetoric of literacy crises remains astonishingly consistent, positing a view of literacy that is "reified and measurable" (Killingsworth 35) instead of "an activity of social groups" that "embeds social relations within it" (Ohmann 685). It's depressing—the "back to basics,"

impoverished discussions surrounding this topic that fail to take into account the questions: "Which literacy? Whose literacy? Literacy for what? How?" (Sledd 499). I try to avoid these discussions about the loss of standards with their barely concealed racism and xenophobia. They take so much out of me. But on one particular day, it seems I can't avoid what has become this public issue. There is an elderly woman auditing one of the classes I am taking who, knowing that I teach writing, wants to commiserate with me about how no one today can read or write. She cites as her example a dealing she had with a bank employee who didn't know how to spell Canada. I confess to having a certain curiosity about what a misspelling of Canada might look like, but otherwise I have no interest in pursuing a conversation where the complex phenomenon of literacy is reduced to an instance of misspelling. I try to laugh it off by saying something like: well, I'm not such a hot speller myself. But this enrages the woman. She pursues me, quite literally, into the women's lavatory. (This definitely is one of the more peculiar moments I've experienced as a graduate student.) "It's all your fault," she yells at me. "What?" I say, as I try to make my way to the sink to wash my hands. She maintains that it is all my fault that the bank employee couldn't spell Canada and that she couldn't get service rendered to her. "My fault?" I ask incredulously. "Yes," she says. "People like you. Because people like you, you're, you're—," she stammers, "too soft."

So in ten years, I had gone, it would seem, from being hard to being soft. Was it true? How had it happened, I wonder? And, more importantly, what does it mean for me and for my students?

Let me backtrack. A few years after I had begun teaching at the institute of technology, I started work at another college that was quite different, a teaching college with a different curriculum and, interestingly, with an inverted ratio of men and women. Here the majority of the student population was female. When I began, through faculty development workshops, to learn more about composition theory and the changes entailed in pedagogy in the enactment of that theory, a shift occurred in my teaching. Viewing your writing classroom, for instance, as a local community of writers, in which the teacher's authority is disseminated rather than centralized, necessitates a softer, more nurturing performance on the part of the instructor. As Joseph Harris tells us, "it is this sense of like-mindedness and warmth"(21) that draws us to this concept of community in the first place. Harris's main point, however, is to show the limits of such warm like-mindedness and to question a paradigm that doesn't account for struggle within community. Feminists, such as Susan Jarratt and bell hooks, to name just two, have followed suit in asserting the need to account for conflict in a notion of community in order to avoid silencing of dissent. But even in a new and improved model of community,

one such as, say, Pratt's contact zone, the instructor's role is, to use a term from a colleague in the business department, "fuzzier" than a banking model classroom would allow. Likewise viewing yourself as a writing coach rather than evaluator (Faigley 113), one who comments on student writing more for the sake of encouraging it than judging it, pushes you in that softer, more nurturing direction. The authority to evaluate, while it does not disappear, wears a velvet glove.

In such classrooms, the false dichotomy between what is personal and what is public begins to blur. Intimacy develops; trust, too, perhaps. You and your students get to know each other through the writing that you read out loud; through the responses that you offer. Often you end up laughing and smiling; sometimes arguing and yelling at each other. People might begin to tell stories, such as: the time the frat student asked me to a keg party—stories that might seem to make the teller vulnerable in the details they reveal. But it isn't just that such personal stories find their public place. The flow reverses itself, too. Knowledge that appears indisputably part of the public domain—detachable as agentless, Enlightenment ideas—becomes personal when you know the writers who espouse those ideas about, say, the article they read on civil disobedience for class that day. The "fantasy of transcendence" (Ruddick 132), the wish for knowledge that is not situated and embodied, starts to fall away. You tend to become interested in the writers and not just the texts; for better or worse, you tend to conflate the writer and the text. This is part of the pedagogical agreement that students and process teachers strike with each other. The writing becomes a stand-in for the writer, and you treat it, and her, with care. How could you do otherwise, and still remain human?

And I consciously turned in this direction, towards this fuzzier, softer way, because I knew what I didn't want to be: I didn't want to be the punitive authority figure in the classroom. Nor did I want to be the language cop, citing violations and issuing tickets, and reducing writing from the critically powerful to the rote banal. In some ways I was motivated to change by what appeared to make students happier with me. I suffered a bit from Willy Loman syndrome: wanting to be well-liked. But this desire was bound up with another more laudable one: I didn't like being hard because I didn't like the effect it had on my students and the writing they produced under those circumstances, and, in the end, I didn't like the effect it had on me. Even though it didn't come naturally to me, I had to admit, softer worked better. In order to enact a pedagogy of process, I had to enact a pedagogy of care.

But at what cost? I begin to wonder. In her discussion of part-time female labor in the field of composition, Eileen Schell cites studies (Diane Kierstead et. al., Neal Koblitz, and Elaine Martin) that indicate:

> If female instructors want to obtain high student ratings . . . they must be careful to act in accordance with traditional sex-role expectations. . . . Male and female instructors will earn equal student ratings . . . only if women display stereotypical feminine behavior. If women teachers give challenging assignments and exams and follow rigorous grading policies, students are more inclined to give them lower ratings. . . . College students of both sexes judged female authority figures who engage in punitive behavior more harshly than they judged punitive males. (quoted in Schell 78)

I think back now on the student's hallway remark about my being "hard" as a gendered observation. Would he have said the same thing about a male colleague, or would it have been redundant? It's perhaps surprising for a woman instructor not to fulfill the student's fantasy about maternal nurturance, but it can be taken for granted that the phallic male will be, as the student put it, "hard."

Sometimes I feel a little damned if I do damned if I don't. Students expect me to be nurturing and yet when I provide such nurturing I take the risk of being regarded less seriously—a risk I suspect a male instructor exhibiting similar behavior is less likely to run. I do remember, while teaching at the institute of technology, having a vague awareness of being held by students to a different standard than my male colleagues. I also recall that often the men just didn't seem to worry so much about how their classes were going, whether they were teaching well or not—not, I don't think, out of indifference but more from a sense of entitlement that was validated by student response. I also think of the feminist-bating and misogyny engaged in by hostile male students that I have had to endure through the years and take seriously in the name of running a democratic classroom. Sometimes it feels like I'm allowing myself to be abused. And some students get angry when the nurturing teacher betrays them by expressing strong opinions on controversial subjects.

This gives me pause. To what extent does the improvement wrought through process and care come at the expense of caving in to gender stereotypes? To what extent does the student-centered pedagogy we have come to value in writing instruction rely on an ethic of care that itself relies on a naturalization of the maternal role of women? Are we redistributing professorial authority, or are we undermining the authority of women within the classroom and within the academy? Perhaps in order to think about these questions, there needs to be another: is there an inherent intersection between process pedagogies and a pedagogy of care? M. Jimmie Killingsworth's description of composition's paradigm shift is telling in this regard. Citing Maxine Hairston and Richard Young, Killingsworth writes:

> In the field of composition, "process, not product" emerged in the 1970s as a rallying slogan for a new generation of writing instructors. . . . In this formulation, "process" signified an interactive approach to teaching, according to which the teacher would intervene as a personal presence early and regularly in the development of student papers. This classroom model contrasted strongly with what its advocates perceived as the dominant paradigm of writing instruction, the so-called "current-traditional" or "product-oriented" model, in which the teacher played an authoritarian role as the guardian of grammatical and rhetorical propriety and the judge of finished papers. Whereas the "product-oriented" instructor felt most comfortable in the lecture hall and the professorial office equipped with red pens and handbooks of error codes, practitioners of the new "process pedagogy" turned the classroom into a workshop and met their students after class in newly formed writing centers or labs. They introduced a more generous portion of face-to-face, one-to-one communication; dialogue generally preceded writing, and talk often served as the chief means of feedback throughout the process of drafting and revising papers [emphasis added]. (26-27)

In Killingsworth's formulation, process is positively soft and product is pejoratively hard, if we connect soft with an interactive pedagogy of care and hard with an authoritarian current-traditionalism. But is process, or care for that matter, really all that soft? Back in my "hard" days at the institute of technology, in accordance with Deen's and Ponsot's textbook, I took my students through rounds of reading and writing observations about one another's work in order to give writer's the feedback they needed for revision. With as stern a self-protecting look on my face as I could muster, I practiced a process that was "hard"—unrelenting, exact, devoid of the surface features of nurturance that might have earned the fuzzy adjective. In some ways it was the current-traditionalists who were soft—opting for the ease of covering grammatical points or citing hackneyed formulas about introductions, bodies, and conclusions while students snoozed under their baseball caps or surreptitiously worked math problems.

And what kind of hardness is it, I wonder, that equates writing with spelling and literate people with competent bank workers who can master the word Canada? A hardness defined as ensuring correct spelling and other surface features is, ironically, really a very soft kind of hardness indeed, reserved for the sort of corrections mothers are supposed to make in their children's behavior and writing teachers are supposed to make in their students' writing. Such feminized "hard-

ness" fits perfectly with a product-oriented current-traditionalism that manages to avoid the demands a "soft" process exacts from both students and teachers. Speaking of the contingent faculty members who make up much of the composition work force, Cynthia Tuell compares them to handmaids who clean up comma splices and organize the discourse of students as though straightening a closet so that the "regular" professors teaching the "real" courses can start doing the "serious" intellectual work (quoted in Schell 87-88). I imagine that such feminized "hard" work no doubt can be done in an essentializing manner of "care" that need not involve the trials and rigors of process at all.

Once one of the technology students wrote on my course evaluation: "teacher does not try to get along with the students." The statement, accurate enough, still remains something of an enigma to me. No, I didn't "try to get along" with students. Was I supposed to? It occurred to me at the time that it was a gendered and disciplined comment. Did students expect male teachers from, say, the math department, to "try to get along" with them? Perhaps. I remember that I did envy the paternally affable manner that some of the male teachers displayed towards their students. And I found that as I got older and began to share some of that sense of entitlement, I could afford to show some of that affability too without feeling vulnerable, especially when I worked at other institutions not so heavily male and more progressive in their policies towards writing instruction. But as I continued to think about the question of "getting along with students," it occurred to me that something beyond surface demeanor might be involved. I'm not convinced that the student comment wasn't sexist; that it revealed a young man's surprise at not getting the nurturance from a woman that he felt entitled to. But on the other hand I wonder if the remark might be pointing to a more profound understanding of care that moves beyond essential maternalism and its ability to accommodate conservative pedagogies of feminized "hardness."

Perhaps "getting along" means no more than listening and responding with goodwill to the actual students who are in the actual classroom at any given time. But can a writing teacher do this without showing the traits connected to the maternal or, for that matter, paternal role? Probably not, which leaves me with some of the same unresolved issues connected to teacher subjectivity and location. Critical pedagogy addresses the question of student subjectivity very well and even, to a certain extent, instructor subjectivity with regard to being in a position of power (see, for example, Ira Shor's description of himself as a tall, white male in *When Students Have Power*). But what about when the instructor is, say, a young woman teaching mostly young men in a school that has a necessary evil view of its humanities department? How does this affect her ability to redistribute authority in her

classroom or to adopt a nurturing stance with her students?

Last week I ran into a former student on the street near the college where I now work. We're happy to see each other, we even embrace. He tells me he's doing well in his English class, getting an A. You're enjoying the class, I ask. He shrugs. "It's OK," he says, "but it's not as good as yours." I know that his compliment is as much inspired by the personal relationship that we developed as it is by anything he might have learned about writing. But perhaps in the end the two things are not so easily separated. At his words I feel the sense of reward that enacting a pedagogy of care offers. In many ways it has, quite simply, made me a better person, attentive to the responsibilities I have towards another human being, student or no. But I also realize how impossible it would have been for me to have this kind of "getting along" rapport with the students from the institute of technology. I'm glad now to have something of a choice in how I interact with students, but I'm still ambivalent about the maternal aspect of the ethic of care.

At the community college where I now work, the student evaluation forms contain a question that asks students to rate how much the teacher seems to care about whether students learn the course material. I suppose this seems like a reasonable enough question, and yet it has always struck me as off-base in its sugariness—a derivation of the Hollywood image of teacher as selfless, humanistic hero—or heroine. We perhaps take it for granted that the teacher should exhibit this posture of caring, but just how essential is such a pose to the learning process? I can't help but wonder: wouldn't it be more to the point to ask whether the teacher enacted successful strategies to help the student learn? No doubt such strategies might include a "seeming to care" attitude on the part of the instructor, but certainly someone could "seem to care" without teaching effectively or, perhaps more importantly, critically. Frankly, I worry that this emphasis on care in the evaluation form undermines the instructor's ability to adopt a critical stance. The image is reinforced of the ideal teacher as the kindly and good-hearted conveyer of undisputed knowledge that does not challenge the status quo. The instructor cares, but does she question?

As I recall, no question about caring appeared on the evaluation forms at the institute of technology, perhaps because such a question would have been inconsistent with the hard knowledge of technology and the training that future (mostly male) engineers should receive (although I would think that giving sage, fatherly advice to students about doing their math problems during English class probably constitutes a kind of caring). Indeed, there was no question about caring on the evaluations at the mostly female-populated teachers college either, and I do remember that there was a question about whether the instructor taught and valued critical thinking. Why, I wonder, does this question about caring show up at the community college with its

overworked teachers and underprepared students? This raises some interesting issues, especially about the feminization of the two-year college, but that, I suppose, is a subject for another rumination.

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David C. Fletcher

TUTORS' IDEALS AND PRACTICES

ABSTRACT: *This case study of two college tutors demonstrates the importance for writing instructors and tutors to engage in collaborative reflection to identify and examine their frame of reference, including their assumptions, beliefs, values and practices. An important finding was that the tutors' interpretation of writing instructors' authority influenced significantly how they translated their ideals into practices and had a clear influence on how tutors allowed student writers ownership of their texts. Consequently, for both writing instructors and tutors, central to their collaborative reflections is the question of the extent to which they support basic writers to become independent and authoritative writers and college students.*

To become effective writing instructors and tutors of basic writers we need to develop a critical understanding of our frame of reference: the beliefs, values, and resulting practices about teaching and learning. If we profess to teach and tutor in ways that support and nurture basic writers' ownership of their writing and, as a result, their development as autonomous and independent college students, an ideal that a majority of writing instructors and tutors claim to hold, then we must ask ourselves to what extent are our practices true to our ideals. For basic writers to develop the competencies necessary to compose increasingly complex academic papers, the relationship of the writing instructor, writing tutor, and basic writer must be thoughtfully and collaboratively examined. In the following case study of two college writing tutors, it becomes clear why writing instructors need to understand how college students translate their journeys as successful writers into tutoring ideals which, they claim, support basic writers' development as college writers. The challenges and obstacles with which college tutors contend as they try to translate those ideals into consistent practices can also inform writing instructors about the inherent difficulties we face as we attempt to fashion practices that adhere to our ideals.

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ing necessary to support ongoing and sustained opportunities for tutors and instructors to reflect on and analyze their instructional practices. As a consequence the tutors did the best they knew how, took their own best advice, and made decisions and choices that were never challenged. The two college tutors in this study made a number of assumptions about the intentions of both the student writers and their instructors, assumed they had correctly interpreted their students' assignments and the instructors' comments, but at no point did the tutors question if their interpretations were correct. Unfortunately for the student writers, there was no established route for the tutors and writing instructors to reflect on and analyze their practices. Writing instructors and tutors lead busy lives and, as committed as they may be, usually do not have the economic sufficiency to donate all the time they need to build an understanding of their actual practices and the implications of their practices on their student writers.

As an instructor who has both taught writing in dedicated courses and integrated writing in content courses and has worked extensively with high school and college writing tutors, I have found it beneficial to give serious consideration to Mary Kennedy's inquiries into the relationship between our ideals to our practices. Not surprisingly, Kennedy discovered that many teachers adopted practices similar to their former teachers. That is, teachers derived a frame of reference from their past learning experiences, which they then used to interpret and evaluate their current teaching situations, including their students' behaviors and intentions and their own. Conflicts and difficulties arose when teachers were expected to implement teaching practices that were new or different and did not fit into their existing frame of reference and might even contradict practices and expectations teachers considered valid measures of their students' accomplishments and their own. Kennedy noted:

> Without a clear sense of how teachers' ideals translate into classroom behavior, with multiple ideals influencing their interpretation of classroom situations, and with the vagaries of the language of classroom ideals, these teachers' interpretations of classroom situations, and their responses to them, will depend heavily on a frame of reference we may never see and they may never be aware of (70).

Kennedy goes the next step, recommending that teachers carefully examine their instructional practices and embedded ideals, because practices cannot necessarily be predicted from knowledge of espoused ideals. In her analysis of teachers' responses to student writing samples Kennedy discovered that teachers' interpretations and

responses were sometimes even different from one situation to another: "The ideas and ideals they claimed to care about could be, and often were, incompatible with the ideas that occurred to them in the face of these specific situations" (57). Kennedy noted that the teachers responded overwhelmingly to the writing samples from a traditional prescriptive frame of reference, interpreting student-writing samples in terms of errors about rules of grammar, punctuation, and syntax. Even the majority of those teachers who espoused more modern rhetorical positions, in which concepts or students' strategies and purposes were held to be more important, tended to revert to interventions that were grounded in a traditional prescriptive frame of reference (58). Brannon and Knoblauch also found that teachers expected their students' texts to match their version of an ideal text and responded to their students' text in ways to make them conform. As a consequence, students have to struggle to maintain ownership, a difficult task even for the more confident student, or acquiesce and relinquish authority and semblance of independence (Fletcher 50).

The complexities embedded in writing instruction and tutoring provide fertile ground for contradictions to arise between our professed ideals about a writer's authority and our actual practice. Pointing to a more complex and problematic nature of tutoring than usually assumed, Healy identified a variety of roles tutors are expected to play and the flexibility that tutors are expected to have at hand, giving rise to role conflict and role ambiguity (43). Gillam helps us to further understand this as a state of affairs that "is neither surprising nor unsettling: rather it is a natural result of the multi-vocality and contradictions inherent in language" (3). Tutors can have a difficult time contending with such inherent conflicts and contradictions, a problem that is magnified when they do not use collaborative practices with their student writers, and consequently reinforce dependency, resulting in the disempowerment of the writer (Mullin 10; Pemberton 68). Instead of supporting writers' ownership and authority, tutors often contend for control that undermines the writer's authority by setting the agenda (Jacobs and Karliner 503), use questioning as a strategy to control (Fletcher 42; Reigstad 17), and impart information as an English teacher rather than responding to the writer as a peer collaborator and guide (Scott 9). It would therefore appear that granting student writers ownership is a challenge that confounds tutors, and the failure to do soresult from experiences deeply imbedded in the frame of reference of writing instructors and tutors.

Denise and Larry: Their Ideals and Practices

In the following analysis we meet Denise and Larry, both college

writing tutors of basic writers, who claim to value and support their students' becoming independent and autonomous writers. We learn about their history as writers and the influence their individual histories has had on their tutoring ideals and practices, the extent to which their practices support or contradict their ideals, and the extent they are aware of conflicts that might have arisen during the tutoring sessions or when they reflect on their ideals and practices.

The case studies were conducted at the writing center of an urban northeast college in a writing center that provides tutoring to students enrolled in a range of courses, with the majority being basic writers enrolled as either freshmen or sophomores in one of the two required composition courses. For this study, I met with each tutor individually for four times over a period of approximately six weeks. During the first meeting, each tutor described her background as a college student and writing history, tutoring philosophy and ideals, and pointed out what she considered to be her most important tutoring practices. Both Denise and Larry tutored two English as a Second Language (ESL) basic writing students during their first of two recorded and transcribed sessions. They then met with me individually and reflected on the practices revealed in the tutoring session transcriptions. Then based on what each had discovered in their reflections, I asked Denise and Larry to reflect on their plans for their second tutoring session with the same students. Again the process was repeated, the second tutoring session was recorded and transcribed, and I met with the tutors again and asked them to reflect on revealed practices.

Denise – Creating a Voice

At the time of this study, Denise, a computer science major, was the less experienced of the two tutors, having only tutored for less than a year. She anticipated continuing her tutoring for an additional two years and hoped to develop her writing to a more advanced level so she would be prepared to tutor upper level students. Denise defined herself as a self-reliant and independent college student who deliberately sought out challenges in order to establish her voice in her writing, her most important goal, and was willing to investigate a subject and revise her thinking and writing until she was satisfied with the results. Her search for her voice began in elementary school and continued in college:

> In the sixth, seventh, eighth grade writing was difficult. I didn't really know exactly what was expected of me. It took many more revisions than it does now in college. Even in high school it was hard to find my own voice. I found for myself as I got

Larry and Writing - A Route to Self Discovery

Larry, a far more experienced student and tutor than Denise, had given much careful thought to his role as tutor and his responsibility to the students he tutored. His was a journey in which he attempted to gain knowledge about himself and define himself as a person. While he was a private in the Army, Larry made a conscious decision to write as part of a larger process to "find himself." Like Richard Wright, his desire was "to free himself through writing" and to therefore define himself as distinct from another person. If he could see himself on paper, Larry felt he would then be able to make decisions, to change who he might become in the future. After leaving the Army, his life became chaotic, and he even lived in a homeless shelter for a short period of time. Larry again turned to writing and he began to feel grounded and more in control of his life.

Eventually, Larry discovered that his desire to find himself through writing was not enough, and he decided that he "needed technical skills." He began a self-designed study of writing beginning with a study of grammar with *Harbrace*, an experience he described as intimidating and, at times, "just strange." "I opened up and I started on page one, and I took my index cards, and I just wrote them on one side, wrote the answers on the other, and I went over and over [the cards], day and night, while continuing to write at the same time."

As he diligently copied *Harbrace* and tried to memorize and use the rules, Larry realized there were differences between what he was able to write, how *Harbrace* was showing him how to write, and how published writers really composed. He noted: "I did not have the background, just did not have enough reading background. So I started reading some more." Along the way he read Albert Camus, Victor Frankel, Ernest Hemingway, Charles Dickens, F. Scott Fitzgerald and many, many others. Larry remained a serious and committed student of literature and philosophy, eventually majoring in both.

Larry entered college on the GI Bill, and passed the entrance writing test. Even through he received an A on most of his papers in his first English composition course, Larry soon realized that his knowledge of *Harbrace* was not enough and decided that he needed to learn more. It was also during this period Larry began to develop a more critical eye about writing instructors and entered into what he described as his "cynical stage." He said that he "started seeing that what I was reading about what writing was had nothing to do with what I was being shown on the board." Larry found the five-paragraph essay meaningless, a "creature," for which he had no use. Larry recalled that he often heard teachers telling students not to make comma splices or have fragments "but at the same time, we never went over that struc-

ture, the structure of the sentence, so these words were meaningless." He continued by noting that too often his composition instructors concentrated on "grammar" and yet did not even appear to know or want to explore the meaning of an essay. Larry wanted to know, "If you don't know what an essay is how are you going to know how to compose one?" and compared the author of an essay to the architect of a building who "knows the features of his building before he constructs it."

In his junior year, Larry elected to enroll in the college tutors preparation course and was most impressed with Susan Horton's *Thinking through Writing,* the primary text of the course. Larry used Horton to confirm his more mature personal theme that writers had to find their own way and needed to decide for themselves how best to use the advice of others.

Larry's Tutoring Ideals – What is an Essay?

Larry remained concerned about possible definitions of essays both for himself and for the students he tutored. He had concluded that student writers were frequently confused and "boxed-in" because they were looking "for a recipe" and incorrectly treated "the five-paragraph essay as a definition," but failed to conceive the essay as "an act of discovery." He continually tested students about their commitment to his definition of the essay and writing, in effect determining if they were forming a "new value system." Larry asked students how they wanted a tutoring session organized; however, if a student asked him to focus on grammar, Larry interpreted this to mean that the student was fearful about passing a course and did not want to take the responsibility to improve her writing: "The worst thing of all is that they have that in reverse. Their first priority is to meet the course, not to deal with their writing itself." Like himself, Larry held student writers responsible for learning to improve their writing, and tried to accomplish this goal in several ways, using each approach as a test of the student's commitment. He also assigned each student readings from his tutoring course: Frank Smith's "Myths of Writing" and "Reading Like a Writer," selected readings from Susan Horton's *Thinking through Writing,* and Wayne Trotta's "Overcoming the Fear of Writing." Larry assumed that, if students read the articles, "It tells me how committed they are; how much effort they're ready to put; how much time they're going to put; how much they thought about it." He usually liked to begin with Trotta's article because "you want to get rid of the fear first." Larry did note, however, that few students seemed to read the articles or were as interested as he would have liked in adopting his philosophy of writing.

It is not possible to understand Larry's tutoring ideals separate from his feelings of resistance and resentment toward the authority of college writing instructors. He believed some of the difficulties students experienced resulted from their attributing far too much authority to their instructors. "But my professor said" is a statement he heard over and over: "I have to even prick myself, pinch myself to make sure that I do hear it again because I've heard it so many times that I've stopped hearing."

Larry's Tutoring Practices

In his two transcribed tutoring sessions, Larry quickly set his priorities and used a question-and-answer and lecture format with two female ESL students. He never asked them to describe their prior writing experiences. In fact, during the first session, Larry took approximately 90% of the time trying to define an argumentative essay that he thought would meet their instructors' assignments, explaining the importance of reading the four articles, and the importance of separating composing and grammar:

> Because the most important thing is getting your ideas across on paper. Who cares if you know grammar a hundred percent? If you're confused, it doesn't matter. You know what I mean? Some people can write grammatically correct sentences and still they're confusing when it come to their ideas. And teachers are more forgiving if you make mistakes with just grammar, but your ideas are good.

Larry also gave the students a checklist to guide them in reviewing their drafts before bringing them to the tutoring session, even though he did later admit that he did not know how many of his students actually used this list. He also asked them to bring index cards to review the parts of speech and "traditional prescriptive grammar that they go over in class," and to bring a writing journal that was to be included in a binder with dividers for their papers and the four articles.

True to his longstanding feelings about writing instructors, Larry contrasted himself with the students' instructors, explaining that while he could be trusted to tutor the students as adults rather than as children, their instructors would not:

> And this stuff [readings and approach to be used in tutoring] is graduate, undergraduate to graduate work. Sometimes

> when you go into these classes, I'll be the first one to tell you in these composition courses they treat you like a baby, which is really bad for writing. I'm not going to treat you like a baby. You're going to be ready for graduate and for undergraduate courses.

He also told his students that they had two options when they heard their instructor's response: they could assume "this person doesn't know what he's talking about," or they could assume their instructors "know what they're talking about, but they don't know how to speak to me. One of the two." Larry usually assumed that the first explanation was true.

How successful was Larry tutoring basic writers? Larry did not hesitate to express his frustration about how slowly the ESL student writers were learning his definitions of the argumentative essay and began to blame the two students for not having taken the time and effort to memorize the revised definitions. To his credit, Larry did acknowledge he was not as familiar with second language issues as he might have been and wondered if ESL students were less likely to challenge or question him or their instructors.

Ideals, Practice, and the Question of Authority

Consistent with Kennedy's finding, Denise and Larry interpreted their behaviors but their students' responses to be consistent with their ideals and experienced no role conflicts (Healy 45) or competing ideologies (Gillam 10). Denise pointed out all the instances in which she felt she had supported and allowed her students' development of voice; Larry pointed to the many instances in which he believed her had allowed his students to challenge his authority and to build a definition of an argumentative essay. Denise was certainly more true to her ideals, while Larry barely allowed his students space to breathe or voice their opinions or questions.

There are several plausible hypotheses to explain the contradictions between Denise and Larry's ideals and practices. The first hypothesis is that both Denise and Larry were so influenced by their perceptions of writing instructors' authority they consequently ended up subscribing to multiple, and sometimes conflicting ideals (Kennedy 69). Denise wanted her students to develop their voice, yet she was constrained by a need for her basic writers to accurately answer the assignment and satisfy the instructor's requirements; consequently, she could not support her students to take the risks necessary for them to continue to develop their writing . As a result, Denise also continually failed to realize or develop her authority as a responsive reader. Larry

wanted his students to question the meaning of an essay, and simultaneously the authority of the tutor and writing instructor. Yet at the same time, Larry wanted the ESL students to accept his form of the argumentative essay that he knew would help them meet the demands of their writing instructors and, by doing so, probably receive higher grades. Another hypotheses is that neither Denise and Larry really trusted the judgments of their ESL basic writers; both tutors seemed to have decided they knew best and did not actually expect the students to be able to develop more sophisticated or complex writing. Denise never moved beyond addressing the sentence level construction of their texts, avoiding or being unaware of how they might consider and develop the controlling ideas of their texts and relationship of the paragraphs to each other and to the text as a whole. In addition, even though both Denise and Larry acknowledged they knew very little about tutoring ESL students, neither one voiced an intention or need to talk with an instructor, another tutor, or to read further. And, finally, a concluding hypothesis is that the real and imaged authority of the writing instructors permeated the tutoring atmosphere, influencing how both Denise and Larry interpreted their relationship with their students. Both Denise and Larry compromised their student writers' ownership and authority of their writing by allowing their interpretations of instructors' authority to determine their tutoring practices. Consistent with Kennedy's findings, this case study again points out that tutors and teachers practices, "cannot be predicted from knowledge of their espoused ideals. Without a clear sense of how teachers' ideals translate into classroom situations, and with the vagaries of the language of classroom ideals, these teachers interpretations of classroom situations, and their responses to them, will depend heavily on a frame of reference we may never see and they may never be aware of" (70).

Creating a Professional Community

Gillam challenges writing instructors and tutors to learn from "the tensions which seem so indigenous to writing center life, the competing ideologies and mixed loyalties which collide and contend on a daily, even hourly basis, can be re-read as positive, as providing fertile ground for writing and talking about writing." Since, she argues, language and meaning develop only through social interaction, student tutors and writers will experience conflicts and tensions, and it is through these very contentions that the "growth of conversation, the writing center's richest resource" will occur (5).

Both instructors and tutors need program time to reflect on and analyze their instructional practices, with each acting as a critical friend

engaged in peer review, and perhaps, when useful, designing new and modified practices that support basic writers' ownership of their texts (Houston and Johnson 6). This will require that we view the other as a colleague, for as this case study has clearly shown, writing instructors and tutors cannot work in isolation of the other and assume students will benefit (Harris 40). Gillam offers a helpful solution worth considering in which writing instructors and tutors engage in dialogue with each other and interpret and re-conceptualize the dynamics of writing instruction and tutoring through the lens of social dialogue. Such a perspective would focus our attention on learning to ask and act on a number of questions about the transactional nature of their activities: what voices of the writer are present in the text and how do the instructor, tutor or writer attend to these; how does the instructor, tutor, and writer hear the text; how do the instructors, tutors, and writer's responses to the text enable the writer to respond to contradiction or incongruence in the text; how does the writer interpret and use or ignore the responses of the instructor and tutor; what options for continued writing do the instructor's and tutor's responses allow; what possibilities for future discussions does the instructor's, tutor's, and writer's conversation allow? (9). Addressing these questions lays the groundwork for writing instructors and writing tutors to play a critical role in the education of basic writers toward the independence and authority we know they must achieve.

When writing instructors and tutors do support students' ownership of their text, students do actually gain a number of benefits: increased motivation to learn; raised tolerance for uncertainty and conflict; defined movement from dependence on professional authority toward a belief in their own abilities to create knowledge (Imel 2).

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Linda VonBergen

SHAPING THE POINT WITH POETRY

ABSTRACT: *Although basic writers in first-semester composition courses progress to expository and argumentative writing, they may begin the semester with a personal narrative. This assignment serves as a bridge into college writing since these students already have a variety of experiences about which they can write. However, there are two possible problems with the personal story: lacking structure, the writer occasionally fails to make a point in the narrative; using the expressive aim of discourse, the writer may also obfuscate the point with emotional, connotative language. To improve student narratives, this article borrows a rhetorical device from Isocrates, imitation, then combines it with the descriptive structure of Liva Polanyi and the referential (rather than expressive) aim of discourse from James Kinneavy. Students imitate the structure of a brief poem, and they use the referential aim of discourse for clarity. Writing precisely and making a point, students are preparing for academic discourse.*

The declarative remark is ubiquitous; I hear it on television, in religious circles, and in education settings—"Everybody has a story." And certainly, most people are expert storytellers, the best authorities about their own experiences; they know how to talk about themselves. After having "plied students with examples of personal narratives, most taken from anthologies" (58), Molly Stocking read her journalism students' essays which were "among the best" she had ever gotten (59). The students explained that they "trusted their own observations" (59).

Since contemporary composition experts, such as Peter Elbow and Mike Rose, laud the positive results of the personal narrative, my intention here is not to address the entire fine corpus of published work about the value of the narrative essay. Instead, I want to stress the additional value of combining Livia Polanyi's descriptive structure for the narrative with James Kinneavy's referential (rather than expressive) aim of discourse for academic writing in a first-semester university composition class. That some university teachers eschew the personal narrative for basic writers is quite likely because of its structure and aim. Perhaps those teachers prefer not to disserve their students

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with expressive writing which is difficult to assess and that sometimes interferes with students' writing in other academic disciplines. Writers in advanced composition courses, who have mastered other aims of discourse (referential, literal, and persuasive) and who have developed organizational strategies, may be better prepared to manage expressive discourse. Nevertheless, while there are sometimes problems inherent with this genre for basic writers, there are also positive approaches to improve student writing.

Basic writers, those recently graduated from high school and now in their first semester composition courses, occasionally write a narrative that is a chronological list of events lacking contextual focus. I recall Ouizer in *Steel Magnolias* who, after listening to Shelby prattle about Owen Jenkins, interrupts: "Shelby, does this story have a point?" After reading a student's chronological list of what time she got up, what she ate for breakfast, where she bought gas, and what she ate for lunch—all prior to the discussion of receiving a community service award that evening—I wanted to ask Ouizer's question. Yes, the award was there, but only in the concluding paragraph with no discussion of its significance save mention that the recipient was "extremely happy" to get it. There was private meaning in this writer's expressive content, but I could not find it. I am not demeaning this student or her efforts; instead, I am admitting that I had failed to help her shape a point. The chronological narrative had been ineffective for the story of her significant achievement. Discussing the focus of personal narratives, Livia Polanyi contends that the event structure "may be quite unimportant, and the story might well be an illustration of some important aspect of a character or situation"; hence, it is often the "descriptive structure [which] provides material indispensable to understanding what significance those events might be said to have for the world created by the story" (209). Again, a chronological relation of events by themselves may not reveal a point for the story, but the descriptive structure can provide a context for the event. I knew that I had to help my student revise this discussion of her significant achievement.

Another problem with the personal narrative is the basic writer's occasional shift into the expressive aim of discourse which becomes so abstract that he loses his voice and also fails to make a point. Too emotionally vested in his experience, he writes: "My friend betrayed me and that changed everything in our relationship." Then he continues with paragraphs about everyone betrayed in some way, never mentioning his betrayal and everything that changed. I knew that I had to help this student with revision, too. Though less involved with contextual emphasis two decades ago, James Kinneavy has provided a cogent analysis of the aims of discourse, those aims still evident in writing. In *A Theory of Discourse*, Kinneavy explains that the expres-

sive aim has its place as discourse: "Since the expressive component of a discourse is, in effect, the personal stake of the speaker in the discourse, there is naturally an expressive component in any discourse" (393); moreover, expressive is "the very kind of discourse by which an individual or group can express his personal or its societal aspirations" (396). Later discussing the semantic features of expressive style, Kinneavy notes:

> If, as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Gusdorf maintain, the expressor must give new meanings relevant to his unique existential situation to all words or even create new words, then expressive discourse should be characterized by an idiolect, a private dialect with some private meanings. And, just as the individual person creates his own idiolect, so also the social person creates its own dialect (or jargon, cant, argot). (431)

Kinneavy further posits that "the referents (kinds of realities referred to) of expressive discourse are usually highly subjective, embodied in images, and connotative rather than simply denotative" (432), that the referents are "marked by superlatives" (432), and that "expressive terms, like exploratory terms, are often ambiguous" (433).

Actually, several of the semantic features which Kinneavy describes are similar to student papers that I have mentioned—the superlative "extremely happy," the high degree of subjectivity, the lack of focus, and the ambiguity of the indefinite "everything." During a recent writing seminar, a colleague exclaimed that personal expressive discourse was more difficult than the academic discourse which he had written as an instructor and graduate student. His exclamation may have validity because he is accustomed to writing for an audience, accustomed to the reality and focus of his message, but not accustomed to semantic ambiguity.

A proponent of the personal essay as democratic and cultural, Joel Haefner suggests "a pedagogy that attempts to balance the individualistic, expressive view of knowledge with a social, collective perspective" by bringing "the personal essay into the collaborative writing project" (132). In collaboration, students can challenge "the sanctity of the 'I' by writing in groups and by using 'we'" (134); they can also engage in dialogism, though consensus is not always necessary (135). Perhaps the "Declaration of Independence," analyzed by James Kinneavy, may serve as an expressive document that illuminates Haefner's more recent suggestions.

While the "Declaration" has "important persuasive purposes," according to Kinneavy, "it is also a piece of discourse with strong expressive components" (409). Kinneavy further explains that accompanying the persuasive aims was an expressive aim: "to enable a new

social personality to achieve self-determination . . . this is always the purpose of expressive discourse" whether individual or social (410). For a thorough analysis of the "Declaration," I would refer those interested to Kinneavy's chapter on expressive discourse. (Included are characteristics such as the expressing self, the use of "we," the emotional appeal, connotations, abundant superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs, ambiguous referents, the idiolect of new meanings for words, the subjective view of reality, and abstract language.)

Though Jefferson was the primary author, this document underwent a total of 132 revisions, fifteen from Jefferson himself, thirty-one from the drafting committee, and eighty-six from Congress (Kinneavy 438). Jefferson, according to Kinneavy, also borrowed phrases and analogies from British and French philosophers and from pamphlets of fellow Americans. This document was indeed a collaborative project. Nevertheless, "many of the signers were probably not even aware of its vast implications" (440). For instance, particular ambiguity rests in the phrase "all men are created equal": "The vision," contends Kinneavy, "has not yet been fully realized today. Political, educational, sexual, racial, economic, housing, and other equalities are still being fought for" (440). So even in this collaborative document, the term *equal* has multiple meanings.

Juxtaposing Kinneavy's research on Jefferson with my own classroom experience, I have found writing differences: in the hands of Jefferson, the expressing self ends in the "Declaration," but in the hands of basic writers, the expressing self often can end (but certainly must not always end) in solipsism. Just out of high school and in their first composition course at a state university, students may produce the "private dialect with some private meanings" which Kinneavy has described (438) in their personal expressive narratives. But they will need referential, literal, and persuasive discourse for writing in the contexts of all academic disciplines. Writing essay responses in these other academic courses, moreover, they may experience frustration because of interference from the expressive aim. As freshmen, basic writers need composing skills for clear academic writing.

Sixteen years after the publication of "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae remains valid for composition pedagogy if freshmen writers are to be part of the academic community in universities. These basic writers, posits Bartholomae, "assume privilege by locating themselves within the discourse of a particular community" (143). He adds:

> What our beginning students need to learn is to extend themselves, by successive approximations, into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections that

> determine the "what might be said" and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community. (146)

It is not that students must learn how to write, but that they must learn, contends Victor Villanueva, "how to write within the conventions of the university" (88). Rather than use the expressive aim, therefore, I prefer to aim for academic conventions with basic writers. Of course, the expressive aim has its place, but perhaps a place in the curriculum sequence after first-year composition courses.

A positive approach for improving focus, development, and language in student narratives is as old as Isocrates who taught rhetoric by imitation. Bartholomae has defined learning "in the liberal arts curriculum" as "more a matter of imitation or parody than a matter of invention and discovery" (143). In addition to imitating the discourse of the academic community, students can also learn to focus their ideas by imitating a narrative poem for their first paper of the semester. It is possible to use a variety of narrative poems. But I have used Countee Cullen's "Incident" in composition classes and am presenting it here as an illustration because the language is vivid and concrete, though mostly because this poem is a narrative with the descriptive structure advocated by Polanyi for giving significance to "the world created by the story" (209):

> Once riding in old Baltimore
> Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
> I saw a Baltimorean
> Keep looking straight at me.
>
> Now I was eight and very small,
> And he was no whit bigger,
> And so I smiled, but he poked out
> His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."
>
> I saw the whole of Baltimore
> From May until December;
> Of all the things that happened there
> That's all that I remember.

After reading this poem orally, students and I immediately discuss the point of its story: a racially prejudiced remark became the source of pain for an eight-year-old child. We also discuss the understatement in the last stanza so that we understand its contribution to the strength of the speaker's voice. Rather than using hyperbole or multiple superlatives to describe the resulting pain, the speaker provides emphasis through the concise understatement.

Having identified the speaker, we then look at the poem structurally to analyze the method of story telling. The first stanza is background, the setting. The second stanza is the incident itself. The third is the speaker's reaction. Before I can move to my next point, several students raise hands and intuitively blurt out, "If this poem is a story, couldn't it be a little essay, kinda like each stanza being a paragraph?" Exactly, for our further analysis grows referentially, based upon the reality of the speaker's experience. The background stanza is the descriptive frame giving concrete significance to the world and attitude of the speaker: he is "heart-filled, head-filled with glee"; Baltimore is not the deep South, yet prejudice is present. While the incident itself, the second stanza also contains description with the age, size, and specific actions of these two children. Children are not born prejudiced; they learn this attitude at a young age. As for the speaker's reaction, the description of an eight-month stay in a large city is balanced against the closing understatement.

That descriptive structure grasped, we next look at what is not in this little poem/essay, details omitted such as what time the speaker got out of bed, what he ate for breakfast, and what color shirt he chose to wear that day. This discussion is student-guided since students immediately know that those other details would not contribute to the point about racial prejudice, that unnecessary information would indeed detract from the point.

In preparation for writing narratives about their own experiences, students discuss other forms of prejudice, often as we make a list on the board which includes gender, religion, ethnic background, sexual orientation, body type, and socio-economic status. We then discover that there are multiple forms of prejudice: any other word could be substituted for the one that the boy used. Moreover, any one of us could be the target of a prejudiced remark. We now have the framework and catalyst for a writing assignment, for the experience is in the social community of prejudice found in the text while the students' responses will be individual, based upon the text but within the context of their own lives.

However, because some students may never have been the target of any form of prejudice, I offer additional writing topics for the narrative assignment. For instance, I ask that students brainstorm a list of significant achievements in their lives—achievements such as civic contributions, academic awards, athletic recognition, culinary ribbons, a school band trip to Europe, and family assistance recognized only by immediate family members yet significant. I record the list on the board to specify the significance and to validate their events.

I then set aside about ten minutes for freewriting so that students may begin to generate descriptive details for their stories. Volunteering, many of the students share the context of their experience when

subsequently reading the freewritten passage. They occasionally verbalize editorial remarks about their passages to clarify the setting and antecedent information for their peers. This verbal editing is an early indication of their awareness for contextual details.

From our brainstorming and freewriting, the topic is "Write a story about your personal experience with some form of prejudice, or a story about one significant achievement in your life. Be sure to follow the organization of Countee Cullen's poem so that your first paragraph is the setting, the second is the incident itself, and the third, your reaction." The organization which I have requested is indeed an outline because first-semester composition students writing their first paper of the semester usually benefit from a clear framework; they spend less energy discovering a structure, more time developing ideas with specific details. As they become more accustomed to unifying ideas into a coherent whole, they can discard the scaffolding in future papers.

Moreover, I remind these students that even professional writers make outlines. Since most of them have heard of the *Star War* movies, I have a new authority—Terry Brooks who is writing the novelization of *The Phantom Menace*. Offering writing advice, Brooks says,

> You must outline your work. . . . For those who are new, unpublished or struggling, outlining teaches you two things. First, it teaches you to think your story through from beginning to end. . . . Second, if you do make changes—and you will—if you've thought it all through, then you know how the change will affect the outline; it gives you a blueprint. . . . If I don't have something to steer me, I'll leave loose ends. (qtd. in Rigney 19)

Although Norbert Elliot mentions metacognition rather than an outline, he does make the point that students writing personal narratives "must select and edit events, must think about the process of thinking" (26). Like Terry Brooks, basic writers' metacognition may be facilitated from an outline, Cullen's poem serving as a concrete example for them.

Where I differ theoretically from Elliot is the discourse aim (not the narrative mode) for the students' writing. Elliot uses the narrative to "provide access to the numinous of human consciousness" (26) through the "nonrational tradition" (27). But since, as Kinneavy notes, the expressive aim is distinguished "clearly from the rational procedures," and instead is associated with "the intuitive or emotional procedures" (419), Elliot appears to conflate the narrative mode with the expressive aim. Indeed, Elliot maintains that the "narrative is, to use James Kinneavy's famous term, an aim" (25). Elliot next claims that

"Kinneavy is mistaken in placing narrative among the modes; rather, narrative belongs with expressive, referential, literary, and persuasive discourse" (26). Beginning with Kinneavy's phrase "all of these," Elliot then places a dash after the word *discourse* to add a quotation from Kinneavy. But the complete quotation from Kinneavy includes a reference to "narratives and other modes of discourse" before Elliot's dash. Kinneavy has actually said,

> The aims of language are the reason for the existence of all the preceding aspects of language. Sounds, morphemes, syntactic patterns, meanings of all kinds, skills in speaking and the other arts of discourse, narratives and other modes of discourse—all of these exist so that humans may achieve certain purposes in their use of language with one another. (37-38)

The "certain purposes," then, are the aims, not the modes which include narrative.

I nonetheless concede that confusion is possible—upon close reading of additional chapters in Kinneavy's text. Differentiating the mode of expository writing from the aim of creative literary writing, Kinneavy says, "It confuses a mode of discourse with an aim of discourse. Exposition, as opposed to narration, is a matter of what is said, not why it is said; the nature of the reference, not the purpose of the reference, constitutes something as expository" (79). The antecedent for "it" is expository writing, though narration appears to be an aim.

Upon reading further chapters, I discovered another distinction from Kinneavy who asserts, "We can evaluate or describe, or classify, or narrate something—these are modes of discourse, but we cannot scientize or inform or persuade or literate it. These are aims of discourse" (421). Ergo, I would prefer to leave Kinneavy's distinctions as he has presented them because I want basic writers to compose in the narrative mode, but not with the expressive aim. One of the four media forms less adaptable to the expressive aim, according to Kinneavy, is "academic conventions" (431). When basic writers compose narratives, I want these students to benefit from learning "academic conventions," rather than numinous expression.

An option, I reiterate, for using the narrative within the community of academic discourse is to combine the narrative mode with the referential aim, rather than the expressive aim. Hence, this combination is a hybrid giving validity to narration. Again, I refer to *A Theory of Discourse* by James Kinneavy to ground my argument and to maintain consistent difference between the aims and modes of discourse, though neither aims nor modes exist in isolation. In fact, the *pathos* of persuasive discourse has its place in my referential assignment. But because I want specificity from writers, the "I felt bad because that

person made a prejudiced remark about me" will not suffice; the writing should not become entirely pathetic. To incorporate *pathos*, students must actually describe the depth of feeling. One means of doing so is to imitate the understatement in the concluding lines of "Incident." Imitation of the understatement, of course, is not the only means of providing a specific description, but writers may become conscious of rhetoric by using this figure of speech.

Although Kinneavy's reference aim is further composed of scientific, informative, and exploratory discourse, there are divisions among the reference components. Kinneavy explains: "Exploratory discourse fundamentally asks a question. Informative discourse answers it. Scientific discourse proves it" (89). Yet the "providence of referential discourse," asserts Kinneavy, is "with subject matter"; "all reference discourse is 'reality'-oriented" (88).

Hence, I rely upon Kinneavy's insistence that "there must first be a grounding in fact and accepted notions. No great exploration can normally be expected from a vacuum. Exploration is not creation from a prior nothing" (102). Kinneavy himself quotes Chenoweth with the "pool of ignorance" sans background and Popper with each writer talking to himself in a vacuum (102). Surely not denigrating the efforts of basic writers in Kinneavy's quotations from Chenoweth and Popper, I yet recall Swift's "Battel of the Books," particularly the duel between the spider and the bee: should we ask our students to generate writing without first consuming texts, we shall put them in the position of the spider generating "Dirt, spun out of [his] own Entrails" (384) rather than the bee who, after consuming books, generates "Honey and Wax," "Sweetness and Light" (385). Teachers cannot ask basic writers to generate writing from nothing; there first needs to be a text for reference, something that the students have consumed. By reading the narrative poem, therefore, students have consumed a text so that they are prepared to generate their own writing.

Accounting for the informative component of reference discourse, I remind students that they must account for the situational context within their writing. While classroom compositions can sometimes be artificial, or "teacher-directed," Kinneavy posits that "at least one facet of the artificiality can be stripped from them by writing them for peers—one's fellow students" (96). Using a poem, students can write for their peers who understand either the universality of prejudice in its various forms or the significance of a personal achievement–both topics related to the descriptive structure in the poem.

As for establishing a point with the narrative, Norbert Elliot asserts, "In decentering the shallow appearance of comprehension and the combative authority implicit in much exposition, we can help basic writers discover ways of negotiation and mediation that are more humane than the egocentric drive to prove a point" (25). By writing

for their peers, however, my students become less egocentric, for they understand that these narrative essays, though individual, will indeed have a point comprehended among themselves. A condition of audience acceptance is that "the story itself," insists Livia Polanyi, "be seen as a proper illustration for what is being put forward as the point" (212). Establishing the point with a story is a means of negotiating academic discourse instead of combating Elliot's implicit expository authority.

After having two days to compose drafts out of class, my students bring their papers to class for peer responses. These responses are focused on essential details so that the writers note referential language. Peers themselves list facts from the background, incident, and reaction paragraphs of other papers. They also pose questions if noticing the need for additional specificity. In a final reflection note, they assess the *pathos, ethos,* and *logos* (terms which we have discussed) of the story. Revising out of class, students have a fairly polished three-paragraph narrative. Then, they are prepared for a discussion of introductory paragraphs. We examine both inductive and deductive introductions; the students draft two or three introductions; subsequently, they choose one for their narrative composition, often after additional collaborative exchange and discussion with peers. Finally, they edit their work for submission—options allowed during any stage of the writing process for teacher conferences or Writing Center consultation.

Longer compositions with further development come later in the semester. Students also write these compositions by employing additional modes and aims of discourse. As David Bartholomae notes, "A student who can write a reasonably correct narrative may fall to pieces when faced with a more unfamiliar assignment" (159). So students do need to progress beyond the personal narrative for academic maturation. Of course, they can imitate other poems, comparison-contrast for instance, as aids for structure and development in subsequent writing assignments. The application of poem to prose writing is as broad as the teacher's reading background. Nonetheless, I also require that students read additional essays as models for their own writing and as references for content generation.

But as an early writing experience for basic writers, this narrative assignment provides them with several benefits. First, the students learn to become close readers—both of their own texts and the texts of others, the latter texts being initially the poem itself then their peers. They also learn to make a point in writing by imitating another text: they shape their narratives according to the poem. After following the writing process, students produce a text with concrete development within approximately two weeks. "If writing is a process, it is also a product; and it is the product, and not the plan for writing," explains

David Bartholomae, "that locates a writer on the page, that locates him in a text and a style and the codes or conventions that make both of them readable" (142). Hence, semester-long revisions with the teacher's responses become unnecessary; the plan itself already exists because their early drafts are focused upon imitation of the poem, though revisions are steps toward the product.

A final benefit of shaping a writing assignment upon a poem is the precision of language. Poet and university teacher, Mary Swander explains "how every word" in a poem "mattered, how every word added one more element to the scene, something that could be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched, how there wasn't much room for fancy adjectives and adverbs, abstraction and general observation" in her poetry workshops (8). As for transference to "regular classroom writing," she notes: "A good essay seems to deal with the same things that a good poem does—how to make an idea concrete, and how, in an interesting way, to lead the reader to a new insight" (9). I have found the same elements of transference in my classrooms for basic writers. The excessive adjectives and adverbs of the expressive aim (such as "definitely" occasionally confused with "defiantly" or the redundant "most unique") and the unnecessary details of emotive writing are all distracting elements which disappear from discourse when students read, analyze, and synthesize information from a poem that they can imitate in their own prose. Swander concludes that her students are relieved "from the pressures of coming up with something 'profound'—the kind of profundity that often ends up in 'mush'" (9). Profound mush may be personally therapeutic and vaguely spiritual, but basic writers soon realize that academic discourse, generated after consuming a text, has a point which the community of their peers as audience wants to understand. In the larger community of other academic disciplines, the history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, music, geology, meteorology, astronomy, biology, chemistry, business, and kinesiology teachers as audience also want to understand the point in essay-test questions and research papers. Shaping the referential point through imitation leads to this empowerment—not only in the basic writing class, but also in any area of critical thinking. The point, therefore, is that we make a point when we write.

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News and Announcements

Call for Papers: JAEPL, Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning invites submissions for its seventh annual issue. JAEPL invites theory-grounded papers that discuss pedagogical concerns focusing on topics that extend beyond currently accepted attitudes toward, and paradigms of, language. Possible subjects for exploration include but are not limited to emotion, imagery, kinesthetics, ecofeminism, situated knowledge, meditation, healing, and inspiration. Send by January 31, 2002, four copies of letter quality manuscripts, MLA style, approximately 12-15 pages to: Linda Calendrillo, Co-Editor of JAEPL, Department of English, 1 Big Red Way, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky 42101, or for editorial inquiries contact Kristie S. Fleckenstein, Co-Editor of JAEPL, Department of English, Ball State University, Muncie Indiana 47306 or kflecken@gw.bus.edu. For more information, visit the website at: http://www.bsu.edu/english/jaepl.

Call for Proposals: ***On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring*** seeks theory-grounded manuscripts that discuss various features of classroom-based tutoring. Topics might include successful and/or unsuccessful approaches; institutional and/or classroom power relations; assessment; distribution of labor (between teachers and students, between disciplines, etc.); the dynamics of race, gender, and/or class in tutoring relationships; peer writing groups; electronic environments; Writing Across the Curriculum; and/or basic writing. Please send 2-3 page proposals or completed manuscripts by July 1, 2001 to Candace Spigelman (cxsll@psu.edu) or Laurie Grobman (leg8@psu.edu), Penn State University, Berks-Lehigh Valley College, P.O. Box 7009, Tulpehocken Road, Reading, PA 19610-6009.

Call for Papers: ***Reflections on Community-Based Writing Instruction*** is a new publication intended to provide a forum for scholarship on service-learning in college composition courses. The editor invites articles (1,000 to 2,500 words) reporting on research, describing, and reflecting on curriculum or teaching practices, or exploring the practical, theoretical, political, and ethical implications of community-based writing instruction. Reflections will be published three times a year and is edited by Barbara Roswell of Goucher College. To submit a paper, request more information, or subscribe, contact her at broswell@goucher.edu.

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ing from fields including anthropology, English, history, journalism, linguistics, psychology, and rhetoric. No worthy topic related to writing is beyond the scope of the journal. For detailed information about submissions, please see any recent issue of Written Communication or visit the website: www.wisc.edu/english/composition/written_communication/Wcwebpg.

Conference Announcement: The Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC), "Managing Change and Growth in Technical and Scientific Communication" will hold its 28th annual meeting October 11-13, 2001 at the Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Conference emphasizes discussion rather than presentation. For more information contact Jeff Grabill, 2001 CPTSC Program Chair, jgrabill@gsu.edu.

Conference Announcement: The Writing Programs Administrators (WPA) Conference, "Composition Studies in the 21st Century: Rereading the Past, Rewriting the Future, will be held October 5-7, 2001 at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. Conference is interactive and participatory. Plenary address is by Peter Elbow. Invited speakers include among others: Lynn Bloom, Lester Faigley, Keith Gilyard, Min-Zhan Lu, Susan Miller, and Art Young. For further information, contact Conference Secretary Krista Orlando at 513-529-1901 or daikerda@muohio.edu.

Conference Announcement: The 91st National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention will be held November 15-20, 2001 in Baltimore, Maryland. The theme of the convention is "Recreating the Classroom "and emphasizes such topics as Diversity, Crossing Levels, Professional Development/New Teachers, Making Knowledge, and Assessment and High Stakes Testing. Visit website www.ncte.org for more information about this and other NCTE events.

Call for Papers and Conference Announcement: CAWS, The CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors, will be holding its annual conference on Friday, November 2, 2001 (9:00 am – 4:00 pm) in New York City. Keynote speaker: Joseph Harris. The conference theme is "Celebrating 25 Years of CAWS: (Re)Defining Community." We are looking for proposals that address issues related to basic writing, including the legacy of Mina Shaughnessy, the redefinition of the basic writer, the last or future 25 years in basic writing, assessment, writing across the curriculum, ESL, and the role of the public university. For more info or to send your abstract (a couple of paragraphs and a working title), contact Caroline Pari, English Dept, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY, 199 Chambers Street, New York, NY 10007 or email: cpari@aol.com. Deadline: July 15, 2001.

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